

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Elizabeth Ann Goulard for the degree of Doctor of Education in Education presented on August 20, 1996. Title: Values, Assumptions, and Actions in an Administrative Team: A Symbolic Analysis of the Expression of Culture in One Community College Setting.

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Organizational culture is broadly recognized as a significant force in organizational action. Since the phenomenon of culture has real impact on organizations, our understanding of that impact is vital to organizational health. While academic settings provide a rich environment for studying culture, relatively little research on culture has occurred in this setting. This interpretive study contributes to our understanding of the administrative subculture in higher education by examining cultural influences at work within a community college administrative team.

The framework of organizational symbolism influenced the overall research goal of interpreting cultural themes found in a community college administrative team and exploring how these themes were expressed in organizational action. Organizational culture was conceptualized as having three levels of manifestation: symbols of culture, organizational values, and basic assumptions about reality. Research questions were developed with the aim of examining each of these cultural levels within the executive administrative team at Northwest Community College and addressing the belief that administrative team actions and decisions are an expression of the common values and assumptions held by team members.

This study integrated field observation with interviews and document review to uncover the values, assumptions, and actions of administrative team members. Cultural windows used to focus observations and interviews included (a) organizational stories, (b) organizational heroes, (c) organizational symbols, and (d) organizational traditions.

The following cultural themes were evident within the executive administrative team at Northwest Community College: community, change and innovation, fairness, candor, hard work, learning and development, humor, teamwork, delegation and shared decision-making, and customer responsiveness and recognition of others. These themes were expressed in numerous team actions. Symbols reinforcing each cultural theme were active within the organization. These symbols included artifacts, traditions, and prominent actions taken by the team. The executive administrative team's primary role within the organization was to influence organizational decisions and modify organizational involvement regarding decision-making.

Key historical figures or events appear to have played a role in developing some cultural themes through strengthening existing values or creating new, contrasting values. Paradoxical value sets were found within three cultural themes: hard work (balancing workload), teamwork (separateness), and delegation and shared decision-making (direct involvement).

Values, Assumptions, and Actions in an Administrative Team:  
A Symbolic Analysis of the Expression of Culture  
in One Community College Setting

by

Elizabeth Ann Goulard

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Elizabeth Ann Goulard, Author

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# **VALUES, ASSUMPTIONS AND ACTIONS IN AN ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM: A SYMBOLIC ANALYSIS OF THE EXPRESSION OF CULTURE IN ONE COMMUNITY COLLEGE SETTING**

## **CHAPTER I**

### **INTRODUCTION**

Organizational culture has increasingly been recognized as a significant force in organizational action. Higher education provides one of the most complex organizational settings in which to analyze culture and its influences (Billups, 1991). Unique to the family of higher education institutions are community colleges. This sector of higher education comprises approximately one-third of all higher education institutions, and serves approximately 40% of all college students (AACC, 1989), focusing on developmental and community education, lower division collegiate coursework, professional technical preparation, and local work force development. Community college administrators play a vital role in organizational management and growth, supervising and leading academic divisions as well as student and college support services. Yet, little published empirical work is available to characterize these academic administrators as a significant higher education subculture. This study seeks to enrich our understanding of the role of the administrative subculture in one community college setting.

Research on organizational culture is confronted with the problem that culture plays an elusive role within organizations. Despite recent attention, culture remains a poorly understood phenomenon with a multitude of definitions.

In this study, the researcher examined the cultural influences at work within a community college administrative team, and explored how cultural themes were expressed in actions taken by these community college leaders.

This chapter outlines the case for a study of this nature. Following an overview of the significance of understanding culture in organizations, the research purpose of this study and related research questions are outlined. A definition of the concept of organizational culture is provided for the purpose of this study. A conceptual framework for using culture in organizational analysis follows. Rationale for studying a community college setting and specifically the administrative subculture is provided. Finally, study limitations and definition of terms are outlined.

### THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

The metaphor of organizational culture has become common in organizational research and theory. Culture has proven to be an effective frame with which to analyze organizational processes, especially when studying these processes within their natural settings.

Pondy, Frost, Morgan, and Dandridge (1983) claim that traditional organization and management theory, while focusing on the formal and rational aspects of organizations, has failed to grasp the full significance of the symbolic side of organizational life. Their text, *Organizational Symbolism*, makes the case for organizations to be viewed as complex patterns of cultural activity. The capacity of humans to act symbolically — to use language, exhibit insight, create and interpret metaphors, instill meaning in events, and seek meaning in their lives — points to a need for organizational theory development that encompasses the human or symbolic factor in organizations.

Schein (1992) states:

I will be hammering away at the idea that culture is a deep phenomenon, that culture is complex and difficult to understand, but that the effort to

understand it is worthwhile because much of the mysterious and irrational in organizations suddenly becomes clear when we do understand it (p. 5).

He identifies three reasons for investing in the study of organizational culture.

The first and perhaps most obvious reason is that the topic has heated up; many authors can be cited that claim that cultural patterns make a difference in organizational effectiveness (Ouchi, 1981; Pascale & Athos, 1981; Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Tichy, 1983; Sathe, 1983; Kilmann & Saxton, 1985; Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983). Schein (1992) argues that the phenomenon of culture is real and has impact on organizations and organizational groups. Our understanding of that impact is vital to organizational health.

Secondly, the topic is confusing. Authors on organizational culture use many different definitions for culture, and numerous methods for investigating culture as an organizational phenomenon. Our ability to conceptualize and legitimately study organizational culture will contribute to additional understanding of this complex field of study.

Third, individual performance cannot be understood unless one takes into account an organization's culture. Schein (1992) believes the analysis of culture can illuminate the study of leadership. He claims that much of what is mysterious about leadership becomes clearer if we separate leadership from management, and instead link leadership specifically to creating and changing culture.

The anthropologist, Clifford Geertz, defines culture as historically created systems of meaning that give form, order, and direction to our lives. He describes the significance of culture as follows:

Undirected by culture patterns — organized systems of significant symbols — man's behavior would be virtually ungovernable, a mere chaos of pointless acts and exploding emotions, his experience virtually shapeless. Culture, the accumulated totality of such patterns, is not just an ornament of

human existence but — the principal basis of its specificity — an essential condition for it. (Geertz, 1973, p. 46)

More bluntly, he suggests there would be no such thing as human nature independent of culture. Cultural patterns, from Geertz's perspective, are templates for the organization of social and psychological processes, much as genetic systems organize organic processes.

Organizational culture reflects a collective understanding of the purpose or meaning of an organization's work. It plays an elusive but significant role in attracting new organizational members, influencing their selection, and in socializing them to their new setting (Chatman, 1991; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Often, culture provides members with organizational identity by providing a sense of what is unique or distinctive about their organization. When communicated externally, this cultural identity can serve to create an image or establish legitimacy with others outside of the organization. The study of organizational culture provides a framework for making sense of the nonrational and informal aspects of an organization that are not captured in formal documents, procedures, or the organizational chart (Peterson & Spencer, 1990).

Chaffee and Tierney (1988) identify additional benefits derived from understanding an organization's culture. These include: (a) the ability to consider real or potential conflicts within the context of organizational subcultures; (b) recognition of structural or operational contradictions that suggest organizational tension; (c) the ability to implement and evaluate every day decisions with an awareness of their influence on organizational culture; (d) an understanding of the symbolic implications of otherwise normal decisions and actions; (e) the ability to consider why different groups in the organization hold varying perceptions about organizational performance; and (f) the ability to orchestrate innovation and change in the organization, mindful of how such change will impact or be constrained by the culture.

This may seem like a tall order, yet it points to the seeming significance of this area of study from the perspective of those who are well versed in it.

## RESEARCH PURPOSE AND QUESTIONS

This study was initiated upon the belief that administrative team actions and decisions in a higher educational institution are an expression of the common values and assumptions held by team members. Therefore, this study's purpose was to examine the cultural influences at work within one community college administrative team and explore how cultural themes were expressed in actions taken by these community college leaders.

The following research questions evolved from the purpose and objectives of this study and focused on cultural symbols, cultural themes, and the expression of cultural themes within a community college administrative team:

1. What values were expressed by individual team members?
2. What assumptions about reality were held by individual team members?
3. Were common values and assumptions held by administrative team members? If so, what common cultural themes were evident?
4. How were cultural themes expressed in actions taken by administrative team members?
5. What visible symbols of culture were found within the administrative team setting?

## ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE DEFINED

Clearly, cultural studies of organizations have burgeoned. However, little consistency exists in how researchers have defined organizational culture. Writers who discuss organizational culture have widely varying rationales, assumptions, research

strategies, and criteria for interpreting culture. Definitions abound for the concept of organizational culture.

A sample of definitions found in the literature include:

1. *Observed behavioral regularities* when people interact, such as the language and behavioral rituals used (Goffman, 1959; Van Maanen, 1979).
2. The *norms* that evolve in working groups (Becher, 1984).
3. The *dominant values* espoused by an organization, such as product quality or price leadership (Deal & Kennedy, 1982).
4. The *philosophy* that guides an organization's policy toward employees and/or customers (Ouchi, 1981; Pascale & Athos, 1981).
5. The *rules* of the game for getting along in the organization, the ropes that a newcomer must learn in order to become an accepted member (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Schein, 1984, 1992).
6. The *feeling or climate* that is conveyed in an organization by the shared perceptions of organizational members (Berger & Luckman, 1966).
7. The set of *meanings* shared by a group of people within a common context (Louis, 1983b).

For purposes of this study, Edgar Schein's work (1983, 1984, 1990, 1992, 1993a, 1993b) was used to conceptualize culture. Schein (1992) describes organizational culture as:

The deeper level of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, that operate unconsciously, and that define in a basic "taken-for-granted" fashion an organization's view of itself and its environment. These assumptions and beliefs are learned responses to a group's problems of survival in its external environment and its problems of internal integration . . . culture is a learned product of group experience. (p. 6)

People bring cultural values and assumptions to an organization from their own experiences outside of that setting. As they become associated with an organization over



time, they behave in ways that make sense because of their setting or their association with an organizational group. There is something about an organization or group that appears to mold individual assumptions and values to influence purposeful behavior (Schein, 1992).

Schein (1992) proposes a model for understanding levels of organizational culture in his text *Organizational Culture and Leadership*. The model describes organizational culture as having three levels of manifestation. First and most obvious are visible and audible symbols of culture: artifacts such as tools, buildings, art, and technology, as well as patterns of human behavior and speech. These outward manifestations are merely symbolic of the culture itself, which is neither visible nor in the awareness of those being observed.

Below this visible level lie the values of an organization, which can be expressed through interaction or seen in organizational documents. Values, which are deeply held beliefs and norms of the organization, reflect a concern for what *should be* (Beyer, 1981). Determining the values of the organization gives a clue as to why members act the way they do, a rationalized reason for their behavior (Schein, 1983).

Finally, at the third and most basic level are assumptions about reality that are subconscious and taken for granted. Assumptions form the essence or core of an organization's culture. "What distinguishes these basic assumptions from norms or values," Schein (1992) notes, "is the degree to which they come to be taken for granted, and the degree to which they drop out of consciousness as issues even to be considered" (p. 7). These unseen assumptions are implicit unless called to the surface by some form of inquiry (Kilmann & Saxton, 1985). In this way, culture provides the contextual clues necessary to interpret behaviors, words, and acts, and gives these actions and events meaning to the culture bearer's frame of reference (Schein, 1992).

Schein's framework focuses on the assumptions and beliefs about an organization's relationship to its environment, the way to determine truth and reality, its view of human

nature and human activity, and the relationships between group members. Each dimension represents a continuum which guides the researcher to explore the assumptions which motivate behavior. These assumptions are briefly outlined in the following paragraphs.

#### An Organization's Relationship to the Environment

A group's self-definition provides clues as to its perception of its relationship with the external environment. Assumptions concerning a group's core mission and goals may indicate the group's beliefs about self-determination. Can they manage their own fate? Are they at the mercy of the external environment, in conflict or in harmony with it? Organizational groups may have markedly different orientations toward time. Some may look ahead and plan for the future, use past performance to solve issues, or address situations only as they arise. Assumptions about change may be important indicators of the stability of the culture.

#### The Nature of Truth and Reality

Groups value and seek different types of information, according to their assumptions about truth and reality. Some groups take a rational approach, conducting research and gathering quantifiable data. Others believe more strongly in the power of observation, and tend to rely on their own or others' experience. Still others believe that truth is sought through discussion and debate.

#### The Nature of Human Nature

Assumptions about human attributes, such as good and evil, individual self-determination, and the ability to change and develop, will reveal much about how groups subsequently conduct activity and relate to other organizational members.

### The Nature of Human Relationships

Groups vary according to the assumptions and values that govern social arrangements. How individuals interact formally and informally, within and across groups, and how power is distributed or attained are important indicators of the cultural characteristics within this dimension (Schein, 1992). The way in which organizational groups define and use physical and social space can reveal cultural assumptions about informal and formal power, as well as the relationships between different groups, such as faculty and administrators.

Although generally a stable phenomenon, organizational culture evolves continually, being created and recreated by the ongoing patterns of interaction between individuals, groups, and an organization's environment (Schein, 1992; Tierney, 1988b). This fluid interpretation characterizes culture as both a *product* and a *process* within organizations (Smircich, 1983a, 1983b).

### The Nature of Organizational Activity

Organizational groups differ in their responses to externally induced situations. A group may take an active or passive role in determining its future, and be spontaneous or deliberate in its planning. Assumptions about fate and control are assessed in this category.

## CULTURE AND ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

In organizational research, there is not one cultural paradigm, but many. Smircich (1983a) provides a framework for understanding the variety of ways that organizational culture can be viewed, defined, and researched. She states:

If we see organizational theory as dominated by the concern for the problem of social order, the current interest in the concept of culture is no surprise. In anthropology, culture is the foundational term through which the orderliness and patterning of much of our life experience is explained.

Cultural anthropology is the inquiry into the phenomenon of social order. What we are seeing with the linking of culture and organization is the intersection of two sets of images of order: those associated with organization and those associated with culture. (p. 341)

Smircich (1983a) outlines five current research themes for investigating organizational culture: (a) comparative management, (b) corporate culture, (c) organizational cognition, (d) unconscious process and organization; and (e) organizational symbolism. Each theme conceptualizes the concept of culture in organizational studies as either an internal variable or as a root metaphor.

#### Culture as an Internal Variable: Comparative Management

Comparative management focuses on variations in employee practices and attitudes across countries. Culture in this context is viewed as a background factor or an explanatory variable. Researchers using this framework identify similarities and differences among cultures, and implications for organizational effectiveness. *Theory Z* (Ouchi, 1981) and *The Art of Japanese Management* (Pasquale & Athos, 1981) are examples of the use of this framework.

#### Culture as an Internal Variable: Corporate Culture

Researchers ascribing to this framework view organizations as culture-producing phenomena (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Louis, 1983b; Martin & Powers, 1983; Tichy, 1982). Organizations are seen as producing cultural artifacts, such as rituals, myths, stories or legends, specialized language, and ceremonies through social interaction. These artifacts symbolize the values and belief systems of the organization's people. Research emphasis from this perspective focuses on interpreting the sociocultural qualities that develop as a result of human action within organizations.

Research within this context is also based on a systems theory framework.

Therefore, the organization is generally conceived of as existing in relationship with its environment. The cultural dimension of the organization contributes to the system's balance and effectiveness. The notion of strong and weak cultures, and their effect on an organization's survival within the environment, is exemplified by the work of Deal and Kennedy (1982), and Peters and Waterman (1982).

#### Culture as a Root Metaphor: Organizational Cognition

Other theorists ascribe to the view that organizations be understood as cultures. In contrast to the previous views that culture is something an organization *has*, these theorists adopt the view that culture is something an organization *is* (Smircich, 1983a, 1983b). Culture is seen as a root metaphor that describes organizations as expressive human forms.

According to a branch of cognitive anthropology referred to as ethnoscience (Goodenough, 1971; Agar, 1982), culture is a system of shared knowledge and beliefs (Rossi & O'Higgins, 1980). Researchers who adopt this view are concerned with determining what the rules are, and finding out how organizational members see and describe their world (Harris & Cronen, 1979). Organizations are analogous to cultures, viewed as a unique structure of knowledge for knowing and acting. The structure in this case evolves from ongoing interpersonal interaction. It also provides the context for further interaction. The works of Karl Weick (1979), and Argyris and Schon (1978) illustrate this particular view of organizational culture.

#### Culture as a Root Metaphor: Unconscious Process

Another view of culture develops from structural anthropology and psychodynamics, and is that of the expression of unconscious psychological processes (Rossi & O'Higgins, 1980). From this point of view, organizational forms and practices are understood as

projections of unconscious processes, and are analyzed with reference to the dynamic interplay between subconscious processes and their conscious manifestation.

For example, researchers using this approach to the study of organizational culture might ask: What problems are solved by persistent hierarchical patterns in organizational structure? What do the patterns of an organization reveal about the human mind? (Mitroff, 1983).

### Culture as a Root Metaphor: Organizational Symbolism

Symbolic anthropologists such as Hallowell (1955) and Geertz (1973) view cultures as systems of shared symbols and meanings. They see the researcher's task as interpreting the themes of culture: understandings, explicit or implicit, that align and guide social activity. Anthropologists using this framework illustrate how symbols are related to activities within a particular setting.

Organizational symbolism promotes the view that an organization, like a culture, is conceived as a pattern of symbolic discourse. In this sense, an organization, being a socially constructed system of meaning, needs interpreting in order to be understood (Van Maanen & Barley, 1985). The researcher uses a variety of evidence to express recurrent themes that represent the patterns among values, assumptions, and action in a setting. Organizational analysis focuses on how individuals interpret and understand their experience, and how these interpretations and understandings relate to subsequent action.

**This study used the framework of organizational symbolism to inform the overall research goal by examining cultural themes found in a community college administrative team and exploring how these cultural themes were expressed in organizational action.**

## ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE SETTINGS

The framework of organizational symbolism was selected because it is most appropriate for guiding this study's research questions, which seek to interpret the patterns among cultural symbols, values, assumptions, and actions within one community college administrative team. While academic settings provide a rich and complex environment for the study of organizational culture, relatively little research on the concept has been conducted within community colleges. Tierney (1988b) agrees that research on culture in higher education is lacking. He points out that "a useable definition of organizational culture appropriate to higher education has remained elusive" (p. 6).

Chaffee and Tierney (1988) emphasize the importance of understanding culture in colleges and universities and explain how it contributes to improved management:

Our lack of understanding about the role of organizational culture in improving management and institutional performance inhibits our ability to address the challenges that face higher education. As these challenges mount, our need to understand organizational culture only intensifies. As decision-making contexts grow more obscure, costs increase, and resources become more difficult to allocate, leaders in higher education can benefit from understanding their institutions as cultural entities. As before, these leaders continue to make difficult decisions. These decisions, however, need not engender the degree of conflict that they usually have prompted. Indeed, properly informed by an awareness of culture, tough decisions may contribute to an institution's sense of purpose and identity. Moreover, to implement decisions, leaders must have a full, nuanced understanding of the organization's culture. Only then can they articulate decisions in a way that will speak to the needs of various constituencies and marshal their support. (p. 8)

While researchers cite the need for further research in the area of collegiate culture and subculture (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Clark, 1980; Dill, 1982; Masland, 1985; Tierney, 1988b), there appears to be a specific need to better understand the cultural and subcultural elements at play within a community college setting. This study examined the cultural

influences at work within one community college administrative team, and explored how cultural themes were expressed in the actions taken by these community college leaders.

### THE ADMINISTRATIVE SUBCULTURE

Van Maanen and Barley (1985) define a subculture as an institutional subgroup whose members interact regularly with one another, perceive themselves as a distinct group within the larger environment, share a commonly defined set of problems, and act on the basis of collective understandings unique to their group. Within an academic setting, numerous subcultures potentially operate and coexist (Tierney, 1988b). This study identified the community college administrative team as a unique and influential subculture.

Many theorists believe that an important first step in understanding organizational culture is to analyze natural work groups. As Van Maanen and Barley (1984) state, "it is here where people discover, create and use culture, and it is against this background that they judge the organization of which they are a part" (p. 351). Schein (1992) also recommends that the study of culture within an institution begin with a stable group, with the goal of understanding their shared experiences and the assumptions that underlie their actions. Schein makes the observation that the stronger and more formed the group culture is, the more difficulty that group will have in being flexible or communicating with other groups.

The growing specialization of education in the last century has spurred the development of a cadre of professional administrators at colleges and universities throughout the country. With the rapid growth of community colleges in the past 30 years, the growth and influence of administrative teams within this setting can be documented. Administrators play a central role today in making critical decisions on issues such as enrollment



management, resource and staff allocation, academic program management, fund raising, long-range planning, and facilities development (Sagaria, 1988).

Tierney (1988b) reflects on the problem that as decision-making contexts grow more obscure and decisions increase in difficulty, leaders in higher education can benefit from their understanding of institutions as cultural entities. He states:

Indeed, properly informed by an awareness of culture, tough decisions may contribute to an institution's sense of purpose and identity . . . no matter how much information we gather, we can often choose from several viable alternatives. Culture influences the decision. (p. 5)

An administrative team's actions and decisions have wide effect on the entire organization. A greater understanding of how administrative actions and decisions are influenced by cultural themes will allow us to better understand the role of culture in influencing the institution as a whole.

Little empirical work has been published on the administrative subculture in higher education to date (Kuh & Whitt, 1988). This literature will be reviewed in Chapter II.

This study contributes to our understanding of the administrative subculture by examining the cultural influences at work within one community college administrative team and by exploring how cultural themes were expressed in actions taken by these community college leaders.

## STUDY OVERVIEW

An ethnographic study of the administrative team at a local community college (hereafter referred to as Northwest Community College) was conducted. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) describe the basic goal of ethnography as that of "creating a vivid reconstruction of the culture studied" (p. 235). Ethnography is the method of choice for studying and interpreting cultural scenes or groups. As a form of interpretive research,

ethnography is concerned with interpreting and accurately recounting or describing the meaning that research participants give to the reality around them (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). Ethnographic research methods offer a distinct opportunity to explore the day-to-day interactions which unfold to challenge, legitimize, and recreate organizational culture.

This study took place within a single community college setting at Northwest Community College. Northwest Community College is a medium-sized community college which was founded in 1966. It is located in an agricultural valley in the Pacific Northwest. The college has a main campus and three well-developed outreach centers which serve a large, two-county district. Sample selection was purposeful; participants were determined by the membership of the community college executive administrative team. This study used a combination of observation, in-depth interviews, and selected document review to gather empirical data related to the values, assumptions, and actions of team members. Justification for study methodology is presented in Chapter III.

### STUDY LIMITATIONS

The researcher acknowledges certain limitations to this study, including the following:

1. This study was conducted by a single researcher, limiting the ability to check initial findings against a second researcher's perceptions. Other methods of triangulating research findings during analysis, such as using multiple data collection methods and sources, were required to enhance the trustworthiness of results.
2. This study was limited to a single community college site, prohibiting the ability to compare and contrast findings within several settings. Therefore, the results are bound to the context within which they are identified. Further research would be required to

determine whether findings in this setting and with this population are generalizable to other community colleges.

3. This study took place over a period of 9 months. Ideally, a longer period of time would have provided a greater set of data for analysis.

4. There was no ethnic diversity in the administrative team studied; however, there was gender diversity. It is unknown how ethnic influences would have affected the cultural descriptions presented.

5. Since a single work group was studied, results found within the administrative team may not necessarily be indicative of other subcultures within the study setting.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

*Administrator:* Member of a college community serving as a manager of operations and services designed to support the educational mission, but not originating from a faculty-based status (Billups, 1991).

*Assumptions:* Implicit, taken-for-granted, subconscious beliefs that underlie the surface manifestations and values of an organization's culture (Schein, 1992).

*Cultural symbols:* Outward manifestations of culture, such as artifacts, tools, buildings, art and technology, as well as patterns of human behavior and speech (Schein, 1992).

*Cultural themes:* Commonly held values and assumptions that align and provoke social activity (Smircich, 1983a).

*Ethnography:* A form of interpretive research concerned with interpreting and accurately describing the meaning that research participants give to the reality around them (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

*Organizational climate*: Common member perception of attitudes toward and feelings about organizational life, which is influenced by organizational culture (Peterson & Spencer, 1990).

*Organizational culture*: A pattern of basic assumptions and beliefs that are shared by members of an organization, and that operate unconsciously to define an organization's view of itself, and to stimulate and shape group actions (Schein, 1992).

*Organizational subculture*: A cultural group differentiated by status, background, location, or other factors that functionally unify the group and act collectively on each member, apart from the dominant culture (Billups, 1991).

*Organizational symbolism*: A framework for organizational analysis that views the organization as a pattern of recurrent themes representing linkages among values, assumptions, and action in a setting (Smircich, 1983a).

*Symbol*: A sign which expresses much more than its intrinsic content; a signification which embodies and represents some wider pattern of meaning (Pondy, Frost, Morgan, & Dandridge, 1983).

*Values*: Deeply held beliefs that reflect a concern for what should be (Beyer, 1981).

## ORGANIZATION OF THE THESIS

Chapter II contains a review of the literature relevant to this study. It is divided into a review of literature pertaining to organizational theory and organizational culture, studies of academic culture, and a discussion of the administrative subculture.

Chapter III presents justification for and description of the study design. Included in this chapter is a review of methodological approaches to the study of culture, a description of methods chosen for collection and analysis of data, as well as the experiences of the researcher in conducting the study.

Chapter IV highlights data that relate directly to the study purpose and research questions. Findings related to the role of the executive administrative team, the influence of history on current values, and the paradoxes found within three cultural themes are discussed.

Chapter V forms conclusions about the study and study results. It includes a summary of the study, discussion of findings, implications for higher education administration, recommendations for future study, as well as propositions related to the role of cultural assumptions and values in this community college administrative team.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The concept of organizational culture has significantly influenced our ability to understand how organizations function. A tremendous amount of research over the past two decades has been devoted to this field of study. This author's ERIC search revealed over 14,000 citations related to culture alone, and over 400 citations specific to organizational culture. This study seeks to add to our understanding of organizational dynamics by contributing specifically to the limited research on culture in community college settings.

This literature review synthesizes some of the more significant literature in the field of organizational culture pertinent to this study. The review will begin with a discussion of theoretical perspectives used in organizational analysis. A significant discussion will be devoted to the interpretive perspective that this author has adopted to use in her study of Northwest Community College.

A section entitled *Organizations as Cultural Entities* will cover the concept of culture and its use in organizational analysis. Specific segments of this section will be devoted to a discussion of interdisciplinary perspectives on organizational culture, the differences between organizational culture and climate, organizational culture archetypes, organizational subcultures, culture and organizational effectiveness, and the influence of culture on organizational decision-making.

Finally, a review of studies on academic culture will be followed by studies examining the administrative subculture. This literature review focuses on both the individual and group characteristics of organizational culture, and forms the foundation from which to compare, after the analysis, the emergent patterns of culture within the administrative team at Northwest Community College.

## THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES USED IN ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

There are fundamental differences among the approaches used to investigate organizations. These differences reflect the theoretical framework with which organizations are viewed. Our view of organizational reality is in a large part determined by the questions and assumptions with which we start. These, in turn, will influence the approaches taken when studying organizations and culture.

This particular study adopted the interpretive perspective of organizations, specifically the framework of organizational symbolism, to inform the overall research goal: that of interpreting cultural themes found in a community college administrative team, and describing how these themes were expressed in organizational action.

Prior to exploring the use of culture in organizational analysis, it is helpful to review the continuum of theoretical perspectives about organizations that currently exists. Burrell and Morgan (1979), Frost (1980), Morgan (1980), Smircich (1983a), Peterson (1985), Tierney (1988b), and others have illustrated the competing organizational theories that have developed. These theories influence the ways in which culture is conceptualized, defined, and researched.

### The Functionalist Perspective

The functionalist perspective describes organizations as open systems existing in relationship to their environment. In this perspective, the organization and the environment exert mutual influence upon one another.

Functionalism assumes that an ordered organizational structure exists, which determines authority and task relationships (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). In this perspective, culture exists as an interrelated variable with social structure, technology, and the

environment. Culture is manipulated and managed by organizational members to influence organizational outcomes. Action is purposeful and consistent with a uniform mission, philosophy, and set of procedures. The implicit bias is with management, and a concern for efficiency and effectiveness (Tierney, 1988b).

The functionalist perspective is traditionally oriented and considers organizational reality as an objective fact. The research agenda within the functionalist perspective is to examine causal laws that have predictive value. Researchers focus on observable behaviors and organizational structure. Functionalists assume that an understanding of the influence organizational variables have on one another will aid in determining organizational outcomes. Prediction, validity, and reliability are key concerns, and quantitative instruments are the primary methods used in organizational study. Much of the conventional wisdom on the design and management of organizations is derived from research grounded in the functionalist perspective (Putnam & Pacanowsky, 1983).

Smircich's (1983a) research themes of comparative management and corporate culture, as outlined in Chapter I, are consistent with the functionalist perspective. Comparative management scholars seek to chart patterns of beliefs and attitudes, as well as managerial practices across countries. Those who research dimensions of corporate culture seek to delineate the ways these dimensions are interrelated and how they influence critical organizational processes and outcomes.

### The Interpretive Perspective

Unlike the functionalist perspective, interpretive researchers do not seek a precise definition of culture. Instead, a central assumption of the interpretive perspective is that organizational reality is too complex for a precise definition. Smircich (1983a) characterizes the interpretive perspective as a major shift in emphasis from managing and controlling to



interpreting and knowing. Morgan (1980) describes the interpretive perspective in this way: "There is an underlying pattern and order within the social world; however . . . what passes as social reality does not exist in any concrete sense, but is the product of the subjective and intersubjective experience of individuals" (pp. 608-609).

Assumptions underlying the interpretive approach to organizational study are fourfold:

1. Culture is not universally understandable either to organizational members or researchers; culture is an act of interpretation; what one observes and interprets will vary.
2. Not all individuals interpret reality similarly.
3. It is impossible to classify abstract reality.
4. Culture is interpretive, a constant process of negotiation between researcher and participants (Tierney, 1988a).

The interpretive perspective regards an organization as a culture that subjectively creates its own reality. The researcher, using this approach, views an organization as a cultural entity where participants constantly interpret and recreate organizational reality. This perspective not only captures the human interaction in organizations, it supplements the rational and environmental explanations usually seen as the motivating force behind an organization's behavior (Morgan, 1980; Schein, 1983; Smircich, 1983a, 1983b).

The goal of researchers who adopt the interpretive perspective is to assess and clarify how subjects interpret and make sense of their organizations to themselves and to others. The ongoing nature of organizing is emphasized. This avoids a sense of false solidity implied in the functionalist view. The world is regarded as a flow of experience; we organize it into meaningful segments by imposing interpretations. Organizational history, individual perceptions, and present-day circumstances all blend to produce organizational

reality. All organizational events or experiences are embedded in a wider context within which they take on meaning (Weick, 1979).

The interpretive perspective focuses on the specific and unique, rather than the general and universal aspects of phenomena. Context-specific data and rich description is emphasized, and ethnography, case studies, and qualitative methods are used to study organizations from this perspective.

Smircich's (1983a) research themes of organizational cognition, organizational symbolism, and unconscious processes and organization, as outlined in Chapter I, are useful for understanding the interpretive paradigm. Cognitive organization theorists seek to understand organizations as systems of thought. Their interest is in charting the understandings by which organization members achieve coordinated action. Symbolic organizational theorists such as Smircich are concerned with interpreting the patterns of symbolic action that create and maintain a sense of organization. Organizational theorists influenced by psychodynamics seek to understand the ways in which organization forms and practices manifest unconscious processes (Smircich, 1983a).

The interpretive perspective, specifically organizational symbolism (Smircich, 1983a) was used in this study to inform the overall research goal of examining cultural influences at work within one community college administrative team and exploring how cultural themes were expressed in actions taken by these community college leaders.

### Critical Theory

Burrell and Morgan (1979), and Morgan (1980) identify two additional theoretical perspectives used in organizational analysis. The perspectives of radical humanism and radical structuralism stem from critical theory, which aims to free individuals from sources of domination or repression.

Radical humanism. The radical humanist approach is similar to the interpretive perspective, in that reality is viewed as subjective, and socially constructed. However, the nature of reality is seen within the context of social domination, conflict, and change. This perspective is best described through the organizational metaphor of "psychic prison" used by Morgan in his 1986 text, *Images of Organization*. Organizational reality from this perspective is seen as oppressive. The very concepts that the functionalist might regard as building blocks of social order and human freedom to the radical humanist stand for modes of ideological domination.

Radical structuralism. The radical structuralist similarly views reality within the context of social domination, conflict, and change, brought on by materialistic forces, such as capitalism and wealth. However, the research approach within this perspective is similar to that of the functionalist, in that reality is seen as an objective notion which is external to the individual. Morgan's (1986) metaphor of "instrument of domination" best describes an organization within this framework.

In both critical theory perspectives, organizing is seen as a process nested in economic, political, and community influences. Evaluation dictates the process of research. Researchers function as critics of the status quo and as visionaries of what the social reality could become, explaining, describing, and understanding power relationships and structures for the way in which they impose on current events or constrain human behavior (Frost, 1980).

### Contemporary Organizational Perspectives

Morgan (1980, 1986) has observed that we create particular images of organizations that frame what we conceive to be an organization. He uses the logic of metaphor for illustrating the various theoretical perspectives on organizations. The logic of metaphor

suggests that no one metaphor can capture the total nature of organizational life. Each of the metaphors provides a way to frame one's thinking and the resulting questions that one might ask when conducting research on organizations.

Table 1 illustrates Morgan's (1986) images as they relate to the various theoretical perspectives used in organizational analysis.

The images or metaphors through which we read organizational situations help us to describe the way organizations are, and offer clear ideas and options as to how they could be. The processes of diagnostic reading and critical evaluation combine to create a mode of understanding—the story line that suggests an approach—or if one prefers, a prescription, for dealing with the issues that are of concern. (Morgan, 1986, p. 331)

Bolman and Deal (1991) describe organizations through four frames: structural, political, human resource, and symbolic. The structural frame asserts organizations as rational and logical entities composed of policies, rules, and structural relationships. The political view describes the dynamics of power relationships and struggles for control that occur between individuals and groups. The human resource view involves concern for the needs and emotions of individuals, as well as a desire to adjust the organization to fit people, or to adjust people to fit the organization. The symbolic view assigns importance to public and personal recognition, ceremonies, awards, and other symbolic behaviors. According to Bolman and Deal, elements of each frame are present in a typical organization.

TABLE 1

MORGAN'S IMAGES AS RELATED TO THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES  
USED IN ORGANIZATIONAL ANALYSIS

Theoretical Framework	Image or Metaphor	Description
Functionalist	Machine	Mechanical imagery, organization as a mechanical system of elements.
Functionalist	Theatre	Organizational members as actors; the importance of roles and performance.
Functionalist	Political System	Conflict of interest and role of power in organizations.
Functionalist	Loosely-Coupled System	Organizations as patterns of information.
Functionalist	Population-Ecology	Mechanisms of competition and selection, rather than adaptation.
Functionalist	Organism	Organization as a life system of elements.
Functionalist	Culture	Symbolic aspects of organizational life; networks of subjective meaning.
Interpretive	Accomplishment	Social sustaining of situations that are intelligible to organizational members.
Interpretive	Enacted Sense-Making	Reality enacted by organizational members through after-event rationalizations.
Interpretive	Text	Organizational activity as a symbolic document.
Interpretive	Language Game	Organization as a game of words, thoughts, and actions.
Radical Humanist	Psychic Prison	Confining and dominating organizational reality.
Radical Structuralist	Schismatic	Fragmentation and disintegration as a result of internally generated tensions.
Radical Structuralist	Catastrophe	Organization as a set of internal contradictions.
Radical Structuralist	Instrument of Domination	Organization as a dominating set of structures, roles, elements.

## ORGANIZATIONS AS CULTURAL ENTITIES

A review of the literature illustrates that a cultural understanding of organizations is significant. Culture helps us to understand individual and organizational behavior and performance (Kilmann & Saxton, 1985; Schein 1985; Smircich, 1983b; Spradley, 1979; Tierney, 1988b; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984). It provides a sense of meaning, purpose, and legitimacy for organizational members (Kilmann & Saxton, 1985; Peterson & Spencer, 1990; Tierney, 1988b). Organizational culture plays a significant role in attracting, selecting, socializing, and retaining organizational members (Chatman, 1991; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). An understanding of culture aides one in making sense of the irrational and paradoxical within organizations (Schein, 1992; Morgan, 1980, 1986). The notion of organizational subcultures has proven a useful framework for understanding organizational diversity and conflict (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Gregory, 1983; Harman, 1989; Mitchell & Willower, 1992; Riley, 1983; Sackmann, 1992; Tierney, 1988b). Finally, studies show culture plays a role in an organization's effectiveness (Cameron, 1985; Hamm, 1992; Tierney, 1988b; Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983) and decision-making processes (Beyer, 1981; Hamm, 1992).

The study of organizational culture is an interdisciplinary quest that provides a richly diverse set of views on organizational life. Culture is characterized as the source that serves to inform organizational climate.

Authors, such as Ouchi (1980), have portrayed culture as a broad and unifying organizational phenomenon, and created archetypes to describe the various forms of culture found within organizations. Numerous others, however, as listed above, believe organizations are composed of numerous subcultures, each with its own value systems.

This section of the literature review focuses on organizations as cultural entities. A brief review of interdisciplinary perspectives on organizational culture is followed by a discussion of organizational climate and culture, organizational cultural archetypes, and organizational subcultures. Finally, culture is discussed in relation to organizational effectiveness and organizational decision-making.

### Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Organizational Culture

The field of human relations first introduced the term culture into the vocabulary of organizational research (Chapple, 1953). This research tradition developed ways to combine interviews and observations of work settings, preceding the wave of organizational culture studies of the 1980s by several decades. In the 1950s, researchers such as Argyris (1957) and Ginzberg and Reilly (1957) acknowledged that values, interpretations, and rituals shape organizational behavior. During the 1970s and 1980s, an increasing number of anthropologists began to turn their attention to the study of formal organizations, relating culture to ideas such as character, climate, ideology, and abstract aspects of organizational structures or processes such as power, decision-making, management, leadership, and loyalty (Becher, 1984; Clark, 1970, 1983, 1984; Harrison, 1972; Kantor, 1977; Leach, 1976; Louis, 1985; Geertz, 1973; Howard, 1986).

In the 1980s, three popular publications emerged: *Theory Z*, (Ouchi, 1981), *In Search of Excellence* (Peters & Waterman, 1982), and *Corporate Culture: The Rites and Rituals of Corporate Life* (Deal & Kennedy, 1982). These texts had an enormous impact on the study of organizational behavior, and a multitude of cultural studies followed.

Anthropology does not singularly define the study of culture in organizations; such an effort relies on sociology, psychology, management science, and other disciplines (McClure, 1989; Schwartzman, 1993). However, anthropology is one of several important

fields needed to guide an integrated approach to studying the significance of values and belief systems in the work place. Theorist Burton Clark (1984) summarizes the relationships between disciplines in the quest to understand culture:

There is some truth, but only a little, in the twin stereotypes that define sociology as the study of social organization and anthropology as the study of culture. Many sociologists analyze values, attitudes, norms, beliefs, ideologies—in short, the more symbolic side of social action. Many anthropologists study specific social structures, such as the clan, the factory, and the school, emphasizing the organizational side. . . . In short, to understand the social structure of higher education, we must understand its culture. The blend is an institution-and-culture approach. This combination of sociological, anthropological, and organizational concerns becomes a broad analytical stance that corrects some deficiencies. (p. 262)

The anthropologist Geertz's (1973) differentiation between the concepts of culture and of social system provides a useful way in which to characterize the role of culture within organizations, as well as the interdisciplinary nature of cultural study. Geertz views culture as an ordered system of meaning and symbols, through which social interaction takes place. An organization as a social system is considered the pattern of social interaction itself. While culture is the fabric of meaning human beings use to interpret experience and guide their actions, social structure is the form their actions take. Geertz's research contributes to the view of an organization as a concrete system of social action. This system includes the social system (social sciences), the personality systems of the individual actors (psychology), and the cultural system (anthropology) which is built into individual and group actions.

The anthropologist Louis (1983a, 1983b, 1985) describes three levels of interpretation that are relevant to organizational life: universal, cultural, and individual. The *universal* level refers to a broad set of meanings that comprise relevance both within and outside of the organization. This universal level is what Weick (1979) characterizes as grains of truth. The *cultural* level refers to a set of meanings or relevances indigenous to a



local social group, in this case, the organization or a subset of the organization. The final level of interpretation is the *individual* one. Here the person's unique cultural codes create personal relevance.

Louis (1983b) argues that, with few exceptions, researchers in organizational sciences have historically proceeded as if study of the universal level of meaning alone was sufficient to create understanding of organizational behavior. Louis argues that clearly much of what matters in organizational life takes place at the cultural level of meaning. The author also identifies this level of meaning as fitting within the sociological context of organizational study. Culture provides for social system continuity, control, and identity, as well as integration of members.

The individual level of meaning is identified as fitting within the psychological context of organizational study. At the individual level, "human beings act toward things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them" (Blumer, 1969, p. 2). Meaning is continually negotiated by organizational members. In one sense, this negotiation results in navigation of the organizational landscape through which one controls one's course or position. In another sense, this negotiation represents bargaining among alternative meanings preferred by various parties to an interaction (Louis, 1983b).

Louis (1983b) describes organizations as continuously convening settings in which cultures may develop, characterizing organizations as petri dishes (p. 46). The author identifies features of organizations that support the development of local cultures. These include: membership stability, the prominence of general organizational ideas or frameworks, organizational age and size, characteristics of key leaders, density of organizational boundaries, and membership restrictions.

### Organizational Climate and Culture

Organizational climate and culture have both been important concepts in organizational theory (Schein, 1992). While these terms are sometimes used interchangeably, culture and climate are seen as distinct within the literature, each with its own body of recent research. Yet overlap and interaction between these two concepts continues to result in a complex organizational view.

McMurray (1994) portrays climate as a descriptive concept which reflects consensus among members on key elements of the organization, such as systems, practices, and leadership style. Moran and Volkwein (1992) define climate as:

A relatively enduring characteristic of an organization which distinguishes it from other organizations and: (a) embodies members' collective perceptions about their organization with respect to such dimensions as autonomy, trust, cohesiveness, support, recognition, innovation and fairness; (b) is produced by member interaction; (c) serves as a basis for interpreting the situation; (d) reflects the prevalent norms, values and attitudes of the organization's culture; and (e) acts as a source of influence for shaping behavior. (p. 20)

A recent study by McMurray (1994) confirms other findings that culture serves to inform organizational climate in a number of important ways, most notably through the influence of organizational leadership. According to Ashforth (1985) "It is not a large conceptual step from shared assumptions (culture) to shared perceptions (climate)" (p. 841). Ashforth views the concepts of culture and climate as occurring along the same continuum with "climate being more grounded in individual consciousness whereas culture is largely preconscious or more to do with tacitly held beliefs" (p. 841). Falcione and Kaplan (1984) suggest that organizational culture is likely to "persist over time, while climate is the assessment of these elements at any given moment" (p. 301).

McMurray's (1994) study reinforces the belief that culture provides the context for the creation of meaning for organizational members. Her model focuses at the interplay between subcultures and the host, or more pervasive organizational culture. At the

subcultural level, when shared attitudes and beliefs are aligned with those of the host culture, the subunit's climate is positive. On the other hand, subunits weakly aligned in terms of attitudes or beliefs with the host culture tend to evidence less favorable perceptions of climate. In this regard, culture informs climate in assisting the individual to decide what is important in his/her experience.

These study results support the work of Poole (1985) who contends that climate is an artifact of culture. He states "climate seems to be a feature of rather than a substitute for culture" (p. 84).

### Cultural Archetypes

Ouchi introduced a model in 1980 that identified three types of organizational cultures: clan, hierarchy, and market. A fourth cultural type (adhocracy) had already been identified (Mintzberg, 1979). Characteristics for each cultural type were developed through the work of Deal and Kennedy (1982), Mitroff and Kilmann (1975), Quinn and Cameron (1983), Sathe (1983), Smircich (1983a), and Wilkins and Ouchi (1983), and are illustrated through Table 2.

Cameron (1985) studied over 300 institutions of higher education to assess the presence of dominant cultural archetypes within academia. Cameron's research found no academic organizations with characteristics of only one cultural type. However, just under 50 institutions had a dominant culture. The largest number of schools with congruent cultures were clans (25), followed by hierarchies (12), adhocracies (9) and market cultures (1).

Wilkins and Ouchi (1983) explored the three cultural archetypes first described by Ouchi (1980) and offered the following conclusions: (a) clans allow for a more rapid processing of information under high levels of uncertainty, ambiguity, and complexity; (b)

TABLE 2  
TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES

	Hierarchy	Market	Clan	Adhocracy
Emphasis	Rules, order, clear lines of authority, uniformity, efficiency.	Competitiveness, goal accomplishment, production, customer orientation, interaction.	Shared values and goals, participation, individuality, sense of family.	Entrepreneurship, creativity, adaptability, dynamism.
Transactions guided by:	Surveillance, evaluation, direction.	Equitable exchange, market mechanisms.	Congruent beliefs and objectives.	Flexibility, tolerance, growth, development.
Congruent leadership style	Coordinators, organizers.	The producer, hard-driver.	The mentor, facilitator.	The entrepreneur, innovator.
Bonding occurs through:	Rules and policies.	Goal accomplishment.	Loyalty and tradition.	Innovation and development.
Strategic focus	Permanence, stability.	Competitive actions, achievement.	Human resources cohesion.	Growth and acquiring new resources.

clans are less efficient than bureaucratic and market forms in operating situations where complexity and uncertainty are low; (c) clans are more costly because of the required maintenance of social networks and agreements; and (d) clans are adaptive within a wide band of activities and are supported by individual loyalty.

### Organizational Subcultures

While anthropologists have tended to study whole cultures, sociologists look more at the development of subcultures. This is an important distinction in perspective. Becher (1984), Clark (1979, 1984), Louis (1983a, 1983b, 1985), and a host of others (Gregory, 1983; Riley, 1983; Sackmann, 1992; Van Maanen & Barley, 1984) challenge the

assumption that there is one culture in an organization. They claim that discovering the essence of organizational culture begins with group level analysis which is the focus of this study. Van Maanen and Barley (1984) state "it is here where people discover, create and use culture, and it is against this background that they judge the organization of which they are a part" (p. 351). Louis (1985) calls subcultures "loci of culture [or] culture-bearing milieus" (p. 82).

Van Maanen and Barley (1985) have established criteria for subcultures within academia. These include: (a) regular interaction; (b) striving for and sharing a perception of group consciousness; (c) shared problems of a common nature; and (d) action on the basis of shared values and norms. Bolton and Kammeyer (1967) offer a definition of subculture as a normative value system differing from the host culture. According to the authors, subcultural groups persist in their interactions with one another, transmit norms and values to newcomers, exercise social controls, and ensure conformity to group norms through these identified means. Feldman and Newcomb (1969) carry this definition further, characterizing the basis for member interaction within a subculture as relating to a mutual attraction to each other, and a strong common orientation.

Subcultures, according to Schein (1993b), tend to form around any stable social unit where stability is a function of length of founder/leader presence, potency of leadership, number and intensity of common coping experiences, length of group existence, and size of group. Depending upon the strength of the dominant culture, the cultural impact of subgroups may be stronger in some organizations than in others. A multicultural image of organizations leads one to consider both cohesive and divisive functions of culture.

The work of Fine, Johnson, and Ryan (1990) revealed that race and gender can influence the way individuals experience the organization. Their results showed that while men, women, and minorities share the same work environment, they do not experience the

environment in similar ways. The unique cultures of gender and racial groups provide a new perspective for understanding organizational behavior, especially as workplace demographics change.

Martin and Siehl (1983) identify three types of subcultures within organizations: enhancing, orthogonal, and countercultural. As described by these authors, an enhancing subculture espouses the core values of the organization, while the orthogonal subculture includes members who simultaneously accept the core values of the dominant culture while holding a separate, unconflicting set of values particular to themselves. Examples might be subcultures associated with certain occupational groups. Martin and Siehl focus their efforts on the notion of countercultures, which exist to present a direct challenge to the core values of a dominant culture. They describe an "uneasy symbiosis" (p. 63) that exists between culture and counterculture.

Schein (1993b) claims that the increasing pace of change in today's environment, combined with societal movement toward a knowledge-based, distributed information system, is causing organizations of all sizes to break down into subunits based on technology, products, markets, geographies, and occupational communities. He believes that these organizational subunits are likely to develop their own subcultures because of shared core technology and different learning experiences.

Schein (1993b) characterizes the problem of coordination and integration in an organization as ultimately a problem of meshing subcultures. The greatest hindrance occurs through variations in hierarchical subcultures, because of the myth that all management speaks the same language. Schein claims that variations in hierarchical subcultures cause difficulty in program implementation and change.

Under this scenario, organizational effectiveness, and the management of change across the organization, is increasingly dependent upon valid communication across

subculture boundaries. Schein (1993b) proposes that dialogue, as a first step in organizational learning, has the ability to cut across organizational subcultures and create shared mental models, which are vital to organizational learning and adaptation. Furthermore, he states that organizational learning is not possible unless some learning first takes place in the executive subculture.

Gregory (1983) applies the concept of organizational subcultures to the corporate environment in a study of Silicon Valley. Gregory identifies professional subcultures within organizations whose occasionally conflicting values are at cross-purposes with the professional teamwork expected of Silicon Valley workers. Gregory's study points out the cohesive and divisive functions of culture within organizations, and the fact that professional cultures frequently span organizational boundaries.

Riley (1983) assessed the role of organizational politics as an organizing phenomenon in two subsidiaries of a larger firm. Riley's conclusions support the notion of distinct organizational subcultures at work within an organization.

Many researchers find that academic culture is comprised of a host of complex subcultures contributing to the overall institutional culture. In the case of the academic setting, subcultures may exist around academic disciplines, occupational departments, category of employee, and student groups and trustees (Tierney, 1988b). Additionally, social groups revolving around any combination of these subcultures emerge through the proximity of living quarters, shared offices, or joint meeting space. Kuh and Whitt (1988) identify collegiate culture as the collective, mutually shaping patterns of practices and beliefs that bind a college community together.

Harman's (1989) study of the University of Melbourne in Australia identifies four levels of academic structure, each giving way to its own unique cultural form. She states, "there is no one homogenous academic culture" (p. 34). Her study richly describes the

academic culture of the institution itself, the academic disciplines, the professional schools, and the wider academic community of professionals.

Mitchell and Willower (1992) take this notion a bit further and argue that since a school's culture contains two large and divergent subcultures (faculty and students), an understanding of their interaction is critical to the improvement of schools as organizations. Their study of a single high school identifies subcultures of students and teachers, and the presence of a shared culture cutting across both groups.

Billups' (1991) work identifies college administrators as a distinctive subculture within higher education, and characterizes this group as participants rather than creators of their organizational cultures, based on her work within five New England colleges and universities.

Institutions of higher education provide fertile ground for the study of culture and subculture. Students, faculty, administrators, support staff, academic disciplines, and other natural work groups all contribute to the complexity of organizational culture in academic settings. This study contributes to our understanding of the administrative subculture in higher education by examining the expression of culture through administrative actions or decisions.

#### Culture and Organizational Effectiveness

Conferences, symposia, special issues of journals, and numerous research reports have focused on culture and its relationship to organizational performance. It is suggested that awareness of a given organization's culture, by its leaders, may result in a more effective institution. "When leaders understand the important link between culture and strategy, they are better able to act in the complex environment in which higher education currently finds itself," writes Chaffee and Tierney (1988, p. 6).



Tichy (1982), and Wilkins and Ouchi (1983) and others argue that a culture supportive of organizational strategies leads to high performance. "To be successful, a company's culture needs to support the kind of business the organization is in and its strategy for handling that business" (Tichy, 1982, p. 71).

A few comprehensive studies of institutions conducted by Chaffee and Tierney (1988); Peterson, Cameron, Jones, Mets, and Ettington (1986); and Tierney (1988b) suggest that the culture of an institution is pivotal in determining the success of organizational improvement efforts.

The popular wisdom embraced by many authors asserts that a strong culture, a congruent culture, and a culture that supports the structure and strategies of the organization is more effective than a weak, incongruent, or disconnected culture. For example, Peters and Waterman (1982) as well as Deal & Kennedy (1982) asserted that a strong culture is associated with organizational excellence. "A strong culture has almost always been the driving force behind continuing success in American business" (Deal & Kennedy, 1982, p. 5).

A 1991 study of higher education institutions by Cameron and Freeman does not support the relationship of cultural strength or congruence to organizational effectiveness. In a survey of over 3,000 administrators, faculty department heads, and trustees from over 300 colleges and universities, no significant differences in organizational effectiveness were found between schools with congruent or incongruent cultures. Schools with strong cultures were no more effective than schools with weak cultures. However, the type of culture at the school appeared to be more important in accounting for effectiveness than congruence or strength.

The findings of Cameron and Freeman (1991), as illustrated in Table 3, indicate that clan cultures are most effective in effectiveness dimensions relating to morale and human

resource concerns. Adhocracies score highest in dimensions of effectiveness related to academic quality and relationships with the external environment. The market culture scores highest in effectiveness related to acquiring resources from the external environment.

Sensitivity to cultural type is certainly indicated by this study.

TABLE 3  
CAMERON AND FREEMAN:  
CULTURAL TYPES AND CULTURAL EFFECTIVENESS

Cultural Type*	Cultural Effectiveness Dimension
Clan	Student educational satisfaction
Clan	Student personal development
Clan	Faculty and administrator employment satisfaction
Clan	Organizational health
Adhocracy	Student academic development
Adhocracy	Student career development
Adhocracy	Professional development and faculty quality
Adhocracy	System openness and community interaction
Market	Ability to acquire resources

\*The highest score was significantly higher ( $p \leq .05$ ) than at least one other culture on each dimension of effectiveness.

Hamm (1992) studied 2-year colleges to explore the relationship between organizational culture and effectiveness. Adhocracy was found to be the most effective cultural type as it related positively to two of three identified community college effectiveness domains (student development and external conditions). Smart and Hamm's (1993) study confirmed earlier research showing a strong correlation between dominant organizational culture type and organizational effectiveness. Colleges identified as having a dominant adhocracy culture were perceived to be the most effective.

### Organizational Culture and Decision-Making

Decision-making is one of several regularly occurring organizational activities that has significant impact on the life of the organization (Hamm, 1992). Taylor (1982) writes about the importance of understanding decision-making practices for academic managers.

The need for a better understanding of decision-making by academic managers is reflected in the nature of problems which confront colleges and universities today. As institutions of higher education have increased in size and complexity, public demands for accountability have increased. Academic managers, however, often remain unaware of their decision-process behaviors despite these calls for accountability and effective problem solving. Therefore, they remain unable to modify and improve their decision-making behaviors. (p. 156)

The purpose of a small but significant subset of organizational culture studies has been to better understand how culture influences organizational decision-making processes. This section of the literature review provides an overview of decision-making models and studies related to organizational decision-making.

Baldrige (1971) was among the earliest to describe decision-making styles in academic settings. He identified three distinct decision-making models. The first is the bureaucratic model, which is characterized as hierarchical, traditional, and formal. Decision-making in this model is based on authority and designated power.

Baldrige's (1971) second model is the collegial model, which emphasizes full participation of all parties impacted by the decision. The leader's role in the collegial model is to facilitate discussion of involved parties. Baldrige, Curtis, Ecker, and Riley (1978) describe the collegial model as a more personal approach to decision-making than the bureaucratic model. The authors note the primary weakness of this model is its lack of attention to competition and conflict.

Baldrige's (1971) third model is the political model, which recognizes the nature of power and force in decision-making. Confrontation and conflict, rather than consensus, are

features of this model. This model assumes that organizations can be described as miniature political systems with the following features: uninvolved of many organizational players, fragmentation and interest groups, conflict, limited authority, frequent negotiation, and the presence of significant external constituents (Baldrige et al., 1978).

Chaffee (1983, 1984) added three additional decision-making models to those already identified. The first is the anarchy model, which emerged from the literature on "organized anarchy" (Cohen & March, 1974). This model features confusing and competing decision-making systems, a shortage of time and resources to make decisions, and an absence of organizational direction. The next is the rational model, which places high value on logic and order. Decisions within this context follow a logical and linear process, and the outcome is determined primarily by common values of the organization. The third model (autocratic) is characterized by the use of power by a single individual or small group without the inclusion of other organizational input.

March and Olsen (1976) outline numerous similar models for analyzing decision-making. These include the rational model, which is grounded in an important cultural assumption about the value of rationality, and use of reason or logic. Additionally, the conflict resolution model assumes that decisions are made through bargaining, coalitions, and compromise between individuals or groups having different interests. This view is built on the cultural assumption that power is a thing that is stabilized in an individual or a group, and that produces control and the ability to impose choice on others.

March and Olsen's (1976) artifactual, or non-decision-making model lays the groundwork for shifting from a focus on decisions to interaction. This model is characterized by the assumption that decision outcomes are an unintended product of processes with dynamics of their own. The garbage can model (March & Olsen, 1976) is another example of this view of decision-making. This model assumes a loosely-coupled

relationship between the decision process and outcome. March and Olsen (1976) describe the garbage can as "a meeting place for issues and feelings, looking for decision situations in which they may be aired; solutions looking for issues to which they may be the answer, and participants looking for problems or pleasure" (p. 25). A decision may, in this view, become a garbage can for almost any problem.

March and Olsen (1976) also present the notion that most decision models are actually folk models. They propose that decisions are "a stage for many dramas" (p. 12), including the following: (a) an occasion for executing standard operating procedures and fulfilling role-expectations, duties, or earlier commitments; (b) an occasion for defining virtue and truth, during which the organization discovers or interprets what has happened to it, what it has been doing, what it is going to do, and what justifies its actions; (c) an occasion for distributing glory or blame for what has happened in the organization, and thus an occasion for exercising, challenging, or reaffirming friendship or trust relationships, antagonisms, power, or status relationships; (d) an occasion for expressing and discovering self-interest and group interest, for socialization and for recruiting; and (e) an occasion for having a good time, for enjoying the pleasures connected with taking part in a choice situation.

Schwartzman (1989) justifies the study of culture within the context of meetings and decisions. She states:

Structure and culture, insofar as they have any meaning at all as theoretical concepts, are only realized within these occasions, and so it is in the occasion that we must locate our analyses . . . whereas no one has ever seen a . . . "value," everyone (almost) has been to a meeting. This means that research on meetings as occasions will necessarily be focused on speech and communication as both constituting and constituted activity in these settings. (p. 35)

Schwartzman suggests that meetings are what decisions, policies, and problems are about.

She suggests that meetings transform the behavior of individuals into organizational action.

Meetings and meeting dialogue become transformed into minutes and reports, which become evidence of organizational action, results, decisions, and control. Schwartzman (1989) characterizes meetings as, "communicative events that organize interaction, thereby structuring communication, as well as providing an interpretive scheme, generating cultural patterns that come to serve as models of and for activities and beliefs" (p. 61). Decision-making brings together diverse groups with divergent beliefs and goals.

Trice and Beyer (1984) point out that meetings are a powerful and ongoing symbol for an organization, because meetings assemble a variety of individuals and groups together and label the assembly organizational action. Expressive symbolic consequences can occur whether or not the meetings result in any important decisions or have other practical results.

Beyer (1981) presents a paradigm that relates organizational beliefs, values, and decision-making. All stages of the decision process, she claims, can be affected by the belief and value premises that (a) define the problems or provide available solutions, (b) focus the shifting configuration of participants with interests in the outcomes of the decision, (c) characterize the environments to which decision-makers try to fit organizations, and (d) structure decision-making situations. According to Beyer (1981), three characteristics of a decision-making situation — complexity, conflict, and uncertainty — encourage the incorporation of assumptions and values. For example, people use assumptions and values to simplify complex decisions.

Hamm (1992) studied community colleges and organizational cultural influences to decision-making. Six decision-making styles were investigated within 30 community colleges in relation to effectiveness. The rational style of decision-making was found to be positively related to student development, morale, and external connection.

Platt (1989) studied institutions of higher education to determine the relationship between the culture of a college and its decision-making behavior. Her results indicated that,

although decision-making behavior typically appears to be an independent process, in reality it is bounded, in part, by cultural assumptions and beliefs that affect the way problems are defined, approached, and decided.

Empirical studies on the decision-making process in higher education are scarce (Taylor, 1982). However, an understanding of the decision-making process and the influence that culture has on decisions is critical. The underlying rationale for studying culture is to understand how decisions and actions are culturally influenced so that we might utilize this knowledge to create more effective organizations. This study examined the cultural influences on decision-making as a form of group action taken by one community college administrative team.

## ACADEMIC CULTURE

Higher education provides one of the most complex organizational settings in which to explore culture and its influences (Billups, 1991). While research on culture in higher education is not new, its complex and elusive nature has limited attempts to study it comparatively. This section reviews the most significant studies that pertain to academic culture.

The classic studies are primarily case studies of single institutions, such as Clark (1970); Foote, Mayer, and Associates (1968); Lunsford (1963); and Riesman, Gusfield, and Gamson (1970). Other recent work has included the study of academic cultures (Becher, 1981; Freedman, 1979; Gaff & Wilson, 1971; Whitcomb & Deshler, 1983); management and leadership (Chaffee, 1984; Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Tierney, 1988b); and the study of secondary school cultures (Cheng, 1993; Mitchell & Willower, 1992; Papalewis, 1988; Shaw & Reyes, 1992; Steinhoff & Owens, 1989). The unique character of higher education institutions have long been recognized and accepted both within and outside of higher

education (Martin, Feldman, Hutch, & Sitkin, 1983; Veysey, 1965). Kuh and Whitt (1988), and Peterson et al. (1986) have synthesized organizational culture research in higher education. Barley, Meyer, and Gash (1988) synthesized both corporate and academic culture studies to assess the impact that corporate culture has had on the academic setting.

Despite its significance in shaping higher education history and development, the community college has been the site of relatively little serious scholarly research (Fish, 1988). Research in the early 1960s typically concerned student culture (Becker, 1963; Bushnell, 1960; Pace, 1962; Yamamoto, 1968). Most studies of community colleges have sprung from the classic work of Burton Clark (1960a; 1960b) of San Jose Junior College. Clark was interested in how a community college develops a role and identity, and how its character is shaped by internal or external forces. Since the early 1970s, Clark's research has focused on distinctive colleges; e.g., cultures (1970), the role of belief and loyalty in college organizations (1971), and organizational sagas as instruments for institutional identity (1972).

London (1978) conducted the first in-depth ethnography of a community college. His study of City Community College during its first year of operation provides a rich account of internal dynamics within the college. Fish (1988); Richardson, Fisk, and Okun (1983); and Weis (1985) have also added to an understanding of the community college through their respective ethnographies. The focus of Richardson, Fisk, and Okun (1983) was open access and its influence on student abilities and faculty expectations. In her study of a predominantly black urban community college, Weis (1985) looked at how the culture of ghetto life undermines students' educational goals. Fish (1988) investigated the cultural and structural interrelationships within the community college. Her ethnography richly describes the role of the community college in the lives of its students, faculty, and staff.



One noteworthy recent study was conducted in 1992 by Hamm. He studied the relationship between effectiveness, organizational culture, and decision-making in community colleges, and found the adhocracy culture to be the most effective cultural type, while the rational decision-making style was most effective.

Kuh and Whitt (1988) describe collegiate culture as a complex layering which includes the external environment that surrounds the institution, the institution itself, the individual actors and their roles, as well as the subcultures within the organization. Masland (1985) describes four spheres of culture in higher education: the discipline, the academic profession, the institution, and the educational system. Sanford (1962) describes the influence that the external environment has on shaping academic institutions. Jencks and Riesman (1969) discuss governmental, occupational, professional, and accreditation agency pressures which influence the cultural development and maintenance of a college or university. Levine (1986) agrees that the influence of social values and prevailing attitudes of society about the general purpose of higher education contributes powerfully to a collegiate culture.

At the institutional level, the development of culture is influenced remarkably by the college's history, its original mission and heritage, and the circumstances surrounding its founding (Clark, 1970). Clark also identifies the academic program and the faculty body as pivotal institutional influences that shape the culture. Kuh and Whitt (1988), and Masland (1985) describe the distinctive themes of an institution as revealed in observed ceremonials, rites, and traditions. Masland stresses the role of traditions in communicating meaning within a college community by identifying and transmitting important values, welcoming and initiating new members, and celebrating members' accomplishments.

At the individual level, Yerkes, Cuellar, and Cuellar (1992) identify individual frames that influence organizational culture, the most significant being the human resource

frame. Clark (1970), and Kuh and Whitt (1988) emphasize the importance of key individuals in a collegiate setting. The influence of dominant actors, such as presidents, founding fathers, or popular faculty members is captured in studies by Clark (1970), Kelly and Bredeson (1991), and Ortiz and Hendrick (1987).

Academic settings provide a rich environment for the study of organizational culture. This study seeks to contribute to our understanding of the cultural influences at work in one community college setting through its exploration of how cultural themes were expressed in actions taken by the executive administrative team at Northwest Community College.

### THE ADMINISTRATIVE SUBCULTURE

College and university administrators play a vital role in institutional management and growth. Yet, debate persists concerning the existence of a definitive administrative subculture in higher education (Kuh & Whitt, 1988).

Research suggests that administrators typically feel estranged from the central purposes and activities of the academic institution: teaching, research, and service (Clark, 1984; Austin, 1984; Solomon & Tierney, 1977). Clark (1984) states that "administrators are the least noticed in the subcultures of academic enterprises and systems; but of growing importance is the separation of administrative cultures from those of faculty and students" (p. 89).

Over the past century, the growth of education has triggered the development of a host of professional higher education administrators. These administrators incorporate not only those with faculty backgrounds, but also individuals with professional backgrounds in social and human services, business, finance, management, and other fields. Academic administrators now assume responsibility for critical decisions in numerous academic areas,

such as enrollment management, resource allocation, academic program management, long-range planning, and facilities development (Sagaria, 1988).

Austin (1984) examined the work experiences of college presidents, deans, and mid-level administrators with particular attention to job characteristics, decision-making roles, commitment, and overall satisfaction. He calls college and university administrators the "keys to the success and quality of their institutions" (Austin, 1984, p. 3). Scott (1978) studied all nonacademic administrators in terms of routine activities, career paths, and professional affiliations, and concluded that administrative activity emerges as one of the major activities within the institution. Schuler (1981) developed a picture of the types of problems commonly shared by college administrators, such as experiencing rapid and multiple changes, feeling the pressure of deadlines, fear of failure, and uncertainty about career and life directions. Billups (1991) studied administrators in five New England colleges in order to characterize the administrative group as a legitimate collegiate subculture. Beyond those efforts, a review of the research in this arena reveals little work.

In addition to these empirical studies, many researchers and scholars discuss college administrators in their research (Anderson, 1983; Anselm, 1980; Bess & Lodahl, 1969; Braude, 1975; Clark, 1984; Maccoby, 1976; Richardson, 1976; Sheppard & Herrick, 1972; Solomon & Tierney, 1977). The study of college administrators primarily includes the exploration of job functions and performance, satisfaction, work experience, training, career development, and institutional commitment. A number of studies on organizational culture have focused on the role of administrators as leaders and their influence of organizational culture (Bennis, 1984; Burns, 1978; Kelly & Bredeson, 1991; Ortiz & Hendrick, 1987; Schein, 1992; Tierney, 1988b).

Schein's (1992) text, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, poses the role of leaders as critical to the formation of culture. Leaders influence cultural embedding through

what they pay attention to, how they react to critical organizational incidents, how they allocate rewards and status, their role modeling and coaching behaviors, and the criteria they use for recruiting, selecting, promoting, retaining, or retiring group members. He states:

Culture is learned and taught through a variety of explicit and implicit mechanisms. The things that solve a group's problems repeatedly and that reduce anxiety will survive and become a part of the culture. But only those solutions that are proposed or invented can become candidates for cultural elements. Cultures do not start from scratch. Founders and group leaders will impose assumptions, and influence the group. (Schein, 1992, p. 221)

Morgan (1986) comments on the trend (as evidenced in Deal & Kennedy, 1982) toward popular, prescriptive literature on the topic of organizational culture aimed at giving North American business managers recipes for developing or improving culture in their organizations, rather than understanding it. He states:

What is new in many recent developments is the not-so-subtle way in which ideological manipulation and control is being advocated as an essential managerial strategy. There is a certain ideological blindness in much of the writing about corporate culture, especially by those who advocate that managers attempt to become folk heroes shaping and reshaping the culture of their organizations. The fact that such manipulation may well be accompanied by resistance, resentment and mistrust, and that employees may react against being manipulated in this way, receives scant attention. (Morgan, 1986, p. 138)

Fortunately, most of the literature on organizational culture indicates that managers do not control the culture or direct it; they influence it, and it influences them if they are perceptive enough to let it. If leaders let the culture inform them, they understand it and use that understanding to guide their strategic planning and decision-making (Bennis, 1985; Louis, 1983b; Schein, 1992; Weick, 1985).

## SUMMARY

Culture is broadly recognized as a significant force in organizational action. Culture interacts with and shapes organizational climate, providing a context for the creation of

organizational meaning and perception. The notion of organizational subcultures provides a cultural basis for understanding real or potential organizational conflict. Studies of culture and organizational effectiveness indicate that organizational cultural type has an influence on organizational effectiveness. An understanding of the cultural basis for decision-making can enhance our ability to implement and evaluate every day decisions with an awareness of their symbolic implications and their influence, in turn, on organizational culture. Since the phenomenon of culture has real impact on organizations, our understanding of that impact is vital to organizational health.

The study of organizational culture has been an interdisciplinary quest approached from a variety of theoretical perspectives. Smircich's (1983a) interpretive perspective of organizational symbolism was specifically identified as directly relating to and guiding the goal of this particular study in examining the cultural influences at work within one community college administrative team, and exploring how cultural themes were expressed in the actions taken by these community college leaders.

While there has been a tremendous amount of research on organizational culture, comparatively little of this research has been conducted with administrators in academic settings. Higher education provides one of the most rich and complex organizational settings in which to explore cultural influences. This interpretive study contributes specifically to our understanding of the administrative subculture in higher education, and the community college as a higher education setting through its examination of the executive administrative team at Northwest Community College.

## CHAPTER III

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the cultural influences at work within a community college administrative team and to explore how cultural themes were expressed in the actions taken by community college leaders at Northwest Community College (NWCC). Research questions specifically sought to interpret the patterns among cultural symbols, values, assumptions, and actions within this setting.

Schein's (1992) model of organizational culture was used to conceptualize culture for purposes of this study. Schein's model characterizes organizational culture as grounded in basic, subconscious assumptions that are illustrated through values or deeply held beliefs and manifested through outward symbols, such as artifacts, speech, and behavior. Schein's framework focused this study's research questions on values and assumptions held by individual study participants, cultural symbols, and shared cultural themes found within the administrative team.

Smircich's (1983a) interpretive perspective of organizational symbolism was used to guide the purpose and research goals for this study. Organizational symbolism was selected because, as a framework, it focuses research effort on interpreting and characterizing the patterns among cultural symbols, values, assumptions, and actions.

This study used ethnography as a form of interpretive research to explore the patterns of outward symbols and values that characterized organizational culture in this setting, and the underlying assumptions that gave rise to it. The basic goal of ethnography is that of "creating a vivid reconstruction of the culture studied" (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 235). Ethnography is the method of choice of studying and interpreting cultural scenes or groups (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Masland's (1985) four cultural windows were used throughout the study to focus data collection efforts. Masland's windows included: (a) organizational stories, (b) organizational heroes, (c) organizational symbols, and (d) organizational traditions. These windows guided field observations, in-depth interviews, and selective review of documents.

This chapter begins with a review of the several methodological approaches to the study of culture and justification for the ethnographic method that this researcher chose. Subsequent sections outline research procedures involved in conducting this interpretive study. Discussions of research site and study population, data collection methods, role of the researcher, analysis of data, and methods used to enhance the trustworthiness of study results are also included.

#### METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF CULTURE

This study used ethnographic methods to explore the patterns of outward symbols, values, and underlying assumptions that characterize organizational culture within the community college administrative team at NWCC. As a form of interpretive research, ethnography is grounded in the basic assumptions of the interpretive perspective.

This section begins with a thorough discussion of the interpretive approach to organizational study. The salient characteristics of ethnography as a form of interpretive research are outlined. Masland's (1985) cultural windows are reviewed as a means of focusing the study of culture within the academic setting. Rationale for the use of field observations, interviews, and document review as data collection methods in the study of organizational culture is provided.

### Interpretive Research in Organizational Study

The differences among organizational culture research approaches reflects the diversity of theoretical perspectives with which we view organizations. These basic assumptions about organizational life influence the nature of the investigation, the methodology, and the resulting research findings.

Sackman (1991) refers to these differences in research approaches as the difference between an outsider's and an insider's perspective. The outsider's approach is a deductive and quantitative one, based on a functionalist perspective with the goal of generalizing from the data and establishing universal laws. In this mode of inquiry, researchers introduce their concepts to the research site, which is relevant to them only in regard to their specific questions. Culture is treated as one of several organizational variables that can be explained, predicted, and controlled.

In contrast, the insider's approach, which is based on an interpretive perspective, aims at gaining an understanding of life within a particular research site. The obtained knowledge is qualitative in nature, context specific, and situationally relevant, and cannot be generalized beyond its immediate context. The researcher interacts with members of the research setting and becomes experientially involved. The process is inductive in that concepts and hypotheses may emerge in this iterative and interactive process as data are integrated with observed experiences. Researchers who subscribe to this mode of inquiry consider culture as something an organization *is*, and they are interested in a thorough understanding of this cultural context.

Cziko (1989), and Morgan and Smircich (1980) provide arguments for the use of qualitative design in educational research. They claim that comprehensive and definitive experiments in the social sciences are not possible, considering the constant change and interaction of factors influencing human behavior. These authors believe that the most we can



ever realistically hope to achieve in educational research is temporary understanding, rather than prediction and control.

According to Schein (1992), the culture of an organization is grounded in the shared assumptions of individual organizational members. Understanding organizational culture requires one to uncover subconscious assumptions that give rise to culture. Because cultural assumptions are taken for granted by participants, they are not easily described by them. Therefore, the researcher has to use methods that strive to decipher or interpret the patterns of behavior, speech, and artifacts, as well as the values that symbolize organizational culture. Geertz (1973) proposes that behavior must be attended to as a form of study, because it is through the flow of behavior (social action) that cultural forms find articulation. This points to the need for an interpretive study which uses the insider's approach and focuses on the current interactions and actors' accounts of their own experiences.

The literature provides a diverse look at methodologies used in the study of organizational culture. While researchers have designed both quantitative and qualitative approaches to the subject, the majority of organizational culture studies have been qualitative in nature, involving ethnographic or interpretive methods. Lincoln and Guba (1985) call this interpretive methodology *naturalistic inquiry*. This research approach is grounded in the following four assumptions:

1. *The nature of reality.* Realities are multiple rather than singular. Everything influences everything else in the present context. All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that the possibility of causal relationships is limited.
2. *The relationship of the researcher and the researched.* The relationship of researcher and subjects is interactive and inseparable. Work with human subjects is complex, in that humans may produce an effect in anticipation of its cause. Human behavior is context and time-bound.

3. *Generalization.* Generalization is limited by time and context within which the research takes place. Generalization in this case is described as approximating, through words and illustrations, the experience that one might typically find in such a situation as the one described in the case. Transferability is the term used to describe how well a working hypothesis developed in Context A might be applicable to Context B. The degree of transferability is a direct function of the similarity between the two contexts, and is dependent upon a rich contextual description. Geertz (1973) uses the term "thick description" to characterize the descriptive quality of accounts found in interpretive studies.

4. *The role of values.* The process of inquiry is value-bound, thereby acknowledging the role of researcher values in shaping both the process and results of the research effort.

Lincoln and Guba's (1985) discussion of interpretive research also outlines characteristics specific to qualitative study. Characteristics that apply to this particular researcher's study are summarized below.

*Research within the natural setting.* The study of phenomena cannot be separated from the context within which it takes place. Phenomena, whether physical, biological, social, psychological, or chemical, derive meaning as much from their context as they do from themselves.

*Researcher as primary research instrument.* Only the human can understand and evaluate the meaning of interaction. Humans are uniquely qualified as research instruments because of their ability to respond to cues, adapt, and find the appropriate target for focus. Interactions are seen as an opportunity to be exploited, rather than an intrusion leading to error.

*Qualitative methods.* These methods are sensitive to the many mutually shaping influences and value patterns that may be encountered. Qualitative methods are a natural

extension of other human activities, such as looking, listening, speaking, and reading. These activities naturally relate to research methods such as interviewing, observing, reviewing documents, and interpreting.

*Purposeful sampling.* This sampling method allows the researcher to increase the scope or range of data exposed, and be flexible in taking into account local conditions, values, and events. Sample units are chosen to extend the information already obtained, to obtain contrasting information, or to fill in gaps in the information.

*Inductive data analysis.* This process allows one to impose a purposeful structure that emerges from the interaction between investigator and phenomenon. Data obtained in the field are analyzed inductively, from specific units of information to larger categories of information. Content analysis is performed through coding units of data and placing previously coded data into categories that provide descriptive or inferential information.

*Negotiated outcomes.* Negotiated research outcomes result because meaning is negotiated between the views of the researcher participants. Findings that might apply to a given context are best verified and confirmed by those who were sources of information within that context. Such negotiation improves the trustworthiness of study results.

*Criteria for trustworthiness.* Qualitative researchers are concerned with the concept of trustworthiness when designing their studies. The basic issue in relation to trustworthiness is simple: How can the researcher persuade her audiences (including herself) that the findings of the study are worth paying attention to? Within functionalist paradigms, the criteria that have evolved in response to this question are termed internal validity, external validity, reliability, and objectivity.

There is no question that the qualitative researcher is at least as concerned with trustworthiness as is the conventional researcher. However, criteria designed from a functionalist perspective are not appropriate to the framework of interpretive research. Basic

assumptions which guide interpretive design, concerning the nature of reality and purpose of the research process, vary dramatically.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest alternate criteria for establishing trustworthiness. The alternate criteria applicable to this study include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Methods of establishing *credibility* include prolonged engagement within the research setting, persistent observation to allow the true nature of reality to emerge, triangulation of data sources and methods to verify results, and participant checks by research participants of emerging research results.

*Transferability* of research methods or findings to appropriate contexts is promoted through rich description. Ethnographic description is explicit, detailed, and includes identification of methods, analytic categories, and characteristics of phenomena within its setting.

*Dependability* of research results is enhanced by the presence of accurate and explicit records. This requires meticulous attention to the organization of field notes, interview transcripts, and research documents. A detailed journal outlining data analysis methods and emerging research design is suggested to support record keeping.

*Confirmability* of research results is enhanced through the process of triangulation. Triangulation involves the use of more than one source of data and/or method for obtaining data to enhance the likelihood that results can be confirmed in a variety of instances, sources, or methods.

Mathison (1988) describes three outcomes that might result from a triangulation strategy. The first is convergence: data from different sources, or methods will provide evidence that support a single proposition about some social phenomenon. The second is inconsistency: the researcher is faced with a range of perspectives or data that do not confirm

a proposition about the phenomenon under study. The third outcome is contradiction: we are sometimes left with a data bank that results in opposing views of the social phenomenon being studied.

### Ethnography

Ethnography is the method of choice for studying and interpreting cultural scenes or groups (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). As a form of interpretive research, ethnography is concerned with accurately recounting or describing the meaning that research participants give to the reality around them (Geertz, 1973). Ethnographic research methods offer a distinct opportunity to explore the day-to-day interactions which unfold to challenge, legitimize and recreate organizational culture. Spradley (1980) describes ethnographic analysis as a search for the parts of a culture, the relationships among the parts, and their relationships to the whole.

Ethnography as a form of interpretive research is grounded in anthropology. The anthropologist Geertz (1973) explains the research focus for cultural study as follows:

Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (p. 5)

Wolcott (1975) defines ethnography as "the science of cultural description" (p. 112). An ethnography is in essence an anthropological case study. Ethnography is the anthropologist's descriptive account of what she has observed and understood of another culture.

Anthropological study provides us with a dual perspective, according to Schwartzman (1989). That is, in presenting and portraying cultural forms that are different than our own, we are allowed to examine and therefore self-critically assess our own ways of knowing and acting (our assumptions of our own setting).

Classic ethnography is characterized by: (a) investigation of a small, relatively homogenous and geographically bounded study site; (b) long-term and repeated presence of the researcher at the site; (c) use of participant observation as the preferred data collection strategy; (d) creation of a data base primarily of field notes; (e) preoccupation with the interpretive description and explanation of the culture, life ways, and social structure of the group under investigation; (f) a fluid and developmental process of investigation; and (g) a process that is inductive (building generative categories and propositions from relationships discovered among the data), generative (concerned with discovering constructs and propositions using one or more data bases as the source of evidence), and constructive (developing units of analysis in the course of observation and description) (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993). One can see that the distinguishing characteristics of ethnographic research are highly similar to those describing other forms of interpretive study.

In addition, however, Geertz (1973) suggests another characteristic: ethnography is microscopic. In conducting such a study, the researcher commonly spends significant amounts of time "in acquaintance with extremely small matters" (Geertz, 1973, p. 21). It is how these small matters are then formed into greater schemes of social context and meaning that characterizes the inductive process of ethnography.

Ethnography facilitates learning about the cultures and structures of organizations from the inside out. This learning process is facilitated by providing researchers direct access to cultural knowledge, behavior, and symbols that participants share and use to interpret the daily experiences of their group (Schwartzman, 1993; Spradley, 1980).

This study used ethnography as a form of interpretive research to explore the patterns of outward symbols, values, and underlying assumptions that characterize organizational culture within the administrative team at NWCC. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) describe the basic goal of ethnography as that of, "creating a vivid reconstruction of the culture studied"

(p. 235). Spradley (1979) agrees, characterizing ethnography as "the work of describing a culture" (p. 3). Educational ethnography focuses on the occurrences of everyday life, and on the perspectives of those involved. It provides researchers with a vehicle for describing, interpreting, and explaining the social world of educators and the operation of educational phenomena (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

### Cultural Windows

The culture of an organization is difficult to assess objectively. Like an iceberg with its visible tip, the substance of an organization's culture, those taken-for-granted, shared assumptions, are hidden beneath the conscious level (Sackmann, 1991; Schein, 1992). Nonetheless, these assumptions can be uncovered through stories, special language, artifacts, norms, and creations that emerge from individual and organizational behavior, and that symbolize a particular culture (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Louis, 1983b; Schein, 1992; Wilkins & Ouchi, 1983).

"The difficulty in studying culture," notes Andrew Masland (1985), "arises because culture is implicit; we are all embedded in our own cultures" (p. 160). Masland proposes four windows with which to uncover manifestations of organizational culture. Each window involves looking for a specific influence of culture at work, and from that evidence, deducing something about the culture itself. Masland's cultural windows include: (a) organizational stories, (b) organizational heroes, (c) organizational symbols, and (d) organizational traditions. This research study used Masland's cultural windows as a means of focusing the primary research techniques of field observation, semi-structured interviews, and document review.

Organizational stories. Clark (1972) describes the value of organizational stories in providing a window on organizational culture and exposing cultural influences. Organizational stories generally have their roots in an organization's history and describe unique

accomplishments or actions of key individuals or groups. Culture develops over time through the actions and words of organizational members. Organizational stories tend to represent that which is unique about an organization (Masland, 1985). Historical stories are a useful way to obtain these historical cultural influences (Hirsch & Andrews, 1983). As a group develops and accumulates a history, some of this history becomes embodied in stories about events and leadership behavior. Thus the story reinforces cultural assumptions and teaches these assumptions to newcomers (Schein, 1992).

Stories and storytelling are common activities that individuals in all organizations use to make sense of their world and their life at work (Schwartzman, 1993). Wilkins (1983) calls this use of stories "second-order control," and compares its usefulness to that of more formal organizational operating procedures. Wilkins identifies further usefulness of stories as a means of generating belief and encouraging commitment by appealing to legitimate values.

Martin, Feldman, Hatch, and Sitkin (1983) assessed the expression of organizational culture through organizational stories told in a variety of corporate settings. Their findings illustrate an interesting paradox: a culture's claim to uniqueness is expressed through stories that are, in fact, not at all unique to the settings studied. Seven recurring themes were found in organizational stories told across all settings.

Smith and Simmons (1983) studied the culture of a newly developing mental health facility. This ethnographic study points to the significance of myths as a form of story that characterize the unique culture of an organization.

Research conducted on organizational stories indicates that stories are an important form for (a) communicating historical experiences and providing individuals with a way to weave this experience into discussions of current activities; (b) distinguishing one's organization from others; (c) socializing new members into an organization; (d) documenting successes and failures and drawing conclusions from these examples; (e) indirectly



communicating information to individuals about topics too sensitive to discuss directly; (f) shaping and sustaining individuals' images of the organization in which they work (Masland, 1985). Organizational stories can be obtained through the use of interview or observational techniques.

Organizational heroes. Organizational heroes (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Dill, 1982) also provide a window on organizational culture. Heroes are individuals who are or have been important to an organization, and often represent values and beliefs in human form. They may in fact be people who play a central role in organizational stories. Data related to organizational heroes can be obtained through interview or observational techniques, as well as document review that focuses on current or historical figures of importance to the organization.

Smith and Steadman (1981) describe the use of history as a diagnostic tool and as a way of calling up great moments from the past to motivate employees in the present. They state, "a company's history contains its heritage and traditions, which managers need to understand if they are to see the present as part of a process rather than as a collection of accidental happenings" (p. 164).

Organizational symbols. This study's framework of organizational symbolism emphasizes the significance of symbols as external cues to underlying cultural values and assumptions. Organizational symbols thus provide the third window on organizational culture. Symbols can be visible, such as artifacts, or verbal, such as metaphor or language. Symbols are a concrete example of implicit values and beliefs in much the same way as heroes personify cultural values (Eoyang, 1983). Symbols, when used as a means of organizational communication, serve important functions. First, they are more concise than the meanings they represent. Second, symbols are more easily manipulated than original thought. Third, the

physical character of symbols makes easy storage and retrieval of information possible.

Fourth, symbols can be reproduced, enhancing the reliability of their communication. Fifth, they enable the articulation of abstract ideas. In short, the main function that symbols serve for humans is that they facilitate communication of meaning (Dandridge, 1983; Dandridge, Mitroff, & Joyce, 1980; Eoyang, 1983).

Pondy et al. (1983) identify three functions that symbols serve for organizations: descriptive, energy controlling, and system maintaining. Descriptive symbols are used to characterize the culture of the group. Energy controlling symbols can be used to inspire, attract, or repel group members. System maintaining symbols provide for stability during periods of transition.

Daft (1983) asks us to envision an organization devoid of symbols as a method of stressing their significance. Daft's description also characterizes the symbolic elements found within each cultural window. He states:

The organization would have no retirement dinners, no stories or anecdotes, no myths about the company's past, no annual picnic, no catchy phrases . . . about mission, no differences in office size or carpet thickness, no Christmas turkeys, and no company emblem. In short, a company devoid of symbolism can be likened to a mechanical system yielding goods and services with robot-like efficiency. (Daft, 1983, p. 199)

Organizational traditions. Organizational traditions provide the fourth cultural window, and yet another means of identifying cultural values, beliefs, and assumptions. They are useful because they translate culture into action. Traditions provide continuity with the past, perhaps demonstrating that old values and beliefs continue to play a current role in organizational life. They serve to reinforce beliefs and values in everyday life (Trice & Beyer, 1984).

Thralls (1992) studied rites and ceremonials through the review of corporate videos. Thralls' study points to the importance of new technology in capturing the expression and

communication of cultural values, beliefs, and assumptions. In addition to this newly described technique, organizational traditions can be observed or their description assessed through interviews.

### Data Collection Methods

As stated previously, the difficulty in studying culture arises because the values and assumptions that drive the expression of culture are implicit. In order to observe organizational culture, the researcher must find its visible and explicit symbols (Schein, 1992). Ethnographic methods allow the study of dialogue and interaction as a means of uncovering these cultural elements, most commonly through observational and interview techniques. Masland (1985) describes the techniques of interview, field observation, and document review as fundamentally useful in interpretive research.

Interviews. According to Masland (1985), interviews are an excellent means of probing the four cultural windows to assess cultural elements. For example, asking respondents what makes their college distinct or unique, or what makes it stand apart from similar schools, uncovers organizational saga. Similar questions can focus on the school's educational philosophy and what is unique about its academic mission. Respondents draw upon their understanding of the organization's saga when answering such questions. They may also refer to symbols and traditions that represent this meaning in a more tangible form.

Interviewees may also respond positively to a question about organizational heroes. It may be helpful to ask respondents to describe who the organization remembers, and why they are remembered. Questions about key figures are also tied closely to questions about organizational history. Because cultural values and beliefs become institutionalized slowly over time, their influence on past events is often apparent.

Prestructured questionnaires and interviews pose difficulties when studying culture from an insider's perspective. Respondents answer questions thought to be relevant by the researcher and posed from the researcher's perspective (Spradley, 1979). Hence, respondents try to understand and conform to the researcher's culture, rather than employing the language of their own culture and raising issues important to them in their particular cultural setting.

In contrast, in-depth unstructured or semi-structured interviews are more effectively used to uncover culturally based values (Schein, 1992). By using broad and open-ended questions, and trying to use the insider's language, the researcher entices the interviewee to unravel aspects of his/her everyday life in his/her particular cultural setting. The process of interviewing attempts to elicit individual perceptions without providing external cues, thus providing a more appropriate perspective for the study of the dimensions of culture than survey methodology (Birnbaum, 1988; Tierney, 1990).

Interviews are intrusive, but they are valuable tools for clarifying observations. They can serve to verify and extend information obtained from other sources (triangulation), or constructions developed by the researcher (member checking). A major advantage of the interview is that it allows the respondent to move back and forth in time.

Field observation. Observation can be used concurrently with interviews. Through observation, one can learn which issues receive careful attention and close scrutiny. Such issues are often central to the organization's culture. Observation can also be used to learn more about cultural symbols, such as traditions or heroes. As an outsider, an observer often sees symbols to which community members have become habituated. As with symbols, the outsider may see traditions that insiders do not notice.

Limitations of this technique include the amount of time required to conduct observations, the singularity of the observer's perspective, and the observer effect, or the

staging of behavior for the observer's benefit. A major advantage of direct observation is that it provides the current experience in an in-depth manner unequaled by other research techniques.

Observation maximizes the inquirer's ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors, customs and the like. Observation allows the researcher to see the world as subjects see it, to live in their time frames, to capture the phenomenon in and on its own terms, and to grasp the culture in its own natural ongoing environment. (Guba and Lincoln, 1981, p. 193)

Document review. Document review is a third research technique useful as a means of filling in the gaps that interviews and observations leave. It is also a valuable source for historical or background data on the research site. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe documents as rich sources of information, in that they are grounded in the context they represent.

Organizational documents can be viewed as a form of cultural artifact. Documents may reveal the values and assumptions that are held by a group or by key individuals. Since they are generally produced for the consumption of organizational members, they are useful as indicators of the internal language of the organization. Documents are also valuable because they are not subject to selective recall or interpretation. Historical accounts, annual reports, minutes, mission statements, or other records may highlight traditions, values, and beliefs, as well as key individuals.

## SITE AND STUDY POPULATION

Researchers who employ ethnographic approaches use sampling and selection somewhat differently from investigators interested in generalizing their results to larger populations. Inferences made by ethnographers tend toward explanation of the phenomena and

relationships observed within the study group. Ethnographers use criterion-based selection in choosing the group or site to be studied (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

This study took place on the campus of NWCC. Criteria which resulted in the selection of this site were as follows: (a) single-campus system; (b) medium-sized institution; (c) within commuting distance for the researcher; (d) relatively unknown to the researcher; and (e) an administrative team of three women and five men willing to participate in the study.

A single campus system was chosen for its less complex organizational design, so that the administrative team composition and reporting relationships would be clear and uncomplicated by the possible politics of a multi-campus system. A medium-sized institution was identified as being desirable for ease of learning the system, establishing credibility and trust with research participants, and communicating with groups auxiliary to the administrative team within a reasonable period of time.

With one main campus and three outreach centers, NWCC fit the criterion of a single campus system. The college employs 161 full-time faculty and serves 23,500 students for a total of 5,000 student FTE annually. The college is considered medium-sized when compared to its sister colleges in the state.

One of the defining characteristics of ethnographic research is that the researcher goes into the field instead of bringing the field to the researcher. Schwartzman (1993) characterizes this as learning "about a culture from the inside out" (p. 4). Since repeated field observation over a several-month period was planned, this design dictated the selection of a community college within commuting distance.

Since the researcher had worked at three local community colleges within recent work history, serving as faculty member, department chair, division dean, and dean of instruction for these institutions, finding a site where the researcher was relatively unknown limited the

choice of regional institutions. This criterion was important so that the site could be entered without preconceptions and relationships established with research subjects that were unencumbered by past work history. NWCC was one of three regional institutions that fit this criterion. The willingness of the college president and executive administrative team to participate in this particular study caused the final site selection to be made.

The study population selection was purposeful; study participants were determined through membership on the executive administrative team within the organization. The researcher met with the college president initially to discuss the study and seek permission to enter the institution. In addition, after initial approval was obtained, each study participant was met to discuss the study and obtain informed consent (see Appendix A). Human subjects approval for this study was obtained through the university.

Administrative team members included eight individuals. The group included three women and five men. There was no ethnic diversity within the group; all participants were Caucasian. Participants included the college president, an assistant to the president, four deans of academic and student services, a vice-president, and a director. Members varied in age and included a mix of relatively new hires and individuals who had been with the college for some time.

The process of gaining entry into a field site is important in determining many of the subsequent parameters of a research project (Johnson, 1975). Schwartzman (1993) reminds us that first encounters provide researchers with a rich source of data. It is in these first encounters that the most dramatic differences between the ethnographer's culture and the informant's culture will be apparent.

The entry process proved to be far smoother than imagined. Once the intent of the study (descriptive rather than evaluative in nature) was clarified with the college president, his interest increased. He assisted in gaining approval from his staff and proved to be a willing

informant, eager to meet and discuss the particulars of the study. Careful field notes were developed even during this early stage of the study, since the value of these early impressions was realized.

During the early phases of the study, the researcher was somewhat concerned with how her current position and college affiliation might open some doors within the institution while at the same time closing others. She came to understand that, as described in Agar (1980), official explanations were not nearly as important in influencing how people judged or trusted her as was the manner in which she conducted herself on a daily basis.

Attention to ethical and political concerns surrounding field work studies has recently increased. Wax (1980) notes the difficulties of obtaining truly informed and free consent. No doubt the president's assistance in introducing the study at NWCC had some influence on the voluntary quality of subject agreement to participate in the study.

## DATA COLLECTION

Wolcott (1975) characterizes a critical underlying aspect of ethnography to be the use of varied modes of gathering information. Pelto (1970) says, "examining cultural behavior with a variety of different approaches greatly enhances the credibility of research results" (p. 145). This section details the data collection methods used throughout the research study, as well as researcher experiences in collecting data.

This study used a combination of field observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and selective review of documents to probe Masland's (1985) four cultural windows (organizational stories, heroes, symbols, and traditions). These windows served as a means of focusing the assessment and description of cultural elements and actions that symbolized the underlying values and assumptions in the administrative team setting.



The researcher entered the site during summer term, 1995 to obtain participants' informed consent and to conduct preliminary observations. During fall term 1995, observations of participants were made during administrative team meetings, where participants interacted as a group with one another, and in council meetings, where they interacted with other college administrators and representatives of faculty, staff, and student groups. Additional one-on-one field observations, informal interviews, and in-depth interviews with study participants were conducted during winter term 1996. Review and analysis of selected documents occurred throughout the study. Finally, research results were shared with study participants during spring term 1996. A time line summarizing research procedures is contained in Table 4.

TABLE 4  
TIME LINE OF RESEARCH PROCEDURES

Time Frame	Activity
Summer Term (August - September) 1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Meet with college president.</li> <li>•Obtain permission to enter site.</li> <li>•Preliminary field site observations.</li> <li>•Meet with individual participants.</li> <li>•Obtain informed consent.</li> <li>•Document review.</li> </ul>
Fall Term (October - December) 1995	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Field site observations.</li> <li>•Attend administrative team meetings.</li> <li>•Attend council meetings.</li> <li>•Document review.</li> </ul>
Winter Term (January - March) 1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Informal interviews.</li> <li>•One-on-one field observations with team members.</li> <li>•In-depth interviews.</li> <li>•Document Review</li> </ul>
Spring Term (April - June) 1996	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Participant review of research results.</li> <li>•Document Review</li> </ul>

### Field Observations

Spradley (1980) argues that ethnographic data should initially be gathered by listening and observing, not to discover answers but instead to find which questions to ask. The current study followed this advice by defining a period of observation during fall term 1995 before beginning interviews. This design served two purposes. First, it allowed the development of trust. Second, it allowed a focus to develop for interviews, which could then be used to confirm preliminary themes identified through analysis of field notes.

For the purposes of this study, field notes were viewed as a critical component of the data collection and analysis processes. From the earliest stages, and throughout the remainder of the study, an ongoing account was kept. Field observations were focused initially by Masland's (1985) four cultural windows, as well as a desire to key in on group actions and decisions, and related group processes. The researcher observed for visible or verbal symbols, traditions, story-telling, discussion of key organizational members, and other artifacts possibly symbolizing underlying values and assumptions. The group's process of decision-making, key decisions made, and attendant verbal and nonverbal behaviors were noted during the period of study.

It was difficult to follow Spradley's (1980) advice to identify the language used for each field note entry. Early field notes reflect a mix of the researcher's language, as well as the voice of various speakers. A verbatim record was kept of what people said, adding researcher comments as reflections or interpretations identified as such in the record. Over time, a usable system was devised for identifying researcher interpretations as opposed to verbatim comments or unique language.

Early in the observation process, great effort was made to follow Schein's (1993a) advice by focusing on *surprises*. Schein believes that these surprises, when encountered and explored by an outsider, come to represent artifacts of deeper cultural assumptions in

operation. For example, the overall role that administrative team enacted within the organization was described and developed following early surprises at the president's role in administrative team meetings.

Field notes were developed from observations, and an ongoing account, through a research journal, was kept from the day the site was first entered. Field notes included descriptions of observations and researcher interpretations. The research journal included a listing of daily research procedures, notes to focus future data collection, and preliminary notes about personal experiences, questions, ideas, and hunches developed through ongoing data analysis. In addition, the journal logged general perceptions and thoughts throughout the research process. The combination of detailed field notes and a research journal contributed to an attempt at *thick description* (Geertz, 1973) of the research site.

Sanders (1980) urges that "feelings of discomfort, threat, and self-consciousness" (p. 168) be monitored and included in a record of the researcher's subjective experiences. These, too, were included in the research journal. Collectively, these field notes and the research journal comprised a significant and highly meaningful portion of the data.

Since the researcher had significant commuting time both to and from the study site, this provided a convenient opportunity for immediate reflection. Initial field notes, which were a condensed version of activity, were converted into a tape-recorded, detailed and expanded account on the drive home. These notes were then transcribed into a computerized version, ready for analysis before the next observation session. Throughout the field observation period, protection of confidentiality was kept by assigning participants code names which were used in field notes and transcripts. Any reference to location was changed to protect college anonymity.

A major concern in planning this study was the time commitment required to actually conduct the study, ensuring adequate time for observation in the field and for conducting

interviews. However, the researcher was determined to obtain the actual field data herself.

Wax (1971) emphasizes this point: "No matter how many research assistants are available, the head researcher, the person who is going to analyze the materials and write the major report, should himself do as much of the interviewing and observation as he possibly can" (p. 266).

### Interviews

Schwartzman (1993) advocates for interviews which provide fairly open questions in the early stages of research. These kinds of questions give the informant the opportunity to answer in ways and with content that is important to him, not to the interviewer. Spradley (1979) refers to these as descriptive or grand tour questions, and suggests that they be focused on aspects of what rather than why. This type of informal questioning of participants was blended with field observations early in the study, and more purposefully during winter term 1996 prior to conducting in-depth interviews.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were conducted with each administrative team participant during winter term 1996. An open-ended approach to interviewing was used in order to support the variety and uniqueness of personal perspectives of interviewees. Interviews included dialogue about observed team and participant actions and decisions, as well as topics related to each of Masland's (1985) cultural windows. All interviews were tape recorded and verbatim transcripts developed. More informal follow-up contacts were conducted with study participants during spring term 1996 once initial data were analyzed to confirm identified findings and propositions. This procedure follows the advice of Lincoln and Guba (1985) to conduct participant checks in order to support credibility and confirmability of results. A general interview guide is provided in Appendix B.

### Document Review

Written documents related to the work of the group were reviewed and analyzed as well throughout the research period. Document review was used to expand illustration of cultural themes and to triangulate findings. Documents included memos from administrative team members, meeting minutes and agenda, and selected college-wide documents that provided college or administrative team background, such as the college catalog, vision and value statements, planning documents, and grant requests.

As with other data sources, confidentiality of participants was ensured through the use of code names and changing of words that might reference college location or identify. Since the number of documents was relatively small, they were analyzed by hand rather than through computer scanning. A list of documents is provided in Appendix C.

Study participants were extremely helpful in suggesting and locating documents that might be useful to the study. In addition to these written materials, a videotaped interview between the president and several members of the founding college board was provided. This videotape contributed rich descriptive historical stories to the data.

### ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER

In interpretive studies, the investigator is usually the instrument through which data are collected. LeCompte and Preissle (1993) describe the role of the researcher in interpretive studies as "involved, subjective" and as an "active collaborator" (p. 24). Obviously, a concern with any interpretive study is that the meanings which research participants give to the reality around them is interpreted accurately by the researcher. Many ethnographers believe that the reality of a cultural scene is the product of multiple perceptions, including that of the researcher and that produced by the interaction between the researcher and the participants under study (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

Early in the study, the researcher was concerned that she would be perceived as an evaluator rather than as an observer. She, therefore, attempted to convey a neutral stance during her time with the administrative team. Early in the research period, nonverbal and verbal contributions to discussions were deliberately limited. As weeks went by, she noticed that she was better received if she contributed occasionally to the discussion. Still, those contributions were limited to *low impact* insights or opinions. At the end of the field observation time, she realized that she was becoming eager to participate in administrative team meetings because the content of discussions was familiar and her comments were welcomed. However, she resisted, not wanting to influence the data collected through active participation or her biases. It was time to move on to interviews!

The length of time initially spent on field observations greatly improved the quality of interviews. The researcher was made to feel welcome, and received very rich, descriptive, and honest descriptions of life at NWCC as a member of the administrative team from all study participants. Several participants indicated a desire to learn more about the details of the study and to see the results of the research. Because of this interest, each member of the administrative team received copies of selected data for review prior to final edit. This helped verify the interpretation of cultural symbols and themes.

The major safeguard against bias and inconsistency is careful documentation of the research process so that the quality of the evidence can be judged by others on its own merits (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Throughout the study, researcher comments were recorded directly on field notes for analysis with other data, and also recorded within the research journal for use in subsequent discussion (see Chapter V).

In addition, it is useful for the researcher to attempt to identify personal bias that might relate to the topic under study. As a dean of instruction and member of another community college's executive team, the researcher was attuned to the difficulties inherent in

studying the executive administrative group at NWCC. Ablon (1977) explores the hazards involved in studying one's own culture and the potential for resultant vulnerability and bias. Lincoln and Guba (1985) characterize interpretive research as value-bound. Examining one's own values and assumptions forces self-awareness, and serves to distance the researcher from the data at the same time that she engages it. In order to determine the cultural values and assumptions of the administrative team at NWCC, the researcher first assessed her own cultural beliefs that might tend to lead to judgments or interpretations that were misguided.

### DATA ANALYSIS

Interpretive researchers and educational ethnographers speak of their research design as inductive, generative, and constructive (Tesch, 1990). Tesch describes the process of qualitative data analysis in the following ways: (a) concurrent with data collection rather than serving as the last phase of the research process; (b) systematic and comprehensive, but not rigid; (c) characterized by segmentation and categorization of data into an organized system; (d) characterized by the use of comparison as the main intellectual tool; (e) reflective of initial categories that are tentative and flexible; (f) eclectic (there is no one correct way to proceed), and; (g) resulting in higher level synthesis.

In analyzing data, an inductive process characterized by Tesch (1990), and Lincoln and Guba (1985) as classic to interpretive research was used. Analysis of field notes, interview transcripts, and documents occurred simultaneously with data collection, so that preliminary study results guided and focused subsequent data collection. Initial data units created conceptual categories and themes, following the process outlined below.

Data analysis began with transcription of field notes, documents, and interviews. Each transcript was reviewed for accuracy and completeness before its analysis. Each set of field notes, single document, or interview session became one set of data (Agar, 1986). Each data

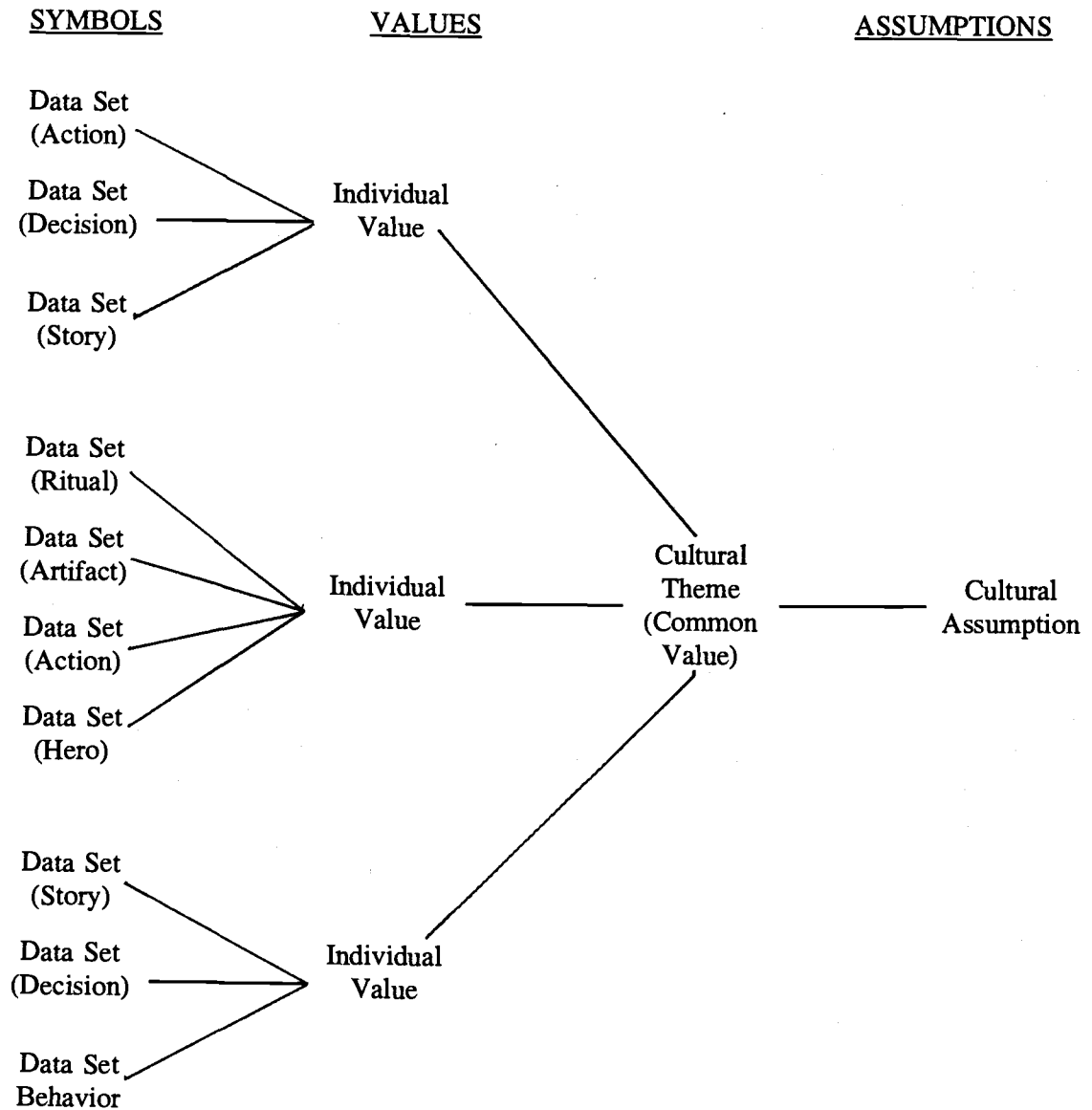
set was reviewed, analyzed for content, and sorted into meaningful data units. Data units were coded through use of The Ethnograph software (Seidel, 1995). The Ethnograph is designed to assist qualitative researchers in the organization, coding, management and retrieval of free-form data. Initial codes related to identification of participants, decisions, group process behaviors, and each of Masland's (1985) cultural windows.

During data analysis, each subsequent data set was compared with previously coded data. This constant comparative process (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) caused initial codes to be refined and supported with a discrete set of data units. Data sets were re-sorted into values for each individual staff member, and then common values were grouped into cultural themes. Cultural themes were analyzed for cultural assumptions. Through this developmental process, data units were compared, categorized, and linked into larger conceptual categories through code sets, a process LeCompte and Preissle (1993) call "comparing, contrasting, aggregating and ordering" (p. 242). Administrative team behaviors and actions supporting cultural values and assumptions were described and categorized. Finally, all data were reviewed for the presence of symbols that related to cultural values, themes, assumptions, and administrative team actions. The inductive process used in analyzing data is outlined by illustration.

The greatest difficulty during this phase of the study was dealing with the huge volume of documents, interview transcripts, and field notes. The Ethnograph software significantly assisted in management of the volume of data obtained through this study. The software's search and retrieval function allowed the location of sets of data units related to each code, or sets of codes. This facilitated the evolution from single codes to code groups, and the modification of codes and code attributes as themes emerged.

Constant comparison and analysis of field data during fall term 1995 allowed a focus for the interviews to emerge. Winter term 1996 interviews, therefore, while serving to broaden information related to Masland's (1985) cultural windows, also served to refine and





INDUCTIVE DATA ANALYSIS RELATED TO THE  
USE OF CULTURAL SYMBOLS, VALUES,  
AND ASSUMPTIONS

verify information about emerging cultural themes, and delimit the scope of subsequent inquiry. The more focused approach during winter term 1996 allowed two things to happen. First, the original list of categories was reduced as accurate attributes became clearer, overlaps and gaps were evident, and data examples were complete. Second, and more importantly, relationships between categories began to appear, and themes and assumptions emerged, that then began to be utilized in comparing with subsequent data collection. An overall behavioral scheme emerged over time representing the role of the executive administrative team within the institution in regard to organizational participation and decision-making.

#### METHODS USED TO ENHANCE THE TRUSTWORTHINESS OF STUDY RESULTS

Qualitative researchers are concerned with the concept of trustworthiness when designing their studies. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest alternate criteria to those historically used with functionalist research paradigms for establishing trustworthiness of results. These alternate criteria are termed credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

The following research design considerations were established specifically to enhance the trustworthiness of this research study's results. They are derived from Lincoln and Guba's (1985) list of criteria.

To establish credibility, prolonged engagement occurred. Data collection began in September of 1995 and concluded in May of 1996. This allowed sufficient time for learning the culture, testing for misinformation introduced either by self or respondent distortions, and building trust. In addition, persistent observation throughout the period of study, provided the depth of focus on cultural elements within the administrative team. Field notes were kept during the entire study, and analysis occurred concurrently with data collection, allowing a continuous refinement of focus for subsequent data collection. This developmental design

allowed salient factors to emerge and be verified over time and through various methods and sources.

Triangulation of data sources and methods also enhanced credibility of results. The researcher relied on each member of the administrative team to contribute to the interpretation of cultural experience and elements, providing multiple copies of a similar source of data. Also, members were interviewed over a period of time to provide breadth to the perspective obtained over time. In addition, different methods were used for collecting data, including observation, in-depth interviews, and selected document analysis. This allowed different sources of the same data to emerge. Triangulation allowed convergence, from a variety of points, on cultural symbols, values, themes, and assumptions.

The most crucial method for enhancing credibility of research results (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) was participant checks. Following initial data collection and analysis, research participants were sent study results for review. Follow-up conversations with participants allowed the final research products to be revised and completed.

In order to promote transferability of research findings to appropriate contexts, explicit and detailed description of methods and data have been provided. This *thick description* (Geertz, 1973) should provide the data base necessary for readers to determine the appropriateness of transferability to their own settings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

A detailed audit of procedures and findings was not conducted to establish dependability; however, all research records and notes, description of process, and products have been kept in such a way that an audit would be possible. Triangulation of data sources and methods, as previously described, was the technique used to provide confirmability of research results.

## SUMMARY

A review of the literature indicates that interpretive studies, particularly ethnographic studies, are appropriate for the study of culture in organizations. This study employed the interpretive methodology of ethnography, integrating field observation with semi-structured interviews and selected review of documents as data collection methods. Research took place on the campus of Northwest Community College. The study population selection was purposeful; study participants were determined through membership on the executive administrative team within the organization.

This study used Masland's (1985) cultural windows to focus data collection related to the values, assumptions, and actions of administrative team members. These windows included an identification and explanation of: (a) organizational stories, (b) organizational heroes, (c) organizational symbols, and (d) organizational traditions.

Analysis of field notes, interview transcripts, and documents occurred simultaneously with data collection so that preliminary study results guided and focused subsequent data collection. Data analysis began with transcription of field notes, documents, and interviews. Each set of field notes, single document, or interview session became one set of data. Each data set was reviewed, analyzed for content, and sorted into meaningful data units. Data units were coded through the use of The Ethnograph software (Seidel, 1995). During data analysis, each subsequent data set was compared with previously coded data. This constant comparative process (Glasser & Strauss, 1967) caused initial codes to be refined and supported with a discrete set of data units. Data were sorted into values for each individual staff member, and then common values were grouped into cultural themes. Cultural themes were analyzed for cultural assumptions. Administrative team behaviors and actions supporting cultural values and assumptions were described and categorized. Finally, all data were

reviewed for the presence of symbols that related to cultural values, themes, assumptions, and administrative team actions.

## CHAPTER IV

### PRESENTATION OF DATA AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this interpretive study was to examine the cultural influences at work within one community college administrative team. This study used Smircich's (1983a) framework of organizational symbolism to inform the overall research goal of interpreting cultural themes found in a community college administrative team, and exploring how these themes were expressed in organizational action. This study sought to enrich understanding of the role of culture in the organizational actions of one community college.

Edgar Schein's work (1983, 1984, 1990, 1992, 1993a, 1993b) was used to conceptualize culture. Schein's model describes organizational culture as having three levels of manifestation: outward symbols of culture, organizational values, and basic assumptions about reality. The following research questions examined each of these cultural levels within the executive administrative team at Northwest Community College, and also addressed the belief that administrative team actions and decisions were an expression of the common values and assumptions held by team members.

1. What values were expressed by individual team members?
2. What assumptions about reality were held by individual team members?
3. Were common values and assumptions held by administrative team members? If so, what common cultural themes were evident?
4. How were cultural themes expressed in actions taken by administrative team members?
5. What visible symbols of culture were found within the administrative team setting?

This chapter begins with a profile of the community college setting including the geographic region, college history, students, faculty, and administration. The remaining sections are organized according to the study's five research questions. Presentation of data is organized into sections which are descriptive of the following research topics: (a) values expressed by individual team members; (b) assumptions held by individual team members; (c) cultural themes, as evidenced by commonly held values and assumptions within the administrative team; (d) the expression of cultural themes in administrative team actions and decisions; and (e) visible symbols of culture found within the administrative team setting. Additional findings related to this study are outlined at the conclusion of this chapter.

## ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

### The Geographic Region

Northwest Community College (NWCC) is located within the center of a large agricultural valley in the Pacific Northwest. Its two-county district occupies 4,774 square miles and serves just under 170,000 residents through its main campus and three outreach centers. The college's district includes a diverse mix of residential and industrial park areas, agricultural and horticultural zones, and sparsely populated timber-rich regions. Four population centers within the district are home to just under 100,000 residents; the remainder of the district is largely rural.

While the district is rural in nature, its primary industries extend beyond the agricultural base of seed crops, Christmas trees, and timber. Typical industries include wood products manufacturers, food processing companies, grass seed producers, high-technology electronics companies, and software development firms. The continuing downsizing of agricultural and timber industries coupled with the influx of high-technology firms in the region produces current opportunities and challenges for the district and its college.

The district's two counties reflect dramatic economic differences. While County A enjoys one of the lowest unemployment rates (3.1%) in the state, County B has one of the highest (8.1%). Median family income was \$35,559 in County A, and \$29,421 in County B. County B has agriculture as its economic cornerstone, depending on grass seed and timber as an economic base. Current decline in timber trade has affected its residents; during 1994-95 over 570 timber-related jobs were lost to the county's residents. In contrast, County A hosts a large university, federal agencies, and high-tech firms. During 1994-95, over 2,200 jobs were added to this county's employment base. Differences between these two counties were noted repeatedly in participant interviews.

#### College History

The college was formed in 1966, began classes in 1967, and occupied its current location within the geographic population center of the district in 1970. A videotaped interview with founding board members by the current president reveals a lively history, not without dissent, regarding college formation and location. Historical events critical to this institution's background are identified in Table 5.



TABLE 5

## KEY HISTORICAL EVENTS IN FOUNDING NORTHWEST COMMUNITY COLLEGE

1962	Initial discussions about college formation.
1963	Steering committee forms with representatives from a two-county area.
1964	Feasibility study determines criteria for community college formation will be met by developing a two-county district.
1964	Court injunction against formation of the taxing district filed by citizens of one county.
1966	Successful election forms NWCC area education district. Board of Education selected.
1966	First president selected.
1967	140 classes held in 30 facilities throughout the district — 2,800 students enrolled.
1968	Bond election for campus development fails.
1970	Voters approve a \$6.1 million bond election to develop a campus — much debate ensues regarding campus location within the district.
1970	Portable buildings house first classes on current campus. Construction begins the first of what will become a 13-building, 104-acre campus.
1979	Initial construction completes the 104-acre campus.

Note. From NWCC General Catalog, 1995-96. Also videotape of an interview with the president and founding board members, February 6, 1992.

### Students

Northwest Community College is the fifth largest community college in its state, serving 23,500 students (approximately 5,000 student FTE's) annually. The institution claims over 250,000 alumni since its inception.

Northwest Community College has experienced changes in the diversity of its student population, according to a recent Federal Title III Grant application. Because of the agricultural nature of the district, a sizeable migrant population is present. The percent of ethnic minority students enrolled has increased over the past 3 years from 6.5% in 1992 to 7.6% in 1994. Overall, 7.5% of the district's residents are ethnic minorities (see Table 6).

Approximately 30% of all high school graduates within the district go directly to NWCC. The majority of students are female; 44% of NWCC students are women over the age of 25. The median age of students is 32 years. Forty-four percent have family responsibilities, 84% work while attending school, and 21% work over 30 hours per week. It is no surprise, therefore, that the majority of students enroll at the college on a part-time basis (Title III Federal Grant Application, May 1995, Comprehensive Development Plan NWCC, pp. 22-24.).

TABLE 6  
STUDENT DATA FOR FALL 1994

Student enrollment (head count)	11,877	Enrollment declined slightly after 2 years of steady growth.
Gender (credit students)		
Male	47%	
Female	53%	
Gender (all students)		
Male	39%	
Female	61%	
Average age		
Full-time students	24.9 years	Older students are more likely to attend part-time due to family and job obligations.
All students	36.9 years	
Credit load/enrollment status		
0-5 credits	8,394 (71%)	The vast majority of NWCC students attend classes on a part-time basis because of family and employment constraints.
6-11 credits	1,310 (11%)	
12+ credits	2,115 (18%)	
Enrollment intent		
Lower division collegiate	41%	
Vocational preparatory and supplemental	30%	
Self-improvement	9%	
Developmental	20%	
Racial/ethnic status (credit students)		
Black	32	
American Indian	113	
Asian/Pacific	156	
Hispanic	126	
White	4,616	
Unknown/Mixed	565	
Nonresident Alien	40	

Note. From Title III Federal Grant Application, May 1995, Comprehensive Development Plan NWCC, p. 22.

### Faculty

During fall of 1993, 161 full-time and 363 part-time faculty were employed at NWCC. The number of faculty by gender and ethnicity is provided in Table 7.

TABLE 7  
FACULTY DATA FOR FALL 1993

	Male	Female	Minority
Full-time faculty	86	75	4
Part-time faculty	134	229	8

Note. From Title III Federal Grant Application, May 1995, Comprehensive Development Plan NWCC, p. 24.

Faculty members support the college's administrative structure by serving as department chairs, while maintaining their faculty status. Faculty representatives also serve on numerous college committees and councils, including the Academic Affairs Council and the College Council.

The faculty offer a comprehensive curriculum including four major degrees: Associate of Arts (an articulated transfer degree), Associate of Science (18 degree offerings), Associate of Applied Science (24 degree offerings), and Associate of General Studies. In addition, numerous 1-year and 2-year certificate programs are offered, as well as transfer course work, developmental education courses, a High School Diploma and Adult High School Diploma program, and personal enrichment courses. The faculty have worked to expand offerings to working students through the availability of five degrees and two certificates during evening hours.

### Administration

NWCC is governed through a shared governance model that includes a seven-member Board of Education elected by the citizens of the college district; Richard, the college president, who is selected and serves at the pleasure of the Board; the executive administrative team; the Academic Affairs Council (instructional and student services administrators and department chairs); the College Council (members of the executive administrative team, directors, associate deans, and representatives from the faculty, classified staff, and students); and the associated students of NWCC. In addition, a host of college committees and council subcommittees participate in college decision-making. All college staff are appointed by the college president and confirmed by the Board.

The executive administrative team, which served as the primary focal point for this study, normally includes 10 members. However, due to a position vacancy, and the termination of one individual during the research period, there were eight individuals who actively participated in all phases of the research.

### PRESENTATION OF DATA

The following section reviews and summarizes data that relate to each research questions. A profile of individual participant values is provided in response to research question one. A series of tables summarizing individual values and assumptions held by each participant is provided in response to question two. A narrative description of shared values and assumptions, or *cultural themes*, is provided in response to research questions three and four, as well as a discussion of how cultural themes were expressed in team actions. A table summarizing cultural symbols and a discussion of symbolic artifacts, traditions, actions, and decisions is provided in response to question five.

### Research Question One

*What values were expressed by individual team members?*

According to Schein's cultural framework, organizational values lie just below the visible level of an organization, yet are expressed through interaction or are visible in organizational documents. Values are deeply held beliefs and norms of the organization, reflecting a concern for what "should be" (Beyer, 1981). Determining the values of the organization gives a clue as to why members act the way they do, a rationalized reason for their behavior (Schein, 1983). This section of the report examines the evident individual values of each member of the administrative team. According to Louis (1983a, 1983b, 1985), each person's individual cultural values create personal relevance. Answers to research questions one and two provide insight into the individual level of interpretation of organizational life for study participants, while questions three, four, and five address shared cultural themes.

Richard. At the time of this research, Richard had been college president for 7 years. He had been with NWCC since 1973, and had held a variety of positions, such as Director of Admissions, Registrar, Director of Student Services and Academic Support, and Vice-President for Academic and Student Affairs. When he became president, he chose not to fill the chief academic officer's position, and held both that and the president's position since 1989. Observation and interview with Richard provided evidence of the following values: community, customer responsiveness, effectiveness, fairness, candor, flexibility, change and innovation, hard work, staff development, humor, loyalty, teamwork, delegation and shared decision-making, and recognition of others.

Richard held a strong value for the importance of developing a sense of *community* in the life of the college. His colleagues considered this a benchmark for his presidency:

"Emphasis for the community has never been greater than in Richard's era," said one.

Another stated, "Richard has always had a strong interest in the local community and what goes on in the local community." As president and college employee he had participated in numerous bond election campaigns. Richard stated in an interview for this study, "We've done 43 elections in the history of the college. We've been out there a lot. . . . Because of those elections, we are really connected to the community. We can't run that many elections without listening, so we really are up on what's important to this community." Despite a consistent lack of voter support for the college in certain areas of the NWCC district, it is evident that Richard's community outreach efforts were both genuine and constant.

Richard regularly held a *President's Breakfast* for civic leaders in the district. The college has held membership in the district's Chambers of Commerce and local rotary clubs. An annual advisory committee dessert was held to recognize the community members who participated in advising the college's professional technical programs. Photographs of prominent community leaders instrumental to the college's history lined the hallway entrance to the administrative suite. Board member photographs were displayed in the college's board room. All of these actions symbolized the importance of community for this president and the institution.

Just as external community outreach appeared to be important, outreach within the college's internal community was evident as well. Said one colleague, "Richard makes a point the first day of the term to go around and touch base with all the instructional areas." Richard has hosted all-staff meetings once or twice per year, "I typically will bring them together a couple times. A lot of times in the spring I will bring them together just to bring them up to date, to do a kind of 'here's where we are and if you have any questions' talk." Christmas potlucks have occurred annually. "We just invite all the staff," said Richard, "and we close the offices for a couple of hours and somebody dresses up as Santa Claus and I'll

do yo-yo tricks, and we give candy canes, eat turkey, and have prizes. You know it's just kind of a nice thing to get together for the holidays." Richard has regularly eaten in the lunch room with college staff.

Faculty were evidently an important part of the college community to this president. He has hosted a reception for the faculty, catered by the Culinary Arts program, at the end of each term. Locations were chosen so that the faculty convened in a different instructional area each time. A colleague described another form of outreach, "He meets with the faculty association leadership every other week with or without an agenda. . . . We didn't have that in place until he came over here . . . usually solves a problem before it's a problem."

Another evident facet of the community for Richard was a deeply held value for *responsiveness to the customer*. "Customer is a big value," he said. At one staff meeting, he suggested working with a local high-tech firm on site to encourage college attendance. "We'll just spend a day in the cafeteria over there evaluating college transcripts . . . and see if we can't get some of these people on board." The majority of one staff meeting was spent discussing the college's snow closure policy. A major point of the discussion was Richard's insistence that the college find a way to remain partially open for those events that were critical on any given day.

Richard was also concerned about the institution's *effectiveness*. "How do you use all the strengths of all the people that you have, while compensating for their weaknesses, and get the most productivity out of your organization?" he asked in a recent interview. In describing his attempts to deemphasize the formal structure, and to emphasize outcomes, he made the following points: "We need to focus on governance, not on boxes and how boxes align in an organizational chart. We need to focus on how programs work. I think anymore you have to not only be effective, but measure it."



Other symbols of a concern for effectiveness included a regular review of FTE (full time equivalent, or enrollment) students, a reorganization with reduction in the number of administrators early in his presidency, and a concern for student success during his time as Director of Admissions and Registrar. "We needed to do something from the students' perspective, so we looked at assessment and placement and advising, all of those things that are related to student success." He recalled a reorganization that occurred in the early 1980s that brought student services and instructional administrators together for the first time in a regular forum to discuss issues of student success.

Values characteristic of Richard's view of reality included a sense of *fairness* and *candor*. When asked what he hopes his presidency will be remembered for, he replied:

I think a sense of openness, a sense of fairness, a sense of trust. I think that people feel like they are able to say what they want to say when they want to say it. I think they should feel like they can agree or disagree. They know . . . a sense of sharing information. I talk to them, I tell them what's going to happen, I tell them where the money is.

This belief was tempered by past history at the college during a more competitive and less trusting time. "There wasn't trust among divisions and the departments," he recalled. A colleague agreed, "Richard is a very bright man and a fair meaning, fair minded president." Another describes Richard's focus on balancing instructional division workloads by student enrollment in each area when reorganizing. Yet another remembered his mark on the college's registration area as follows: "He basically established our registration office process and procedures which were developed and still function as a friendly, but fair service."

While policy was important to Richard, *flexibility* was equally so. "This is a fair game. We have rules. We all know what the rules are." This was tempered by, "Our policy is not so specific that it drives everything." Richard strove for flexibility in spending current bond measure dollars that are dedicated to capital equipment as stated in a September 1995

memo to the council: "As you review this strategy, please note that the numbers are not hard and fast. Compelling needs may require us to spend something more . . . this year."

Richard sought flexibility in those he hired in leadership positions as well. "We need to hire a good leader that has a breadth of skills. The organization will change. We need to look down the road when we hire. We can't hire people with specific skills. We have department chairs with specific skills."

Richard has maintained a strong desire for *change and innovation* during his tenure as president. When discussing some of the issues, he believed the next vice-president for academic affairs (being recruited during the research period) faces, he summarized: "Things are changing so fast . . . we need to change not only what we teach, but our way of adjusting the curriculum and creating new, short-term innovative programs. We also need to change the way we deliver it, and how we deliver it. And, that's just mind-boggling." In discussing upcoming faculty negotiations, he said: "We're getting the faculty together, that's good. We want their input and we're looking at new ways of delivering teaching and learning. We need to look at new ways of doing things." Finally, "Like any organization, you hope that it changes with what's going on around you." Evidence of commitment to change was found in the college's planned \$4.5 million investment in equipment and technology, interest in distance learning, and support for the establishment and continued work of faculty and student learning communities.

Like the rest of his colleagues, Richard valued *hard work*. This was tempered by a concern for balancing the workloads of others. A colleague compared Richard's style to that of his predecessor, "He worked hard and he played hard. He went away on weekends. Richard is always here." Richard demonstrated this value in how he described a former NWCC vice-president. "I loved him. He was the first person to work every morning. He was the last one to leave every night. He was at everything he needed to be at." Yet, despite

his own work expectations, Richard showed a concern for tempering that expectation for others. "I've grown up with them. I've gone through crises with them. And, we're really good about understanding; if you are going through a divorce, . . . you don't have to be as productive the next 6 or 8 months." He also acknowledged the workload limitations of his deans in being able to foster the kind of curricular innovation he desired. "They already have full-time jobs. I can't take the deans out and say, 'Gee, you know, could you spend the next 6 weeks developing a new program?'"

Richard shared a value for *staff development* with his colleagues. He reflected on the challenges in developing employees. "How do you deal with staff and organizational development? How do you encourage people and reward them for going back to school, for working a little bit harder, for redesigning their curriculum? How do you put them together and how do you keep them motivated? How do you move them?" Development of a budget decision package for increasing staff development funds, annual support for two all-staff inservice sessions, and the staffing of an office dedicated to staff and organizational development symbolized the institution's commitment to this challenge. Richard personally worked hard to *recognize* colleague achievements and accomplishments during board meetings and in other public settings. "You know, the more people we recognize for the work they do, the better they do it. . . . I think we do a pretty good job institutionally recognizing staff, but I pay a lot of attention personally."

Richard possessed a good sense of *humor*, and encouraged an informal atmosphere within his administrative team. Jokes, humorous stories, and wisecracks were abundant in every meeting that the researcher attended. Humor was used as an icebreaker, "Well, I guess I can start by saying I'm glad to be back but that probably wouldn't be appropriate"; to reduce tension, "You realize that it hasn't snowed here at the college since 1963 when the college was formed, so we're just finally getting around to this policy"; and to acknowledge

those truths that might not otherwise be easily said, "So, we did make a decision there, didn't we?"

Richard valued *loyalty* toward the college and his fellow employees. A colleague said, "If you want to work for Richard, you'd better be loyal." Richard himself said, "The culture here isn't a throw-away culture; this is home for us. . . . There are reasons beyond this being a good place to work that people come here. They get a good job. We take care of them."

The importance of coordination, integration, and *teamwork* were stressed by Richard and his colleagues. In a series of discussions regarding how to reorganize and fill two vacant NWCC vice-president positions, Richard described his view of organizing:

It doesn't matter what the organization looks like . . . I'm telling them . . . "Here's what happened in the '70s, here's what happened in the '80s, and now we are in the '90s and I'm saying forget the organization, forget the reporting lines, you know, there's a job for all of us to do." We have got to work together and stop paying so . . . much attention to the organizational chart.

This leadership stance opposed a long institutional history of competition. Richard and his colleagues readily described a former president who was known for his encouragement of competition within the institution. "Within the early years, we grew as a culture competing . . . competing in providing services, and getting more . . . students, but competing against each other. . . . If you got more students, you got more money . . . then you could hire more staff. . . . Keep in mind that we had 10 years of history here that it was okay to win or lose." This president had other aims. "I want a good leadership team, and governance by a leadership team. . . . We're not going to compete with each other. It's important to integrate what we do. I realize how important it is to make integrated decisions. . . . We need to better . . . coordinate with other departments." Other evidence of integration was found in the makeup of the College Council and the Academic Affairs Councils, as well as

the mixture of academic and professional technical programs within each instructional division.

As Richard worked with his executive administrative team, he espoused the values of *delegating authority* and *shared decision-making*. As a new president, he moved department chairs into positions of more authority and created the Academic Affairs Council. "I'm thinking, if I give the department chairs more responsibility, then their managers will have more time to do. . . . That was my intention also in creating the Academic Affairs Council . . . give power to the faculty." He recently worked with the board to devise a plan for spending bond measure money that allows the president, rather than the board, to approve expenditures within the general plan, increasing flexibility. When a colleague was asked about Richard's influence on the institution, he replied, "Valuing the faculty, and putting the faculty in more of an influential role."

Richard's dilemma in *walking the talk* of this value was his love of *direct involvement* with the institution. During his tenure, two vice-president positions were vacated and left unfilled. A colleague described his influence on the institution as follows: "Richard has had a real operational focus. He's been real directly involved in the life of the institution. It's hard for him to keep his hands off the work of the divisions." Another stated: "To Richard's great credit, if he was in this room, I would be saying the same thing and he would be agreeing with me. He does recognize that he has over time assumed so much responsibility . . . there's just not enough underlying support and structure at this institution for decision-making." Richard agreed with this assessment of his strong role in daily decision-making. "They all depend on me to do it. I have allowed them to do that. That's not . . . in the long-term best interest of the college. It's worked in the transition . . . but if we are going to take the next step, that's got to change." He added, "The hard part is going to be taking my hands off of it. I've got fingerprints everywhere."

James. James was a relative newcomer to NWCC, arriving in 1995. He served first as an executive assistant to Richard, and was recently promoted to the position he currently held as one of the two college vice-presidents. Observation and interview with James revealed the following values: community, customer service, fairness, candor, change and innovation, humor, loyalty, teamwork, shared decision-making, and recognizing others.

Like his colleagues, James valued *community* involvement. He stated, "There is a sense of ownership in this community. You hear it in the community college. You hear it in restaurants. You hear it in grocery stores. People talk about their college. They feel very good about NWCC." During an interview, James described local community interest as the factor that stimulated great debate about the college's site location. In addition, he discussed the relationship the institution had with its university counterpart. "I think the relationship between NWCC and XYZ University is extraordinarily strong, much better than most 4-year, 2-year neighbors. I think there is genuine respect between the two institutions, and the student movement between the two institutions is very pronounced." James applauded his colleagues' work with local communities. "I think the roots of this college are very deep in both City A and City B. Relationships to the chambers, to the school districts . . . we have some really wonderful cooperative programs with the school districts. I'd give us an A for good work."

James desired a greater focus on *customer service* within his areas and within the institution.

That's one of the areas [customer service] that I really do have an interest in trying to get some conversation started. . . . I think the college is getting, as a whole, much more sensitive to the customer issue, and I like that. I think the administrative team talks about that a fair amount and I think is beginning to enjoy . . . I mean it's not perfect. It's not as fully formed as we would like it to be, but I think they are getting there.

James was supportive of the role of policy in supporting a *fair* environment at the institution. "Administrative rules are important here. Policy is important. We are very conscious about paying attention to the rules by which we adopt rules, and it's not a process that people wink at. The quality of rule-making, though, is pretty good." James believed the administrative rule books were well-developed at NWCC.

James displayed *candor* in his dealing with fellow staff members. During administrative team meetings, he was observed to be one of the few staff members to openly disagree with Richard. He freely admitted when he needed assistance or didn't know the next step. An example of his interactions with colleagues was summarized by this comment in regard to strategic planning: "If you have a better idea about how to do this, believe me, I would like to hear it."

While expressing solid support for *change and innovation* in the organization, James voiced concerns about the administration's ability to support the magnitude of change necessary, given the relative flatness of the organization.

Asking the deans to look at long-term curricular issues, to engage in some of the educational reform efforts, to really take a lead in formatting programs, and having enough assistance and help from other folks to make that happen is really very, very hard. . . . However, it's a conscious institutional choice that we've made to have a very thin administrative structure.

Despite his quiet nature, James also had a solid sense of *humor*. He was observed teasing another colleague about his Halloween costume, recalling with humor several dull meetings, referring to humorous occurrences at past board meetings, and describing my observations of the administrative team as similar to "watching a foreign film." James agreed that there was tremendous *loyalty* within the institution. "There is extraordinary loyalty to this place. People sitting around the table have been here for a long, long time. Starting with Richard, you've got folks who really feel committed to NWCC and loyal to it.

I think that's real distinctive." Despite his short tenure, he was observed attending a council meeting concerning budget matters on a vacation day. On the down side, he viewed longevity as being an occasional barrier to innovation at the college. "It's hard to sort of think about other ways of doing business, to look at ways of doing things with fresh eyes."

Like his colleagues, James valued the importance of coordination, integration and *teamwork* in conducting college business. In reviewing college history with me, he was the first to point out that previous presidents either did not share these values or were unable to accomplish significant movement in this direction. He summarized, "There has never been a time when the message from the top was, 'All of us need to be a part of the same enterprise. All of us need to work together. Deans are important, but deans are more important as a team.'" James hoped that he was able to move the institution toward greater coordination and teamwork in the future. He stated, "I really want to see this institution move to a more empowered level." Examples of his efforts to involve staff to a greater extent in *shared decision-making* and teamwork included the formation of subcommittees with team leaders for preparation of the accreditation self-study report, a proposal to form work teams around contract issues in preparation for faculty bargaining, a request to "get stakeholders together to talk about what's important for scholarships" prior to planned change in this area, and numerous requests for input from others during staff meetings.

There were numerous examples recorded of James giving *recognition* for effective teamwork. Examples included commenting on a recent news release that portrayed NWCC in partnership with a local high-tech firm, and recognizing the admissions and registration areas for great work during a recent enrollment period.

Melissa. At the time of this study, Melissa had been with the college since 1975, serving first as a faculty member, and then working in coordinator and director roles, and as



an interim vice-president before taking her position as one of the college's six deans.

Melissa's interview and field observations revealed the following values: community, customer responsiveness, fairness, hard work, change and innovation, humor, delegation and shared decision-making, staff development, teamwork, and recognition of others.

Melissa shared her colleagues' passion about the importance of *community* and *customer responsiveness* to NWCC. She was active in community civic groups and had worked closely with the district's three outreach centers, tailoring and coordinating college offerings for evening students and working adults. "We had a real strong history of involvement in the community," she stated. "The outreach centers were really important because of that." Her concern for the institution's future resided in the fact that faculty and staff were turning over, and "as we are bringing new people on, we are not emphasizing the community, and that bothers me, because it's a strong part of our mission." She indicated that community responsiveness was a strong value of the college's first two presidents, and fondly told the story of starting one of the college's outreach programs, having the mandate to "be up and running in September" against all odds. Melissa played an active role in founding the family resources program, and the training and business development center for the college.

Melissa shared a value for *fairness* with her colleagues, but added the dimension of gender to this arena. She was instrumental in the past in encouraging the institution to examine the equity of pay for men and women doing comparable work. Her concern expressed during interviews resided around the fact that past progress in promoting women to positions of authority within the institution might be slipping. She saw herself as "one of the few women left at the top here." Melissa also viewed board policy as having an important role within the institution. "Policy is good grounding for us." Her belief in its value was demonstrated by the fact that she recently worked with the founding board of

another new institution to help them develop initial policies. Melissa was *honest*, and unafraid to share her opinions and interpretations with the administrative team. I observed many examples of her opinion and interpretation contributing to group discussion and awareness of issues.

Melissa shared a value for *hard work* with her long-term colleagues at NWCC. When asked about key values that emerged within the institution over time, she replied: "Hard work. Expecting a lot out of people, and I think that's still here. It certainly is here with me, and I expect it of people who work for me. In that period of time [referring to a past administration], you saw most of the division directors really putting in the hours, and that was just the expectation that you worked evenings and Saturdays." Melissa pointed to the continuation of this tradition with the reduction of administrators in recent years, "from I think 54 managers to 42, and we were already lean compared to other colleges." She reflected on other budgetary reductions made in the wake of reduced local and state financial support for community colleges. "We made all of our cuts early. We just did it. In about 1990, we pink-slipped a lot of people."

Melissa had worked within her division to promote *change and innovation*. She allocated division resources for retreats with an organizational development focus, and promoted the development of division-wide values and vision statements. She served a college-wide advocacy role for supporting and promoting instructional technology, since computer and information services was within her division. Melissa was instrumental in writing grant proposals to fund *staff and organizational development*.

Melissa identified *humor* as one of the top values that emerged within her division. She was observed contributing to the informal, jovial nature of administrative team meetings on a regular basis.

Melissa strongly valued *delegation and shared decision-making*. "I really liked the autonomy that I had off campus. I really want to see this institution move to more level and more empowered ways of doing things." Her belief was that this was happening. "I think in the faculty departments, they have a lot of power to get the job done. For the most part, I think decisions are allowed to be made at the levels that they need to be made." Melissa supported development by focusing on *recognition* whenever possible. She mentioned Superstars and Thank-U-Grams as two ways that she acknowledged staff members who had contributed. "Recognition is important. The group recognition is probably more important." This value of team was shared by her staff. In Melissa's last division retreat, *teamwork* was identified as a top value. She summarized by saying, "I think teamwork is a value. It's important that we participate and that we know what's going on at all different levels."

Charlie. Like James, Charlie was a relative newcomer to NWCC at the time of this study, having been employed for 2½ years. He was one of the college's six deans, having been promoted from an associate dean's position. Data collected through interview and observations indicated the following values: community customer responsiveness, effectiveness, change and innovation, staff development, delegation, shared decision-making, diversity, and humor.

Charlie agreed with the perception that the college valued the *community*. "There is a community connection and community involvement. That's been a high value." He demonstrated his personal value in *responsiveness to the customer*, and *effectiveness* through consistent work in promoting learning communities at NWCC. Of his experience in cultivating this change in educational delivery for these students, he stated, "I think the reality of that fit isn't as strong as the impression that we are customer-oriented. I think that there's a strong feeling that we are customer oriented. I think the reality is . . . there is much

to be done to improve that." Regarding the effectiveness of the college at supporting student success, he commented, "There's a culture here that's very supportive of students. What's more important is not the number of people we put in the seats, but the number of people who come out and are successful." He continued to challenge the institution to examine its effectiveness by asking, "Do you offer enough courses? Can people actually start here and finish a transfer degree in two years? Are we here to support students to succeed through these programs, or what are we doing?"

Charlie's comments during interview indicated he was strongly supportive of college efforts to *change and innovate*.

We do have a lot of change that's happened just within this division. . . . I think it's good. . . . We've been doing a lot of improving, organizing. We've initiated a lot of things, too. I think there's been some movement in some of the things we are doing instructionally. . . . I feel a lot of change with new people coming in.

He recognized a need to *develop staff* in order to support this change. "There is a growing need for development of staff . . . because of technology and changing delivery systems, there's been a stronger need and push for faculty development, to the extent that now we have a person who is coordinating some of that." One of his frustrations: a restricting sense of powerlessness at lower levels. "I've heard institutionally that it's an 'ask first' institution instead of an 'act first' institution. I prefer the second."

Downsizing in Charlie's division occurred at the time of his promotion. His response to this challenge was to emphasize *delegation* of authority to others and empowerment of faculty and staff. His value of *shared decision-making* was evident through his description of these changes.

I increased the responsibility of one of our secretaries to an administrative assistant, and she is assuming a lot more of the hands-on, month-to-month budget responsibilities. . . . I suppose I could have lobbied strongly and recommended an associate dean, but frankly that wasn't my preference. My preference was to look at some other organizations to continue to give

decision-making responsibility at other levels, as opposed to creating structure. . . . I think there is a strong classified base there . . . I wish we could give them more responsibility.

Charlie valued *diversity*, and spoke about the challenges that NWCC had in diversifying its ranks. "We are not a very diverse community here. We had Anita Hill come here to visit and speak last week, and I wondered as she spoke of what she thought of the white faces that she looked out upon. I think that women do have a strong network of support here . . . but I think we are not as strongly diverse an organization as we could be." Charlie pointed to the uniqueness of his career profile, in that he spent a significant amount of his time overseas, and worked with elementary and secondary school students. "In some ways, it's been good. I think I've been able to look at things totally differently, from a different paradigm."

*Humor* was observed to be a regular part of staff meeting communications, and Charlie was a regular participant in this ritual. Examples of his use of humor included teasing Tom about almost saying the words "educational reform" during a discussion of teaching and learning; teasing the faculty association president about her Halloween costume; finding humorous ways to name the scoreboard equipment request on a board agenda; and referring to the slogan "Just say No" when discussing the difficulties of diversifying NWCC.

Tom. Tom started his employment at NWCC when the college began, and at the time of this study boasted a 28-year history with the institution. Many of those years were spent as a member of the faculty. He has served as one of the college's six deans. Tom's

interview and field observations reflected the following values: community, customer service, effectiveness, hard work, candor, humor, teamwork, and delegation and shared decision-making.

Of his value in connecting with the *community*, one of his colleagues said, "Clearly Tom has led us in many ways. He's led us into a lot of contacts with business and industry before that was the thing to do." Tom agreed, "We should be interested in our external customers." He illustrated this belief in *customer service* during discussions regarding the college's position on snow closure days. "People will show up; they can't be expected to stay away, they want service." Tom sketches the college's role in creating a sense of community within the district as he discussed the differences between the two counties NWCC served. "You know about the tension between A County and B County. Yep, the river runs through it . . . we used to come over here to play sports (when I was young) or vice versa, and it was great hostility. But, the community college has helped bridge that to some extent." Tom discussed the college's mascot, the roadrunner. He recalled how it was selected to symbolize the early days of the college, when classes were spread throughout the district, and students needed to commute long distances between communities in order to participate in a comprehensive program. "They had to run the road, and so they became roadrunners."

Tom shared many stories regarding the college's founding and early years. Threaded through these conversations was a clear commitment to *effectiveness*. Regarding influential college figures: "Frank left an attitude of let's really be focused on the student . . . let's give them what we can in terms of support and encouragement." "Clearly Joe's influence on the institution was in terms of the *can do* spirit . . . we're going to get it done." In Tom's own

words, "Once you recruit the student and get them here, for goodness sake make an effort to retain them. . . . If a student doesn't show up in class for a day or two, we'll call them up and see how things are going."

He, too, mentioned the emphasis on efficiency and *hard work*.

We're a very flat organization . . . we're stretched pretty thin. . . . We're probably the only community college in the state that doesn't charge fees. . . . This district has not supported the college through local property tax dollars to the extent of other districts . . . so, we haven't had a lot of money to upgrade stuff. One of our philosophies is to scrounge and find a way . . . we really squeeze the nickel here.

Tom mentioned *candor* when contrasting Richard's influence with that of a previous president. "That's one thing Paul always used to hold . . . he'd keep things hidden from you. Richard's very forthright. Richard and I have had our disagreements over the years, but I'll tell him what I think and he'll tell me what he thinks . . . so, he's real up front." During meetings the researcher observed Tom freely sharing his opinions, whether positive or negative. Frequent *humor* from Tom was also observed during staff meetings. Regarding a review of past planning documents, "Are you having a statute of limitations on past planning documents reviewed?" Regarding Richard's inquiry about how the group was doing, "There isn't any snow, and FTE's up." Regarding the frequency with which the group discussed snow closure policy, "This is one of the agenda items we have had on our agenda for 25 years."

Tom agreed with his colleagues on the importance of coordination, integration, and *teamwork* at NWCC. He shared an historical perspective, "We mixed academic and occupational programs in all the divisions . . . in the late '70s, and we did that intentionally . . . after our first occupational dean left, we've never had a vocational or professional

technical dean. That's been significant. So, that's one of our values, I think." In reference to today's institution, "We're real informal here, and everybody's part of the team. . . . We've got little boxes and such [on the organizational chart], but it doesn't mean a whole lot."

Tom's emphasis on *delegation and shared decision-making* was evidenced by these comments made during an interview:

The department chairs are faculty. They're not administrative. These folks need to be in the driver's seat. . . . One of my goals has been to try to get our instructional departments some degree of independence . . . to be able to generate revenue over which they have discretion. . . . [Department chairs] are the ones that need to decide which way to take the departments. All we can do is set the tone, help provide support."

William. William was employed at NWCC in 1976. He began his career as a counselor, then served in manager and director positions before being promoted to the position of dean in 1993. William's interview and field observation data revealed the following values: community, customer responsiveness, hard work, trust, change and innovation, learning and staff development, teamwork, and diversity.

When asked about NWCC's relationship to the *community*, he replied, "Emphasis for the community never has been greater than in Richard's era. We are very interested in partnerships and outreach. . . . I think the community focus is by design. I think it's important. We should have been doing it a long time ago." William mentioned the internal *customer* as he discussed the college's *responsiveness* to needs. "I don't think we do enough with our internal customers . . . but we have a very strong focus on the external customer." He believed the college could improve in its internal outreach efforts. "I think we do symbolic outreach with key groups, but I'm not sure we do it enough on an individual basis. I don't think we reach out enough to individual players." One symbolic effort that William began with this goal in mind was the college's annual awards for employee service.



In agreement with his colleagues, William discussed the culture of *hard work* within the institution. "I think we do a lot with little money." "I think hard work is overlooked here. The majority of people don't stop in 40 hours. People work hard around here . . . we also put out a quality product."

Regarding the value of honesty that others espoused, William had a different insight, related to *trust*. "I think simply for new people, it takes a while for them to earn trust, to earn credibility, to have people listen when they speak up. It takes a while for new people to be heard." A colleague agreed, and referred to relative newcomers to NWCC as "newbies." This perception was confirmed in several staff meeting observations of newer individuals, whose concerns were occasionally raised and left unaddressed.

William described an era of mistrust during the previous president's last years within the institution. He believed there continued to be room for improvement at NWCC in creating a climate where "public honesty" felt safe. Another colleague agreed. "Don't speak out in opposition to an idea that's been expressed. If you don't agree with it, then do it behind closed doors. Saving face, and presenting an opinion or aura of loyalty and agreement is a high value."

William agreed with his colleagues' emphasis on *change and innovation*. "One of the healthiest things at NWCC is that we've experienced a change of personnel. We are turning over. . . . Change is an important theme." He also placed a strong value on *learning and staff development* in support of change. This was evidenced by his past development of case studies for his managers' use in monthly discussions. "We put a fair amount of money into staff development. I think we do a good job of developing individuals." However, he believed more could be done to develop *teams* within the institution, a concern that was voiced by other colleagues as well. "We've got to practice what we preach . . . you know, I

would love to do self-managed work teams. . . . It's okay to tell people what to do, but I don't think you should ever tell them how to do it. . . . You have to consult with people who have the expertise in making a decision."

William valued *diversity*, and described the past president's historical influence on this arena. "Paul did a lot for the diversity of the college. . . . I appreciate that. I don't think we've ever done particularly well with minorities. . . . I think a diversity of opinions is great."

Jessica. Like several of her colleagues, Jessica had been at the institution a relatively short period at the time of this study. She had held her director's position for 3½ years. Jessica's interview and observations revealed strongly held values for customer responsiveness, community, candor, fairness, staff development, delegation, and shared decision-making.

Jessica spoke positively about NWCC's role in providing effective service for its students and internal customers. "I think we are *customer-oriented*. If there's no effectiveness, then something will be done. So, I think it's a very high value. It also speaks to the community, and now this emphasis on institutional effectiveness is happening." She also mentioned the college's quick response to a drop in local and state financial support. "That was a key event in that NWCC bit the bullet, whereas many institutions didn't, and so at the back end of that, we've not had to lay off anybody as a result of it since." Jessica was observed responding to internal customers by quickly revising the budget calendar in response to workload concerns.

In regard to the importance of *community*, she said, "I think NWCC has a very positive relationship with the community. I think Richard has really excellent relationships

one-on-one with most community members. I think he probably knows every key player. . . . I think he really genuinely cares about the community and NWCC's part of that effort." During an interview, Jessica acknowledged a common belief about the failures of past NWCC administrators who were less involved with the community. "People are tired of commuters who aren't a part of the community." The researcher observed Jessica considering the college's internal community when she devised open forums for dean candidates to interact with college members.

Jessica regarded the institution as valuing *candor* and a sense of *fairness*.

I think there's a genuine value of honesty, and I really value that as an individual, because I've been in situations where that isn't a value at all. . . . Fairness is important. I think the role of policy is big. They drew a (policy) book, and they certainly do adhere to it. I think it's a very ethical institution.

Jessica valued *staff development*, and stressed the importance of focusing more efforts on developing teams, as well as individuals. She mentored several individuals within her division, and fondly recalled several women mentors she had early in her tenure at NWCC who were no longer with the institution. "I think an emphasis on developing people is slowly becoming an important event. It's proven by the number of dollars that are increasing each year, but I think that it's also being realized that if we don't invest in our people, we are going to be outdated and stale." Like Melissa, she shared a concern about the development and promotion of women within the institution. She cited examples of several women who had left the institution in recent years for promotions elsewhere.

Jessica was proud of her accomplishments in promoting participatory management within her division. She regularly *delegated authority* to others, "I have a wonderful staff, and I let them pretty much do what they want to do." Jessica was observed recognizing her team for their efforts in preparing budget materials and documents related to college

accounting. Regarding decentralized decision-making, Jessica said, "I have been successful in implementing *participatory decision-making* at the classified level, which is unusual, because that's usually not a level where folks have autonomy."

### Mary

Like Tom, Mary began her career with NWCC when the college first opened. She had worked as a part-time and full-time faculty member, department chair, and division director. She served as an assistant to the president at the time of this study. Mary's data reveals the following values: community, customer responsiveness, effectiveness, fairness, change, learning and development, humor, delegation and shared decision-making, and trust.

Mary shared her colleagues' value for the *community* and those that NWCC serves. She said, "We've always tried to be very active in the community, but we've never tried to be controlling. Lots of people are very active in all the communities where we exist, but it's in a supporting role." Mary described numerous outreach and recognition efforts that involved both internal and external members of the college community. These included Classified Appreciation Week, the advisory committee reception and award to the Outstanding Advisory Committee Member-of-the-Year, the business division's awards for outstanding students, the college dinner honoring outstanding part-time faculty, and the quarterly end-of-term reception for faculty. She supported these efforts, saying, "I think it is a very important thing for our staff."

Despite the college's need to be efficient with resources, Mary indicated a strong belief that NWCC was effective in its *service to customers*, both internal and external.

I think to me one of the most important things that I've never seen NWCC waiver from is money-related, financially related . . . what the faculty and the students need, those needs are met first. . . . We've never been overly staffed in administration. We have run lean there, sometime more to our detriment probably, but I've always felt that the students and their needs, i.e., faculty needs, were the highest priority and still are today as we talk

about budget for the organization. . . . I've always felt that any legitimate, justifiable need that could possibly be funded would be funded there, sometimes at the expense of support staff and their needs, or the administration."

Mary was highly involved in other activities symbolic of the college's concern with being *effective*: an institutional effectiveness pilot program, quarterly enrollment reporting, professional technical program reviews, and college-wide self-study and review in preparation for an upcoming accreditation visit.

Mary was also concerned with maintaining a climate of *fairness* within the institution. Speaking about her career with NWCC, she said, "One thing I proved . . . is that you can get promoted through this organization . . . what I believe I did to get here, was by hard work, commitment, fairness, the kinds of things that I think people respect." She echoed another colleague's story of a recent return by a former dean lamenting the lack of written policy for guidance at her current institution. Mary agreed with her colleagues that policy had played a moderating role at NWCC.

In looking to the future, Mary mentioned the degree of organizational *change* needed just to keep up. "Keeping up with change has to be on top. It's not just technology. It's obviously the whole school improvement movement and it's also as people, faculty, become more skilled in their jobs and learn more about how people learn and how we should be teaching, that is also a major challenge." She mentioned regular *learning* as a necessity for keeping up with change. Mary had been instrumental in supporting staff and organizational development efforts through the supervision of an office whose activities were dedicated to that goal.

Numerous field notes referred to humorous events in administrative team meetings. While Mary was relatively quiet during these meetings, her sense of *humor* was evident in the comments and quips she occasionally inserted into discussions.

Field notes and a recent interview also indicated that Mary valued *delegating authority and shared decision-making*. There were numerous examples of her suggesting administrative team topics be referred to other appropriate groups or individuals. Mary mentioned participation of others in planning events for Classified Appreciation Week: "The best thing that's come out of this planning process is that we have two members of the classified association who are now liaisons with staff development. Their purpose will be to plan ongoing events for classified so we can do things beyond this year." Mary mentioned the faculty department chairs as a particularly important group in decision-making: "The most significant group in my mind is the Academic Affairs Council. . . . The chairs in general, have a lot of influence, whether it's together in that setting, or in their own divisions . . . they certainly have a lot of influence." Mary also highlighted a self-organizing group that formed around issues of software implementation. This group served as a problem-solving and advisory group for the council.

They call themselves the B group. They are all classified, I believe. . . . They usually meet monthly, and if they want . . . they will bring issues, you know. They are the ones who actually helped make some of the changes in the set up of the human resource system when we went to this software. . . . They just kind of sprouted.

With the hiring of the second vice-president, Mary's job had the potential to change significantly. Yet, she appeared unconcerned, exhibiting significant *trust* in her president and the future.

Two weeks ago I said, "I suppose I should change the name of my title in the catalog." It's going to print pretty soon. I said, "What do I call myself when I put it in the catalog?" And [Richard] said, "Oh, you just call yourself the same thing, that's okay." So, who knows what it will bring? . . . I'm not going any place during a period of transition . . . so initially, I'm going to stay right here in this office."

Mary teased about retirement, but then acknowledged, "I'm not ready to retire, but it's nice to be able to say it some days. . . . I'm not nervous. Richard says, 'we are not going to hire somebody she doesn't like.'"

### Research Question Two

*What assumptions about reality were held by individual team members?*

Cultural assumptions about reality are subconscious, and typically taken for granted. Assumptions form the essence or core of an organization's culture. "What distinguishes these basic assumptions from norms or values" Schein (1992) notes, "is the degree to which they come to be taken for granted, and the degree to which they drop out of consciousness as issues even to be considered" (p. 7). Schein notes that assumptions are hard to locate, but can be inferred through examination of an organization's artifacts and values, or brought to the surface in interviews.

Schein's (1992) framework, as discussed in Chapter I, focuses on assumptions about an organization's relationship to its environment, the nature of truth and reality, its view of human nature and relationships, and the nature of organizational activity. Each dimension represents a continuum which guides the researcher to explore the assumptions motivating behavior.

Cultural assumptions were identified after analyzing each staff member's words and actions during interview, and in each set of field notes. Tables 8 through 15 summarize evident individual values, sample data, and identified cultural assumptions under each of Schein's (1992) categories for administrative team members.

TABLE 8

## RICHARD — CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
Relationship to Environment	Community	"Emphasis for the community has never been greater than in Richard's era." / "We've done 43 in the history of the college. We've been out there a lot . . . because of those elections, we are really connected to the community. We can't run that many elections without listening; so we really are up to what's important to this community." / "Richard makes a point the first day of the term to go around and touch base with all the instructional areas."	The college works in partnership with its internal and external communities. / The community is a vital part of the college.
	Change/Innovation	"We need to change not only what we teach, but a way of adjusting the curriculum and creating new, short-term innovative programs, but we also need to change the way we deliver it, and how we deliver it. And, that's just mind-boggling." / "Like any organization, you hope it changes with what's going on around you."	It is important to look ahead in time and to change the organization to fit one's future vision.
Truth/Reality	Fairness	Richard, in reference to what he hopes to be remembered for: "I think a sense of fairness, a sense of trust." / "It's a fair game. We have rules. We all know what the rules are." / "Our policies are not so specific that it drives everything."	Fair treatment of organizational members is important. / Organizational rules will enhance fair treatment of organizational members.
	Candor	"You know, I think that people feel like they are able to say what they want to say when they want to say it. I think they should feel like they can agree or disagree. They know . . . a sense of sharing information. I talk to them. I tell them what's going to happen. I tell them where the money is."	Organizational reality should be revealed through open sharing of information and opinion.



TABLE 8 (Continued)

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
	Efficiency/ Hard Work	William, in comparing a former president's working style with Richard's: "He worked hard and he played hard. He went away on the weekends. Richard is always here." / Richard, in reference to a former co-worker: "He was the first person to work every morning. He was the last one to leave every night. He was at everything he needed to be at. He was a member of the local Rotary club."	Hard work contributes to effectiveness.
	Flexibility	"We need to hire a leader that has a breadth of skills. The organization will change." / "Our policy is not so specific that it drives everything."	Flexibility improves effectiveness.
Human Nature	Learning and Development	"How do you deal with staff and organizational development? How do you encourage people and reward them for going back to school, for working a little bit harder, for redesigning their curriculum? . . . How do you put them together and how do you keep them motivated? How do you move them?" / Developed a decision package for the budget related to staff development. / Supports two annual inservice sessions for staff.	Organizational members have a need and desire to learn and develop. / An organization will change and develop as its employees develop.
	Humor	"You realize that it hasn't snowed here at the college since 1963 when the college was formed, so we're just finally getting around to this policy." / During a tense moment: "So, we did make a decision there, didn't we?"	Humor is another way of communicating the truth. / An informal environment is important. / Humor reduces tension.
	Loyalty	"If you want to work for Richard, you'd better be loyal." / "The culture here isn't a throw-away culture; this is home for us . . . so, there's reasons beyond this being a good place to work that people come here. They get a good job. We take care of them."	Since the organization takes care of its employees, loyalty is expected in return. / Long-term employees are loyal.

TABLE 8 (Continued)

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
Human Relationships	Teamwork	"It doesn't matter what the organization looks like . . . I'm telling them in the '90s, 'Here's what happened in the '70s, here's what happened in the '80s and now we are in the '90s and now I'm saying forget the organization, forget the reporting lines, you know, there's a job for all of us to do.' We have got to work together and stop paying so . . . much attention to the organization chart." / "We're not going to compete with each other. It's important to integrate what we do." / "I realize how important it is to make integrated decisions. . . . We need to better time this to coordinate with other departments." / "I want a good leadership team, and governance by a leadership team."	How we work together is more important than who we work for.
Organizational Activity	Delegating Authority	"I'm thinking if I give the department chairs more responsibility, then their managers will have more time to do . . . that was my intention in creating the Academic Affairs Council . . . give power to the faculty." / Tom, regarding Richard's fingerprints on the institution: "Well, valuing the faculty, and putting the faculty in more of an influential role."	Faculty are important organizational members, and able to assume authority. / Granting authority improves effectiveness.
	Shared Decision-Making	"We're getting the faculty together, that's good. . . . We want their input." / "I like closure, but I have realized that the process is really, really important. It is more important sometimes than the result." / Created the Academic Affairs Council.	Decision-making is important organizational action. / Decisions are improved through participation of stakeholders.

TABLE 8 (Continued)

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
	Responsive-ness to the Customer	Suggested working with a local high-tech firm to evaluate employee transcripts on-site. "We'll just spend a day in the cafeteria over there evaluating college transcripts . . . and see if we can't get some of these people on board." / "Customer is a big value."	The customer deserves our best service.
	Effectiveness	"How do you use all the strengths of all the people that you have, while compensating for their weaknesses, and get the most productivity from your organization?" / "We need to focus on governance, not on boxes and how boxes align in an organizational chart. We need to focus on how programs work." / "I think anymore you have to not only be effective, but measure it."	The organization's employees are important to its effectiveness. / Helping people to work together is key to an organization's effectiveness.
	Direct Involvement	On Richard's direct role in decision-making: "They just depend on me to do it. I have allowed them to do that. That's not . . . in the long-term best interest of the college. It's worked in the transition . . . but if we are to take the next step, that's got to change." / "The hard part is going to be taking my hands off of it. I've got fingerprints everywhere."	Direct involvement in organizational activity is important to organizational effectiveness.
	Recognizing Others	Recognizes achievements during board meetings. Recognizes colleagues during staff meetings for accomplishments. / "You know, the more people we recognize for the work they do, the better." / "I think we do a pretty good job institutionally recognizing staff, but I pay a lot of attention personally."	Recognition of others is important organizational activity.

TABLE 9

## JAMES — CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
Relationship to Environment	Community	"There is a sense of ownership in this community. You hear it in the community college. You hear it in restaurants. You hear it in grocery stores. People talk about their college. They feel very good about NWCC."	The community is a vital part of the college. / The college works in partnership with its community.
	Change/Innovation	"Look at long-term curricular issues, to engage in some of the educational reform efforts, to really take a lead in reformatting programs." / "Longevity sometimes doesn't serve the process well. I mean, it's hard to sort of think about other ways of doing business, to look at ways of doing things with fresh eyes."	It is important to look ahead in time and to change the organization to fit one's future vision.
Truth/Reality	Fairness	"Administrative rules are important here. Policy is important. We are very conscious about paying attention to the rules by which we adopt rules, and it's not a process that people wink at. . . . The quality of rule-making, though, is pretty good."	Fair treatment of organizational members is important. / Organizational rules will enhance fair treatment of organizational members.
	Candor	"If you have a better idea about how to do this, believe me, I would like to hear it." / Regularly shares opinions with Richard and others.	Organizational reality should be revealed through open sharing of information and opinion. / Sharing of ideas improves outcomes.
Human Nature	Humor	"I see a broad use of humor in this group." / Teased a colleague about his outfit. / Teased researcher about field observations as similar to "watching a foreign film."	An informal environment is important. Humor reduces tension.

TABLE 9 (Continued)

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
	Loyalty	"There is extraordinary loyalty to this place. People sitting around the table have been here for a long long time. . . . You've got folks who really feel committed to NWCC and loyal to it. I think that's real distinctive."	Long-term employees are loyal.
Human Relationships	Teamwork	"There has never been a time when the message from the top was, 'All of us need to be in this together. All of us need to be a part of the same enterprise. All of us need to work together. Deans are important, but Deans are important as a team.'"	How we work together is more important than who we work for.
Organizational Activity	Delegating Authority	"I really want to see this institution move to more a more empowered level." / "Richard will also have to learn, I think, to use his Vice-Presidents in an appropriate way rather than simply as adjunct staff to his office. They really are going to have to have some true live authority."	Granting authority improves effectiveness.
	Shared Decision-Making	"We need to get stakeholders together first to talk about what's important . . . and then we'll put a plan together." / Formed subcommittees and work teams on important issues.	Decision-making is important organizational action./ Decisions are improved through participation of stakeholders.
	Responsiveness to the Customer	"That's one of the areas that I really do have an interest in trying to get some conversation started about customer service." / "I think the college is getting, as a whole, much more sensitive to the customer issue and I like that."	The customer deserves our best service.
	Recognizing Others	Acknowledges local business - NWCC partnership. / Commends admissions and registration area for work well done.	Recognition of others is important organizational activity.

TABLE 10

## MELISSA — CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
Relationship to Environment	Community	"We had a real strong history of involvement in the community. The centers were really important because of that." / "As we are bringing new people on, we are not emphasizing that community and that bothers me, because it's part of our mission statement." / Serves on community civic groups.	The community is a vital part of the college. / The college works in partnership with its community.
	Change/Innovation	Allocates resources for retreats with organizational development focus. / Created a divisional vision statement.	It is important to look ahead in time and to change the organization to fit one's future vision.
Truth/Reality	Fairness	Promoted an institutional discussion about the relative equality of pay for men and women doing comparable work. / "Policy is a good grounding for us." / Worked with the founding board of another institution to develop operating policies.	Fair treatment of organizational members is important. / Organizational rules will enhance fair treatment of organizational members.
	Candor	Freely admits when she does not know something during administrative team meetings.	Organizational reality should be revealed through open sharing of information and opinion.
	Efficiency/ Hard Work	"I think we were one of the most cost effective per FTE." / "I think management has gone from I think 54 managers to 42, and we already were really lean compared to other colleges." / "We made all of our cuts early. We just did it. In about 1990 we pink slipped a lot of people." / "Hard work. Expecting a lot out of people, and I think it certainly is here with me and I expect people who work for me to do the same."	Hard work contributes to effectiveness. / Effective workers need support. / Responsible use of resources is key to effectiveness.

TABLE 10 (Continued)

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
Human Nature	Learning and Development	Has written numerous grant proposals to seek development funding for the institution and for staff. / Holds division staff retreats.	Organizational members have a need and desire to learn and develop. / An organization will change and develop as its employees develop.
	Humor	"Humor is big in my division." / Humor identified as top value in divisional retreat.	An informal environment is important.
	Loyalty	"Betty came back the other day [former dean]. She is really now impressed with how much all of our groups and departments think of the good of the institution . . . there's that loyalty to the institution . . . and thinking about direction we should be going as an institution."	Loyalty is expressed through shared thinking about and for the organization.
Human Relationships	Teamwork	Reference to learning community: "They have pulled in people from other divisions. That's a really strong group." / "I think teamwork is a value." / All division retreat — teamwork was identified as a strong value. / "It's important that we participate and that we know what's going on at all different levels."	How we work together is more important than who we work for. / Employee participation improves organizational effectiveness.
Organizational Activity	Delegating Authority	"I really liked my autonomy that I had off campus." / "I think in the faculty departments they have a lot of power to get the job done." / "I really want to see this institution move to more level and more empowered ways of doing things."	Granting authority improves effectiveness.
	Shared Decision-Making	"For the most part, I think decisions are allowed to be made at the levels that they need to be made." / Held an all-day retreat within her division to identify values and vision for the division. / "I think student opinions are important here, too."	Decision-making is important organizational action. / Decisions are improved through participation of stakeholders.

TABLE 10 (Continued)

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
	Responsive-ness to the Customer	Works to coordinate the schedules across campus for evening/working students. / Story of one outreach center's formation: "You will have classes up and running in September."	The customer deserves our best service.
	Recognizing Others	Verbally and publicly acknowledges staff members who have contributed. / "Recognition is important. The group recognition is probably more important." / Recognizes Superstars, sends Thank-U-Grams	Recognition of others is important organizational activity.

TABLE 11

## CHARLIE — CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
Relationship to Environment	Community	"There is a community connection and community involvement. That's been a high value." / "I think there's quite a bit of faculty outreach into our community."	The community is a vital part of the college. / The college works in partnership with its community.
	Change/Innovation	"We do have a lot of change that's happened just within this division. . . . I think it's good." / "We've been doing a lot of improving, organizing. We've initiated a lot of things, too. I think there's been some movement in some of the things we are doing instructionally." / "I feel a lot of change with new people coming in."	It is important to look ahead in time and to change the organization to fit one's future vision
Human Nature	Learning and Development	"There is a growing need for development of staff . . . because of technology and changing delivery systems, there's been a stronger need and push for faculty development to the extent that now we have a person who is coordinating some of that."	Organizational members have a need and desire to learn and develop. / An organization changes and develops as its employees develop.



TABLE 11 (Continued)

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
	Humor	Teased Tom about almost saying the words "educational reform." / Teased the faculty association president about her Halloween costume. / Found humorous ways to name the scoreboard equipment request on a board agenda.	Humor is another way of communicating the truth. / An informal environment is important. / Humor reduces tension.
	Diversity	"I think we are not as strongly diverse an organization as we could be."	Diversity improves an organization's effectiveness.
Organizational Activity	Delegating Authority	"I think there is a very strong classified base here. . . . I wish we could give them more responsibility." / "I have heard institutionally that it's an 'ask first' institution instead of an 'act first' institution. I prefer the second.	Granting authority improves effectiveness.
	Shared Decision-Making	"My preference was to look at some other organization to continue to give decision making responsibility to other levels, as opposed to creating another structure."	Decision-making is important organizational action. / Decisions are improved through participation of stakeholders.
	Effectiveness	"What's more important is not the number of people we put in the seats, but the number of people who come out and are successful."	We are effective if our students are successful. / Helping people to work together is key to an organization's effectiveness.
	Responsiveness to the Customer	"Do you offer enough courses, can people actually start here and finish a transfer degree in 2 years?" / "Are we here to support students to succeed through those programs, or what are we doing?" / "I think the reality of that fit isn't as strong as the impression that we are customer oriented. I think that there's a strong feeling that we are customer oriented. I think the reality is . . . there is much to be done to improve that." / "There's a culture here that's very supportive of students."	The customer deserves our best service.

TABLE 12

## TOM — CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
Relationship to Environment	Community	"Clearly Tom has led us in many ways. He's led us into a lot of contacts with business and industry before that was the thing to do."	The college works in partnership with its internal and external communities. / The community is a vital part of the college.
Truth/Reality	Candor	"Richard's very forthright. Richard and I have had our disagreements over the years, but I'll tell him what I think and he'll tell me what he thinks . . . so, he's real up front." / Regularly shares opinions in staff meetings.	Organizational reality should be revealed through open sharing of information and opinion. / Sharing of ideas improves outcomes.
	Efficiency/ Hard Work	"We're a very flat organization . . . we're stretched pretty thin." / "Clearly Joe's influence on the institution was in terms of the <i>can do</i> spirit . . . we're going to get it done." / "This district has not supported the college through local property tax dollars to the extent of other districts . . . so, we haven't had a lot of money to upgrade stuff. One of our philosophies is to scrounge and find a way . . . we really squeeze the nickel here." / "We're probably the only community college in the state that doesn't charge fees."	Hard work contributes to effectiveness. / Responsible use of resources is key to effectiveness.
Human Nature	Humor	"Are you having a statute of limitations on planning documents?" / "There's no snow, and FTE's up." / "This is one of those agenda items we have on our agenda for 25 years."	Humor is another way to communicate the truth. / An informal environment is important.

TABLE 12 (Continued)

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
Human Relationships	Teamwork	"We mixed academic and occupational programs in all the divisions . . . in the late '70s, and we did that intentionally." / "We're real informal here and everybody's part of the team." / In reference to the organizational chart: "We've got the little boxes and such, but it doesn't mean a whole lot."	How we work together is more important than who we work for.
Organizational Activity	Delegating Authority	"The department chairs are faculty. They're not administrative. Folks need to be in the driver's seat." / "One of my goals has been to try to get our instructional departments some degree of independence . . . to be able to generate revenue over which they have discretion."	Faculty are important organizational members and able to assume authority. / Granting authority improves effectiveness.
	Shared Decision-Making	In reference to department chairs: "They are the ones that need to decide which way to take the departments. All we can do is set the tone, help provide support." / "We need to get broad-based input."	Decision-making is important organizational action. / Decisions are improved through participation of stakeholders.
	Effectiveness	"Frank left an attitude of let's really be focused on the student . . . let's give them what we can in terms of support and encouragement." / "Once you recruit the student and get them here for goodness sake make an effort to retain them . . . if a student doesn't show up in class for a day or two, we'll call them up and see how things are going."	We are effective if students are successful.
	Responsiveness to the Customer	In reference to snow closure days: "People will show up; they can't be expected to stay away, they want service." / "We should be interested in our external customers"	The customer deserves our best service.

TABLE 13

## WILLIAM — CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
Relationship to Environment	Community	"Emphasis for the community never has been greater than in Richard's era. We are very interested in partnerships and outreach." / "I think the community focus is by design. I think it's important. We should have been doing it a long time ago." / "I think we do symbolic outreach with groups, but I don't think we do enough on an individual basis."	The college works in partnership with its internal and external communities. / The community is a vital part of the college.
	Change/Innovation	"One of the healthiest things at NWCC is that we've experienced a change of personnel. We are turning over." / "Change is an important theme."	It is important to look ahead in time and to change the organization to fit one's vision.
Truth/Reality	Fairness	"I would say we have an emphasis on policy . . . we do a good job of reviewing policy and I think policy is important."	Organizational rules will enhance fair treatment of organizational members.
	Trust	"I think simply for new people, it takes a while for them to earn trust, to earn credibility, to have people listen when they speak up. It takes awhile for new people to be heard."	Organizational reality should be revealed through open sharing of information and opinion. / Trust is an important element of honesty.
	Efficiency/Hard Work	"I think we do a lot with little money." / "I think hard work is overlooked here. The majority of people don't stop in 40 hours. People work hard around here."	Hard work contributes to effectiveness. / Effective workers need support. / Responsible use of resources is key to effectiveness.

TABLE 13 (Continued)

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
Human Nature	Learning and Development	Developed case studies for managers for use in monthly discussions. / "We put a fair amount of money into staff development. I think we do a good job of developing individuals."	Organizational members have a need and desire to learn and develop. / An organization will change and develop as its employees develop.
	Diversity	"Paul did a lot for the diversity of the college . . . I appreciate that. I don't think we've ever done particularly well with minorities."	Diversity improves an organization's effectiveness.
Human Relationships	Teamwork	"I think we do a good job of developing individuals" (believes more could be done to develop groups within the institution).	Employee participation improves organizational effectiveness. / The organization's employees are important to its effectiveness.
Organizational Activity	Delegating Authority	"We've got to practice what we preach. . . . You know, I would love to do self-managed work teams." / "It's okay to tell people what to do, but I don't think you should ever tell them how to do it."	Granting authority improves effectiveness.
	Shared Decision-Making	"I think a diversity of opinions is great." / "You have to consult with the people who have the expertise in making a decision."	Decision-making is important organizational action. / Decisions are improved through participation of stakeholders.
	Responsiveness to the Customer	"I don't think we do enough with our internal customers . . . but we have a very strong focus on the external customer."	The customer deserves our best service.
	Recognizing Others	"Public recognition is so important." / "I don't think we reach out enough to individual players." / Started annual awards for employee service.	Recognition of others is important organizational activity.

TABLE 14

## JESSICA — CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
Relationship to Environment	Community	"I think NWCC has a very positive relationship with the community. I think Richard has really excellent relationships one-on-one with most community members. I think he probably knows every key player. . . . I think he really genuinely cares about the community and NWCC's part of that effort." / "People are tired of commuters who aren't a part of the community."	The college works in partnership with its internal and external communities. / The community is a vital part of the college.
Truth/Reality	Fairness	"Fairness is important." / "I think the role of policy is big. They drew a book, and they certainly do adhere to it. I think it's a very ethical institution."	Fair treatment of organizational members is important. / Organizational rules will enhance fair treatment of organizational members.
	Candor	"I think there's a genuine value of honesty, and I really value that as an individual, because I've been in situations where that isn't a value at all."	Organizational reality should be revealed through open sharing of information and opinion.
Human Nature	Learning and Development	"I thinking an emphasis on developing people is slowly becoming an important event. It's proven by the number of dollars that are increasing each year, but I think that it's also being realized that if we don't invest in our people, we are going to be outdated and stale." / Is actively mentoring several individuals within her area. / Concerned about the lack of development of women leaders.	Organizational members have a need and desire to learn and develop. / An organization will change and develop as its employees develop.
Organizational Activity	Delegating Authority	"I have a wonderful staff, and I let them pretty much do what they want to do."	Granting authority improves effectiveness.

TABLE 14 (Continued)

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
	Shared Decision-Making	"I have been successful in implementing participatory decision making at the classified level which is unusual, because that's usually not a level where folks have autonomy."	Decision-making is an important organizational action. / Decisions are improved through participation of stakeholders.
	Responsiveness to the Customer	"I think we are customer oriented." / Quick revision of budget calendar in response to request for change.	The customer deserves our best service.

TABLE 15

## MARY — CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
Relationship to Environment	Community	"We've always tried to be very active in the community, but we've never tried to be controlling" / "Lot's of people are very active in all the communities where we exist, but it's in a supporting role."	The college works in partnership with its internal and external communities. / The community is a vital part of the college.
	Change/Innovation	"Keeping up with change has to be on top. It's not just technology. It's obviously the whole school improvement movement and it's also as people, faculty, become more skilled in their jobs and learn more about how people learn and how we should be teaching, that is also a major challenge."	It is important to look ahead in time and to change the organization to fit one's vision.
Truth/Reality	Fairness	"What I believe I did to get here was by hard work, commitment, fairness, the kinds of things that I think people respect."	Fair treatment of organizational members is important.
	Efficiency/Hard Work	"We've never been overly staffed in administration."	Hard work contributes to effectiveness.
	Trust	Expressed trust in Richard concerning job security following reorganization. / "I'm not going any place during a period of transition . . . so initially, I'm going to stay right here in this office."	Long-term organizational loyalty is rewarded. / The organization takes care of its employees.

TABLE 15 (Continued)

Schein's Categories	Evident Values	Sample Data	Cultural Assumptions
Human Nature	Learning and Development	Supports and supervises the office of staff and organizational development. / "Regular learning is necessary for change."	Organizational members have a need and a desire to learn and develop. / An organization will change and develop as its employees develop.
	Humor	Numerous examples of laughter in response to others' quips and occasional teasing of colleagues in meetings.	An informal environment is important.
Organizational Activity	Delegating Authority	"The best thing that's come out of this planning process is that we have two members of the classified association who are now liaisons with staff development. Their purpose will be to plan ongoing events for classified so we can do things beyond this year."	Employee participation improves effectiveness.
	Responsive-ness to the Customer	"What the faculty and student needs, those needs are met first." / "Students and their needs . . . are the highest priority as we talk about budget."	The customer deserves our best service.
	Shared Decision-Making	"The department chairs, in general, have a lot of influence." / "Those are the people who are going to do it. Let's pull them together. Let's ask them what they think."	Faculty are important organizational members and able to assume authority. / Decisions are improved through participation of stakeholders.
	Effectiveness	Working on institutional effectiveness pilots. / Mentions unwavering financial commitment to serve students and faculty. / Quarterly enrollment reporting. / Professional technical program reviews.	Responsible use of resources is key to effectiveness.
	Recognizing Others	"We have a dinner honoring outstanding part-time faculty, which I think is a very important thing for our staff." / Involved in Classified Appreciation week, and advisory committee awards.	Recognition of others is important organizational activity.



### Research Questions Three and Four

*Were common values and assumptions held by administrative team members? If so, what common cultural themes were evident? How were cultural themes expressed in the actions taken by administrative team members?*

Research questions three and four focus on cultural meaning that is shared within the administrative team at Northwest Community College. Louis (1983b) characterizes this as the cultural level, as opposed to the individual level, of interpretation.

Organizational symbolism promotes the view that an organization, like a culture, is conceived as a pattern of symbolic discourse. Organizational analysis focuses on how individuals or groups interpret and understand their experience, and how these interpretations and understandings relate to subsequent action (Smircich, 1983a; Van Maanen & Barley, 1985). The researcher uses a variety of evidence to express recurrent themes that represent the patterns among values, assumptions, and action in a particular setting.

Members of the administrative team operate from a common cultural perspective in many respects. Fundamental values and assumptions concerning the relationships to the environment, the nature of truth and reality, human nature, human relationships, and organizational activity are shared by most team members. Values and assumptions held by individual members of the executive administrative team were considered to be common cultural themes if shared by five or more (62.5%) members of the administrative team.

The following cultural themes were evident within the executive administrative team at Northwest Community College: community, change and innovation, fairness, candor, hard work, learning and development, humor, teamwork, delegation and shared decision-making, and customer responsiveness and recognition of others. These themes were expressed in numerous team actions. What follows is a summary of these common cultural

themes and an illustration of how these themes were expressed in actions taken by administrative team members.

Relationship to environment. All team members shared a strong value for the community, and the role it played in the life of the college. Administrative team members operate from an assumption that the community is a vital part of the college, and that the college works in partnership with both its internal and external communities. This was demonstrated by numerous outreach activities, both within the organization and involving the college district. Examples included: president's breakfast with district civic leaders; college participation by team members in city chambers of commerce and service clubs; the annual advisory committee dessert and recognition of outstanding advisory committee members; the participation of executive staff and others in over 40 tax levy and bond measure campaigns; the cultivation of a strong relationship with the local university; the development of cooperative programs with area school districts; the development of three strong outreach centers to serve local communities within the district; support for an active training and business development center; first-of-term visits by Richard to instructional areas; twice-yearly all-staff meetings; a Christmas potluck; eating lunch regularly with college staff; end-of-term receptions for faculty; and regular, informal meetings with faculty association leaders. In the college's Institutional Statement of Purpose, the word *community* was mentioned 20 times. Interestingly, interviews revealed a consistent reference by both experienced and newer staff members to the role that the college's first two presidents played in fostering this value. Of interest to note is the fact that despite continuous community outreach, the college has required over 40 bond and levy elections to maintain a funding base for operations.

Team members operated consistently with the future in mind, demonstrating a value for change and innovation, and an assumption that it is important to look ahead and to change the organization to fit one's future view. The most striking example of this future orientation was the organization's planned \$4.5 million investment in technology. Other examples included a voiced interest in developing distance learning, and work with faculty and staff in one division to develop a future vision. Richard began reorganizing and hiring vice-presidents for academic affairs and college services in response to his perception that he could no longer properly support the pace and direction of instructional change from his office. There were numerous references during meetings or in interviews to educational reform and innovation, the continued development of learning communities (a move to redesign delivery of instruction for transfer students), the need to *keep up* with change, and the organizational changes that staff turnover were bringing about. A *Vision Toward the 21st Century* was published with the college's values statements. Once again, there were consistent references during interview to historical founding events, the excitement of an earlier period of rapid change and growth, and to historical figures that promoted earlier growth and development of the organization.

The nature of truth and reality. Administrative team members voiced or exhibited a value for fairness, operating from an assumption that fair treatment of others is important, or that organizational rules will enhance fair treatment of others. This value and set of assumptions was evidenced most frequently by behaviors surrounding rule-making or review, and comments in support of policy or rule development. Examples included Richard's hope that he would be remembered for this quality as a president; others' descriptions of Richard as a "fair-minded" president; numerous references during interviews to the college's past history of competition and budget distribution; administrative team

discussions about the qualities desired in a future instructional leader; a concern voiced by several about gender balance on the executive administrative team; a *no compete* policy in place with local businesses; a set of well-developed policy and administrative rule books; and Mary's belief that the story of her successful career at NWCC was evidence of fairness, commitment, and hard work. The college's published statement of values referenced fairness as a principle that should guide staff behavior.

Candor was another value voiced or demonstrated by administrative team members. Team members operated from an assumption that organizational reality should be revealed through open sharing of information and opinion. As the team worked together, this was consistently demonstrated by regular sharing of information during a "Good of the Order" ritual on meeting agendas, identification of issues by staff members during discussion, sharing of opinions on meeting topics, and voiced support for this value during interview sessions. Another observation was the apparent comfort by staff members in admitting when they did not know about or follow through on a topic, or when they did not know how to do something. Staff members asked each other for advice and shared personal stories with each other. Once again, past college history through interviews revealed a time when information was not freely shared, and when greater mistrust occurred among executive administrators. This reference was consistent in almost every interview.

Administrative team members shared a value for hard work and efficiency, operating from an assumption that hard work contributes to effectiveness. Team members also shared the assumption that responsible use of resources is key to effectiveness. Study participants shared reflections during interviews about the hard work and success of the college's early founding years. They spoke affectionately about the hard work habits of key figures from the college's past. The importance of working hard was either voiced as a value or shared as an expectation for college staff. Team members discussed the college's

efficient use of resources, whether human or financial. Examples of a strong work ethic were evidenced by staff members working more than a 40-hour week, working evenings or weekends, reducing administrative staff from 54 to 42 during the early 1990s, making efficient use of limited budget dollars, and continuing to limit student fee assessments.

The nature of human nature. Administrative team members shared a value for staff development, operating from an assumption that organizational members have a need and desire to learn and develop, and that this will, in turn, affect the ability of the organization to develop. Examples of administrative team actions that supported this belief included developing a budget decision package to increase staff development funds; maintaining staff development funds for all college employees, including part-time faculty; supporting an office dedicated to staff and organizational development; organizing fall and spring college-wide inservice sessions for staff; encouraging individuals to advance their education; developing case studies for managers' use; serving as mentors for staff members; developing learning communities; and writing grant proposals to fund staff and organizational development. The college's philosophy statement included numerous references to the terms growth, self-fulfillment, learning, and development. Published values statements for NWCC included two references to staff and professional development.

Humor was also strongly valued, expressed, or demonstrated by administrative team members. Staff members shared the assumption that an informal environment is important to their work. Study participants used humor as an icebreaker when first gathering, to reduce tension during times of conflict, and as a means of sharing honest opinions or observations. They told humorous stories and made wisecracks during meetings. Teasing about dress or behavior also occurred. There were times that the researcher was teased, or that humorous observations were made about what she was recording during meetings. A

total of 74 references to the use of humor were noted in field notes and during interviews. Interestingly, a videotaped interview with surviving members of the original founding board referred to humor as an important ingredient of the college's first board.

The nature of human relationships. The importance of teamwork was also expressed by administrative team members. Evidence of team behavior was noted or expressed through coordinating and integrating behaviors by the group. The executive administrative team met every other week as staff to the president, and every other week as College Council, including representatives from student government, other college administrators, as well as faculty and classified association representatives. At least one staff member noted the integration of professional technical and transfer programs within divisions that occurred early in the college's history as commitment to an integrated operation. Richard's regular meetings with faculty representatives, regular review of board agendas by the administrative team, the mix of instructional and student services representatives on the Academic Affairs Council, flattening of the organization through reduction of administrators, reference to integration and teamwork in Richard's communications to organizational members, voiced supported for self-managed work teams, and references to the unimportance of the organizational chart all support a common cultural assumption that how one works together is more important than who one works for. Once again, frequent references to the past historical influence of competition within the organization and a strong desire to leave that behind were noted.

The nature of organizational activity. Executive administrative team members expressed or demonstrated a value for delegating authority and empowering others to organize, plan, and share decisions on matters of organizational importance. Common assumptions that appeared to be operating included: granting authority with responsibility

improves effectiveness, decision-making is important organizational action, and decisions are improved through the participation of stakeholders. Administrative team actions that were evident in support of this value included the development of strong department chair positions and the Academic Affairs Council, strong classified work teams in Jessica's area, the formation of college subcommittees to work on accreditation, faculty bargaining and scholarships, the development of budget themes by staff in a retreat session, the increased authority of classified staff members in divisions where associate deans positions were eliminated, regular discussions by the administrative team about who needs to be involved in deciding or discussing issues, and delegation within divisions. There was an apparent tension in the team regarding the balance between espoused values for delegation and shared decision-making, and the apparent direct involvement Richard had in many administrative decisions. During interviews with study participants, nearly every individual, including Richard, expressed an interest for improving the ability of the executive administrative team to make joint decisions. A common pattern noted in field notes was the formulation of proposals by Richard, and the modification of these proposed solutions or strategies by the administrative team through a variety of observed behaviors, including seeking input, raising questions, sharing opinions, and involving others. Movement in this direction was supported by the college's published values statements which claimed that "an open, team-oriented management style will provide opportunities for staff input into decision-making."

Customer responsiveness was a strongly evident value shared by administrative team members. The team operated from an assumption that the customer deserves one's best service. This value was expressed through a desire to evaluate transcripts on-site at a local high-tech firm, development of a flexible snow closure procedure that allowed the college to remain open for key events, support for a strong "After Four" program for working adults,

development of strong outreach centers to serve local communities, discussions about the effectiveness of the current phone system and a potential survey of customers regarding their satisfaction with it, an expressed desire to improve service in meeting facilities repair requests for internal customers, and support for the development of learning communities to meet the needs of transfer students. Once again, an historical reference to founding figures that espoused a strong commitment to customer service was shared by many staff members.

Recognition of others was also evident as a value shared by administrative team members. The team operated from an assumption that recognition is an important organizational activity. This culture theme was demonstrated through recognition of staff at college board meetings, recognizing individual administrative team members or departmental accomplishments during Richard's staff meetings, and statements of support for this theme during participant interviews. The college recognized employee service through an annual awards ceremony. Staff members recognized individual accomplishments through Thank-U-Grams. Part-time faculty were honored at an annual college dinner, advisory committee members have been feted with an annual dessert function, and classified staff have participated in an annual week of appreciation activities.

Table 16 summarizes data elements that support the existence of shared values or cultural themes within the executive administrative team. Each cultural theme was developed from data segments containing similar values, beliefs, or behaviors. Code words used to describe similar data segments are noted, along with the frequency with which these data segments were found. The number of different data sources that support each code is noted. Each interview, document, or set of field notes indicates one data source.



TABLE 16

## DATA ELEMENTS THAT SUPPORT THE EXISTENCE OF CULTURAL THEMES

Schein's Category	Cultural Theme	Code Words Used	Frequency Noted*	Number of Data Sources
Environment	Community	Community Outreach	73 51	17 15
	Change/Innovation	Change Innovate Technology	48 26 36	14 11 20
Truth/Reality	Fairness	Fair Policy	21 20	7 17
	Candor	Honest Share Info ID Issue Opinion	73 103 88 42	16 14 15 10
	Hard Work	Hard Work Efficient	12 20	8 10
Human Nature	Learning and Development	Learn Develop	19 58	9 17
	Humor	Humor Informal	74 35	16 14
Human Relationships	Teamwork	Team Coordinate Integrate	29 13 25	11 8 8
Organizational Activity	Delegation of Authority and Shared Decision-Making	Delegate Authority Decision Process Question Involve Seek Input	25 42 94 107 39 68 76	10 14 18 15 9 15 13
		Customer Responsiveness	42 27 16 31	13 13 9 9
	Recognition of Others	Recognize	80	16

\*Total frequencies for individual code words found within the data range from a high of 107 citations to a low of 1 citation.

### Research Question Five

*What visible symbols of culture were found within the administrative team setting?*

Schein's (1992) model describes organizational culture as having three levels of manifestation. The first and most obvious level involves symbols of culture. Organizational symbols can be visible, such as artifacts, or verbal, such as metaphor or language.

Organizational traditions may combine the symbolism of both artifacts and language. These outward manifestations are merely symbolic of the culture itself, which is not visible nor in the awareness of those being observed. Dandridge, Mitroff, and Joyce (1983) describe three functions that symbols serve: (a) to characterize and reinforce the culture of the group; (b) to inspire, attract, or repel group members; and (c) to provide stability during periods of transition. Eoyang (1983) summarizes these functions as the communication of meaning.

As noted in previous chapters, this study employed the use of Masland's (1985) cultural windows to focus and guide observations and interview questions, and to elicit the symbols of culture within the executive administrative team. Masland proposes four windows useful for eliciting tangible cultural manifestations or symbols: (a) organizational stories, (b) organizational heroes, (c) visible or verbal organizational symbols, and (d) organizational traditions. Masland's windows proved extremely useful for eliciting description of the cultural artifacts, traditions, and symbolic actions described in this section and outlined in Table 17. Table 17 summarizes symbols that were found and their relationships to cultural themes within the executive administrative team at NWCC.

Research questions one through four assessed how values and assumptions were expressed by executive administrative team members, whether as individuals or as a group. Research question five serves to focus attention on specific symbols that reinforced the evident cultural themes. It is clear from the data that symbols reinforcing each cultural

TABLE 17

CULTURAL SYMBOLS RELATED TO CULTURAL THEMES FOUND  
WITHIN THE ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM

Cultural Themes	Evident Symbols
Community	Chamber of Commerce and service club memberships Displayed photographs of community leaders and board members Displayed United Way recognition awards Advisory Committee recognition event and awards President's breakfast Christmas potluck End-of-term faculty receptions Livestock judging banquet Part-time faculty recognition banquet Roadrunner as college mascot
Change/Innovation	\$4.5 million investment in technology Staff turnover ("newbies") and vacancies New Vice-President for Academic Affairs Bond measure and facilities planning College vision statement
Fairness	College philosophy and values statements Well-developed policy books Regular review of policy "No-competition" rule with local businesses No student fees
Candor	Regular all-staff meetings All-staff memos from president's office Good of the Order sharing at meetings Conflictive discussions at some staff meetings
Hard Work	1990 reduction in force Regular student FTE review Regular overtime Evening and weekend work
Learning and Development	Staff wellness program Grant writing for staff and organizational development Office for staff and organizational development Budget request for staff development Learning communities Fall and spring all-staff inservice sessions Staff development funds for management, faculty, classified staff, and part-time faculty
Humor	Regular jokes, wisecracks, stories and teasing at meetings Halloween costumes "Observing us is like watching a foreign film"

TABLE 17 (Continued)

Cultural Themes	Evident Symbols
Teamwork	Board room table (has no apparent head) Mix of professional technical and lower division collegiate within divisions Retreats at College Council and division level Regular meetings with faculty association College Council, Academic Affairs Council membership
Delegation and Shared Decision-Making	Department chairs Flat administrative structure Committee structure, presence of subcommittees and task forces New vice-president positions
Customer Responsiveness	Evening Services office Three outreach centers Training and Business Development Center After Four Degree College allows some events to continue during snow closures
Recognition of Others	Board agenda items related to recognition Annual services awards Thank-U-Grams Part-time faculty dinner Advisory Committee awards dessert Classified Appreciation Week

theme were active within the organization. These symbols consisted of artifacts, traditions, and prominent actions taken by administrative team.

The data presented in response to this study's research questions support the belief that administrative team actions and decisions were an expression of the common values and assumptions held by team members. It is evident that common values and assumptions were held by members of the executive administrative team at NWCC, and that actions and decisions by the group and its individuals did, in fact, express those values and assumptions.

Artifacts that symbolize cultural themes are found for almost every commonly shared value at NWCC. Symbols providing evidence of the value of the community to this college included prominently displayed photographs of significant community leaders, and

the presence of the Roadrunner as college mascot. The college vision statement attested to the significance of change and innovation for NWCC. A set of well-developed policy books, and the college philosophy and values statements illustrated the sense of fairness that permeated the executive level of the college. All-staff memos symbolized the importance of honest sharing of information by this college's president. The office for staff and organizational development stood as symbolic testimony to the importance of learning and development for this administration. The presence of Halloween costumes within the executive team meeting provided a sense of humor and informality that was evident. A board room table with no apparent head illustrated teamwork. An organizational chart depicted the flat administrative structure and importance of delegation. Three outreach centers and the Training and Business Development Center stood as evidence of customer responsiveness. Thank-U-Grams symbolized the recognition of others that existed in many forms.

Organizational traditions were abundant as symbols also. The President's Breakfast, Christmas potluck, livestock judging banquet, advisory committee awards, and end-of-term faculty receptions symbolized the importance of both internal and external communities to NWCC. Regular all-staff meetings and "Good of the Order" sharing in administrative team meetings illustrated honest sharing of information. Regular overtime, including evening and weekend work, stood as testimony to the importance of hard work for the organization. Fall and spring all-staff inservice sessions symbolized the significance of learning and development for staff. Divisional retreats and regular meetings between Richard and the faculty association illustrated the importance of teamwork. Annual service awards, the advisory committee awards dessert, Classified Appreciation Week, and the part-time faculty dinner symbolized the recognition of others that was an integral theme within this team.

Symbolic actions and decisions that illustrated cultural themes were also evident throughout the data. These included both significant and small actions and decisions. A recent decision to invest \$4.5 million over the next several years in technology illustrated the importance of change and innovation to the administrative team. A 1990 reduction-in-force decision by this same group illustrated the value in hard work and efficiency as a key to effectiveness. Discussion and decisions regarding locating several board meetings off campus at outreach centers and business sites illustrated the importance of community to the team. Alteration of the budget calendar indicated a responsiveness to internal customers who complained about the workload crunch that traditional budget calendars created. A decision to allow partial openings and to staff the college switchboard on snow days illustrated responsiveness to the college's external customers. Regular discussion, review, and decisions to revise numerous administrative regulations during the research period indicated the importance of policy and fairness to administration. The administrative team's support for Richard's decisions to reorganize and replace two vice-president positions was symbolic of the growing importance of delegation and shared decision-making to this president and team. Numerous decisions by the executive administrative team to channel discussions to College Council, Academic Affairs Council, or other groups and committees were also symbolic of the value for shared decision-making. The decision to develop a decision package to promote further staff development funding illustrated the importance of learning and development for the group. The development of integrated faculty/ management negotiation work groups illustrated the significance of teamwork. Significant discussion and decisions to enhance the advisory committee awards dessert illustrated the importance of recognition of others to this team.

## OTHER FINDINGS

In addition to answering the study's research questions, emergent data points to three additional findings that appear to be significant to the study of organizational culture within this setting. The first finding relates to the role that the executive administrative team played within NWCC. The second finding relates to the significance of historical figures and events to current values. The third finding relates to an apparent paradox of contrasting value sets found in three cultural themes within the executive administrative team.

### The Role of the Administrative Team Within the Organization

Based on answers to research questions three and four, it is evident that common values and assumptions were held by members of the administrative team at NWCC, and that actions and decisions by the group and its individuals did, in fact, express those values and assumptions. However, it is clear from conducting this study that the executive administrative team was not the primary decision-making unit within the institution. The following data show that the role of the administrative team was to influence organizational decisions made by the president, and to modify social involvement within the organization regarding problem-solving and decision-making.

Influencing organizational decisions. The college president had a very direct hand in many college affairs. Richard was observed during administrative team meetings to be the principal architect of strategy and proposals for action. Some notable examples were the strategy to allow the college board to adopt general planning guidelines that would give Richard the authority to authorize bond measure expenditures without board approval, and the spend-out formula for bond measure funds. Often, meetings were dominated by his agenda and his strong verbal abilities. The group did spend time in decision-making, but the

majority of decisions observed were minor. Examples of these decisions included developing a schedule of board presentations, the development of budget timeliness, and review and revision of board agendas. Several large decisions were observed to be made directly by Richard, such as ending a modified hiring freeze, deciding to fill the two vice-president positions, and appointing James to one vice-president position.

These observations were confirmed in interviews by every member of the executive administrative team. One team member said, "I would say the management style is very operationally focused. What I see happening is that people consult one-on-one with Richard about something, and then he makes a decision." Another said:

Richard is also a person who likes to have . . . I mean he's a very hands-on president, so he likes to have things come through his office. Over time what's happened at the college has been that all issues, large and small, arrive at his doorstep, and the institution, in a sense, waits for Richard to make decisions. The underlying decision-making structure of the college is just not very muscular.

Still another pointed to a problem with this process:

Sometimes in his eagerness to streamline process, he overlooks things that are required in processing. He wants to keep things simple and efficient, but there are human costs to that, such as maybe not hearing things, or hearing people out enough in the process of making decisions.

Yet another suggested:

Deans wait, in a sense, for significant decisions to be decided by Richard. . . . So, one of the things that we need to work on a little bit is not to take Richard out of the loop, but to have others at the college begin to develop some confidence and some facility for dealing with issues around decision-making. And, to Richard's great credit, if he was in this room, I would be saying the same thing and he would be agreeing with me. He does recognize that he has, over time, assumed so much responsibility that . . . there's just not enough underlying support and structure at this institution for decision-making.

Administrative team members commented directly about the executive administrators as a group. "We function as a sounding board for Richard at times." "Don't you notice that we never make decisions at these meetings?" "It comes and goes. Sometimes



it's just a place where he gives us *to do* lists." "College Council was originally intended as the decision-making body and other than policy review, I think little is decided there. . . . It's pretty much an information transmission body and I see the administrative team as being a staff to Richard, maybe giving him some advice on issues that he brings to us, but we don't make many decisions"

Finally, another commented on Richard's interest in changing the current process: "Richard has had a real operational focus. He's been real directly involved in the life of the institution. It's hard for him to keep his hands off the work of the divisions. I think maybe he would like to step away."

Richard confirmed this perspective during his interview:

Yeah. I have more influence on them than I think I do and I'm beginning to realize that. . . . There's part of me that really likes knowing everything. . . . They call me, "What are we going to do?" That happens all the time. It's like, "If we really need an answer, we call Richard." And, that's got to change. It is slowly changing. . . . The hard part is going to be taking my hands off of it. I've got fingerprints everywhere.

In response, the administrative team developed a strong ability to serve as a sounding board for Richard. They played a significant role in influencing his proposals, strategy, or decisions through a series of behaviors, such as raising questions, sharing information, sharing opinions, identifying issues, and seeking input from others. Table 18 summarizes the frequency of these behaviors, and the number of different data sources in which they were found.

TABLE 18

## ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM DECISION-MAKING BEHAVIORS

Noted Behavior	Field Note Frequency*	Number of Data Sources
Raising a question	39	9
Sharing information	103	14
Sharing an opinion	42	10
Identifying an issue	88	15
Seeking input from others	76	13

\*Frequency of field note citations ranged from a high of 107 to a low of 1.

Team members discussed why this particular decision-making scenario appeared to work for the institution. Reasons given included that fact that Richard was extremely well-liked throughout the organization and that he made good decisions. Interview transcripts indicate that team members may not be practiced in decision-making at the executive level. This study indicates that this decision-making model worked perhaps for all those reasons, but also because there were a significant number of shared values which shaped the eventual outcome or action taken.

Another interesting note was the presence of stories told during interviews that may well have shaped this president's decision-making behavior. The first was about the second college president, who was described as a very "hands on, caring, yet autocratic" individual. He was admired for his direct involvement and caring about the life of the institution. The second was about the third college president, who was characterized as "never being around," or "not really involved in the life of the community or organization . . . an outsider." Richard told stories about being "the anchor" during that period of time, taking care of the daily life of the organization that went unattended.

Richard's integral role during earlier periods of organizational history likely informed his current values and the quality of his current decisions. In addition, it may indicate why he was entrusted with his direct style of decision-making today. Decision-making historically, as it was during the research period, was likely based on shared organizational values.

Modifying social involvement in the organization. A significant role that the administrative team played in the life of the organization can be characterized as *traffic cop*. It was described to the researcher during interviews in this way: "Sometimes Richard just brings a list and we direct traffic." Behaviors that were directly observed to fit the traffic cop metaphor included (a) deciding to involve another individual or group in a particular decision, (b) deciding not to involve others in a discussion or strategy, (c) managing conflict, and (d) discussing how to process a particular issue or topic. Table 19 summarizes the frequency of these behaviors and the number of different data sources in which they were found.

TABLE 19  
ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM SOCIAL INVOLVEMENT BEHAVIORS

Noted Behavior	Frequency	Number of Data Sources
Involving others	68	15
Modifying others' involvement	29	9
Managing conflict	42	8
Discussing how to process	107	15

Traffic cop behavior illustrated a heavy processing component to organizational life at NWCC. In many instances, tentative decisions or strategies brought to the administrative team by Richard were discussed or tested in other organizational groups. This practice

enhanced the shared aspects of decision-making or action within the organization and in some cases gave the symbolic illusion of participation to predetermined decisions.

### The Influence of Historical Events and Figures on Current Values

As mentioned previously, one of the methodological strategies employed in this study was the use of Masland's (1985) cultural windows during interviews to assess cultural values and assumptions. Masland's windows proved extremely useful in focusing observations and interviews, and eliciting vivid organizational stories and descriptions of historical figures mentioned in this section. An interesting note is that, for many of the administrative team's evident values, there was a corresponding historical figure or event that was widely discussed in regard to that value. Historical influence appeared to have either strengthened the existing value or created a new, contrasting value. Examples illustrating this finding are noted below.

Community. During 1966-67 as the college was being formed, one of the cities within NWCC's district gave its strong, community education program to the college. This was the beginning of a coordinated attempt to pull together adult education programs from the various school districts within the new community college district boundaries. This seed of adult and community education grew into the presence of three large and viable outreach centers that currently exist, the development of a training and business development center, and a strong community-based family resource program, as well as a strong sense of community partnership.

The college's precarious funding situation and its attempt to pass bond and levy elections was threaded throughout its history as well. However, the lack of voter support for funding does not reflect a lack of outreach effort by the college. One staff members said, "We were always going to the voters for money. In 1982, we went out with four levies . . .

we spent a lot of time trying to pass levy elections." The president states, "We've done 43 levy and bond elections in the history of the college. We've been out there a lot . . . because of those elections, we are really connected to the community."

Several stories were told about the conflicts embedded in the siting decision for NWCC's campus. Strong community interest in the college erupted into a conflict between at least three potential sites within the district. Subsequent to the final site decision, the college maintained a strong obligation to outreach throughout the district. Stories about the college's mascot, the roadrunner, illustrated how classes were (and continue to be) spread throughout the district.

Change and innovation. The college's second president had a strong influence on the spirit of change and growth that exists within NWCC today. At least four staff members described Joe as "growth-oriented," "creating a creative and competitive, growth-oriented culture," "instrumental in getting the college built," and a "can do" spirit.

Candor. Several historical figures were mentioned to illustrate a previous "era of mistrust" described by numerous staff members. Key terms were: conflict, mistrust, power, and control.

You had an instructional dean who had some power in that he could generate enrollments and get money and resources for budget. We had a student services dean who was mean and obnoxious and only got what we had because he fought hard. We had a business manager who was in control of the money and didn't tell anybody where it was so he had all the power.

"There wasn't trust among divisions and the departments." Regarding the previous president,

"That's one thing Paul always used to hold . . . he'd keep things hidden from you."

In the last few years of his tenure here his credibility suffered because people had the suspicion that he was looking for another job and at one point he was asked and he said, "No," but then the word leaked out that in fact he was looking and he was a finalist . . . his credibility really suffered after that.

It is apparent that, from the top down, the current executive administrative team was interested in fostering an honest climate. Said Richard, "I talk to them, I tell them what's going to happen, I tell them where the money is." Another staff member stated, "Richard's very forthright. Richard and I have had our disagreements over the years, but I'll tell him what I think and he'll tell me what he thinks . . . so, he's real up front."

Hard work. Once again, the college's second president had a significant influence on the college's work ethic. A staff member described it this way: "He was just on top of everything. He was here at night. He was here in the day. He was pretty visible." This influence was shared by others in subsequent administrations. Regarding a former vice-president, "I loved him. He was the first person to work every morning. He was the last one to leave every night. He was at everything he needed to be at." Another staff member said, "In that period of time, you saw most of the division directors really putting in the hours. That was just the expectation, that you worked evenings and Saturdays."

A key event that nearly every staff member mentioned was the reduction in local and state financial support for community colleges. "That was a key event in that NWCC bit the bullet, whereas many institutions didn't, and so at the back end of that, we've not had to lay off anybody as a result of it since." Yet, the layoffs of some 30 individuals in 1990 reduced the administrative ranks significantly contributing to current workload.

Teamwork. NWCC experienced a strong past history of competition, from its founding years until the mid-1980s, when the college's previous president and vice-president began to reorganize and emphasize teamwork and collaboration, which has continued today. Every staff member recalled the competitive early years. "The one thing I remember about Joe is that he fostered competitiveness. Money followed FTE, so student services didn't find much support." "Joe's style was to encourage competition, and he saw that as being healthy

... a way to keep some energy going on in the college, to challenge one to generate FTE." Another said, "Within the early years, we grew as a culture competing ... competing in providing services, and getting more ... students, but competing against each other ... we had years of history here that it was okay to win or lose."

Staff members discussed the administration that followed and the changes that came. "Paul came in and recognized this competition was going on, and recognized that we needed to begin to change that. To recognize that we needed to deal with success of students. So, he began to create an organization to do that." "Phil came, and created an atmosphere of collaboration — he put student service administrators in with instructional directors to improve the lack of collaboration between student services and the faculty."

The wishes of the current executive administrative team were similar. Said James, "All of us need to be a part of the same enterprise. All of us need to work together."

Customer responsiveness. Historical figures clearly left an impression of the importance of service to the district's students, as well as business and industry partners. Several staff members mentioned Frank, a past student services administrator, as an important historical figure. His contribution: "He was such a strong student advocate," and "Frank left an attitude of 'let's really be focused on the student ... let's give them what we can in terms of support and encouragement.'"

Two current staff members played significant roles in stimulating a sense of responsiveness to the district's business and industry partners. "Clearly Tom has led us in many ways. ... He's led us into a lot of contacts with business and industry before that was the thing to do." Melissa also played an active role in early business partnership development which eventually led to the founding of the training and business development center. She also founded the parent education program and influenced the instructional

expansion of the area's outreach centers. These centers remain a clear and lasting symbol of community and customer responsiveness.

### The Paradox of Contrasting Values

In three cultural theme areas, the appearance of paradoxical values appeared within the executive administrative team. While the contrasting values were not shared widely enough among administrative team members to be considered cultural themes, their presence in the data, as indicated in Table 20, appeared significant enough to mention. Table 20 summarizes these value sets, the frequency with which data segments revealing these values were found, and the number of different data sources for each value. The paragraphs that follow illustrate this finding with sample data.

TABLE 20  
CONTRASTING VALUES

Value A	<i>f</i>	Number of Sources	Value B	<i>f</i>	Number of Sources
Hard work	12	8	Balancing workload	17	9
Teamwork	67	12	Separateness	56	7
Delegation and shared decision-making	451	18	Direct involvement and control	137	16

Hard work and balancing workload. While hard work and efficiency emerged as a cultural theme, administrative team members were also concerned with balancing their own workload and that of others. One notable example was Richard's expressed concern for mounting additional planning efforts during the year, while the organization prepared for college-wide accreditation. Another was the administrative team's decision to revise the budget planning calendar, because they were concerned about balancing the workload



throughout the year for instructional areas. Yet another staff member asked budget originators to collate budget materials to spare her staff work. Richard discussed why he no longer does all-staff off-campus social events: "What I realized is that they are so busy that it's just one more thing, so I quit doing that." Another staff member shared a concern about workload at the dean's level: "I don't understand how we get our work done at the instructional level. The dean becomes sort of a crisis manager when there's a real screaming problem."

Teamwork and a sense of separateness. While teamwork emerged as a strong cultural theme, administrative team members expressed varying concerns about the sense of separateness that existed, despite this strongly espoused value. The sense of division between faculty and other organizational members was noted by almost every staff member. One staff member commented on the strength and importance of the faculty within the institution: "The chairs, in general, have a lot of influence. Things are not going to move around here if the faculty or the department chairs are seriously opposed." Yet another voiced this sentiment: "I think there is a strong value of the faculty. Faculty get paid better than the managers and all that stuff." Comparisons were made about the distribution of staff development dollars among organizational members: "There's always been some money for development, but faculty's always had the lion share of that." Yet another pointed to Richard's regular meetings with faculty association leadership.

The sentiment that NWCC focuses on the faculty to the exclusion of others was shared by many team members. A notable example of this focus is the end-of-term receptions for faculty.

The classified are not directly invited but they come anyway. Some of them boycott it. . . . It's very ambiguous, very unclear, and Richard absolutely refuses to change it, and so that says that it's very important to faculty that they feel singled out. . . . The intent is good, but people are concerned

about it. It sends a different symbolic message about the strength and importance of the faculty.

The college's statement of purpose mentioned faculty, but not other NWCC staff.

Other observations that contributed to the sense of continuing divisions within the college included comments regarding the difficulty of sharing resources among departments, and the independence of the outreach centers and professional technical programs in general. One staff member summarized this sentiment by saying: "All of the folks who were here in the early days tended to be entrepreneurial and independent in spirit. Now, that leads to some potential difficulties with newer management philosophies of teams and keeping a focus on the institution."

Shared decision-making/delegation and direct involvement/control. Another strong cultural theme that emerged was a value for shared decision-making and delegation of authority. This value was tempered by equally strong evidence of a value for direct involvement held principally by the college president. This phenomenon was discussed in an earlier section of Chapter IV.

## SUMMARY

Northwest Community College's executive administrative team shared cultural values and assumptions related to the community, change and innovation, fairness, candor, hard work, learning and development, humor, teamwork, delegation and shared decision-making, customer responsiveness, and recognition of others. These themes were found to be expressed in numerous administrative team actions. Symbols reinforcing each cultural theme were found to be active within the organization. These symbols consisted of artifacts, traditions, and prominent actions taken by the administrative team. The primary role of the

administrative team at NWCC was to influence organizational decisions and modify social involvement within the organization regarding problem-solving or decision-making.

Historical influences, such as key organizational figures or events, appeared to have played a role in culturating some cultural themes through strengthening existing values or creating new, contracting values. Paradoxical value sets were found within three cultural themes: Hard work (balancing workload), teamwork (separateness), and delegation and shared decision-making (direct involvement).

## CHAPTER V

### SUMMARY, DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This chapter provides an overview of the research project. Major findings are presented and discussed in terms of the literature. Implications for higher education administration are presented, as well as recommendations for future research. Concluding statements point to the value of interpretive research in the study of organizational culture, the significance of values tension for organizational conflict, the cultural themes that influenced administration team action at Northwest Community College (NWCC), the importance of historical events and leaders to the evolution of culture, the ongoing nature of organizing, and the value of learning more about one's own organizational culture.

#### THESIS SUMMARY

##### Study Purpose

Organizational culture is broadly recognized as a significant force in organizational action. Since the phenomenon of culture has real impact on organizations, our understanding of that impact is vital to organizational health. While academic settings provide a rich environment for studying culture, relatively little research on culture has occurred in this setting. This study contributes to our understanding of the administrative subculture within one community college setting. Through interpretation of the underlying values and assumptions operating within the executive administrative team at NWCC, a greater understanding of the role culture plays in group dynamics at that level has begun to be developed. This understanding can serve as the basis for further investigation of the role that culture plays with other groups in different settings.

This study was initiated upon the belief that administrative team actions and decisions in a higher educational institution are an expression of the common values and assumptions held by team members. Therefore, this study's purpose was to examine the cultural influences at work within one community college administrative team and explore how cultural themes were expressed in actions taken by these community college leaders.

The following research questions were developed to focus on cultural symbols, cultural themes, and the expression of cultural themes within the community college administrative team at NWCC:

1. What values were expressed by individual team members?
2. What assumptions about reality were held by individual team members?
3. Were common values and assumptions held by administrative team members? If so, what common cultural themes were evident?
4. How were cultural themes expressed in actions taken by administrative team members?
5. What visible symbols of culture were found within the administrative team setting?

### Theoretical Framework

This study used Smircich's (1983a) framework of organizational symbolism to inform the overall research goal of interpreting cultural themes found in a community college administrative team, and describing how these themes were expressed in organizational action.

Edgar Schein's work (1983, 1984, 1990, 1992, 1993a, 1993b) was used to conceptualize culture. Schein's model describes organizational culture as having three levels of manifestation: outward symbols of culture, organizational values, and basic assumptions

about reality. Schein's framework focuses on the assumptions and beliefs about an organization's relationship to its environment, the way to determine truth and reality, its view of human nature, the relationships between group members, and the nature of organizational activity. Each dimension represents a continuum for exploring the assumptions which motivate behavior.

### Methodology

This study employed the interpretive methodology of ethnography, integrating field observation with semi-structured interviews and selected review of documents to gather empirical data related to the values, assumptions, and actions of administrative team members. Research took place on the campus of NWCC. The study population selection was purposeful; study participants were determined through membership on the executive administrative team within the organization. Study participants included the president, his assistant, a vice president, four deans, and a director. Members varied in age and included a mix of relatively new hires and individuals who had been with the college for some time. The group included three women and five men.

### Summary of Study Results and Findings

This study's research questions examined the presence of cultural symbols and the expression of individual and shared cultural values and assumptions within the executive administrative team at NWCC. Analysis of data indicated the following study results:

1. NWCC's executive administrative team shared cultural values and assumptions related to the community, change and innovation, fairness, candor, hard work, learning and development, humor, teamwork, delegation and shared decision-making, customer responsiveness, and recognition of others.

2. These shared values and assumptions, or cultural themes, were expressed in numerous administrative team actions and decisions.

3. Symbols reinforcing each cultural theme were active within the organization. These symbols consisted of artifacts, traditions, and prominent actions and decisions by the administrative team.

In addition to answering research questions which explored the expression of cultural themes at NWCC, this study contributes to our understanding of organizational culture at NWCC through the following research findings:

1. The primary role of the administrative team at NWCC was to influence organizational decisions and modify social involvement within the organization regarding problem-solving or decision-making.

2. Historical influences, such as key organizational figures or events, appear to have played a role in cultivating some cultural themes, through strengthening existing values, or creating new, contrasting values.

3. Paradoxical value sets were found within three cultural themes: hard work (balancing workload), teamwork (separateness), and delegation and shared decision-making (direct involvement).

## DISCUSSION OF STUDY RESULTS AND FINDINGS

### The Presence of Cultural Themes and Paradoxical Value Sets

NWCC's executive administrative team shared cultural values and assumptions related to the community, change and innovation, fairness, honesty, hard work, learning and development, humor, teamwork, delegation and shared decision-making, customer responsiveness, and recognition of others. At the same time, paradoxical value sets were

found within three cultural themes: hard work (balancing workload), teamwork (separateness), and delegation and shared decision-making (direct involvement and control).

Schein (1992) claims that if a group of people have shared a significant number of important experiences in the process of solving problems, one can assume that such common experiences have led them, over time, to a shared view of the world and their place in it. Over time, this shared view is taken for granted and drops from awareness. Culture in this sense is a learned product of group experience and is, therefore, found where there is a definable group with a significant history.

This particular team had significant shared history, with a total of 127 years of college service among team members. That averages just under 16 years of service per staff member, but this number is a bit distorted, considering that five of eight staff members have served between 20 and 28 years with the organization. It is not unexpected, therefore, that the administrative team would share a large number of values.

However, the paradox of contrasting value sets contained within three cultural themes is intriguing. For example, while hard work and efficiency emerged as a cultural theme, the majority of staff members were also concerned with balancing their own workload, and that of others. While teamwork emerged as a strong cultural theme, administrative team members also expressed varying degrees of a sense of separateness that existed between and among certain college groups. Despite a strongly espoused value for shared decision-making and delegation of authority, the interactions of the administrative team indicated strong evidence of a value for direct involvement in college affairs by the president.

Schein (1992) claims that group life is best represented by a paradoxical model in which oppositions and conflicts are perpetually present. Schein reminds us that not all shared values undergo transformation into cultural assumptions. Many remain conscious and



are easily articulated as group norms. Such values will predict much of the behavior that can be observed at what Schein calls the "artifactual level." But if those values are not based on prior cultural learning, they may also come to be seen only as what Argyris and Schon (1978) have called "espoused" values, which predict what people will say in a particular situation, but may be out of line with what they will actually do in situations where those values should be operating. Thus a paradox may exist between what is said and what is done. This description likely applies to Richard's values and behaviors concerning decision-making, and the resulting tension with the evident cultural theme of delegation and shared decision-making.

Schein (1992) also identifies the confrontation of dependency/authority as the basic issue that a group must resolve as a group. Who will lead; who will have how much authority, power, and influence over whom; and who will be dependent upon whom are examples of this basic issue. It appears that the administrative team is beginning to renegotiate this basic issue as group membership changes and as the college develops. Perhaps the strong authority and direct control of the current president was a model from the past, that worked in the past, but must now change as the values tension or paradox grows.

Richard agrees with the assessment of his strong role in daily decision-making as well as the need for change. "They all depend on me to do it. I have allowed them to do that. That's not . . . in the long-term best interest of the college. It's worked in the transition . . . but if we are going to take the next step, that's got to change." It appears that Richard's espoused values for shared decision-making and delegation of authority may well have been an aspiration for the future rather than an internalized guide for current action.

Hackett's (1990) description of contrasting value sets also provides a model for understanding the potential for both shared and paradoxical values within an organization's

culture. He argues that culture is not a central tendency, but instead is perhaps best expressed as the "moral space" within which people live. This space is described as being crosscut by several axes of variation, the poles of which are anchored by contrasting value sets. These axes define the potential for movement as value tensions result within a setting.

Using Hackett's (1990) analogy, one could conclude that the shared values of the administrative team represent a clustering at a number of poles, while the presence of paradox represents movement along a number of axis. The values tension is creating movement in areas relating to decision-making, authority, workload, and teamwork. It is possible that a larger study sample or one more varied in terms of longevity would have revealed greater paradox or values tension among cultural themes.

Affirming the sense of separateness expressed by team members, Platt (1989) agrees that colleges are composed of several dominant subgroups such as faculty, administrators, and students. The author argues that models which concentrate on the collective culture may ignore the important influence of these cultural tiers.

This notion fits the concept of subculture described by numerous authors (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Gregory, 1983; Harman, 1989; Mitchell & Willower, 1992; Riley, 1983; Sackmann, 1992; Tierney, 1988b). The administrative team appears to fit Van Maanen and Barley's (1985) criteria for academic subcultures, which include: (a) regular interaction; (b) striving for and sharing a perception of group consciousness; (c) shared problems of a common nature; and (d) action on the basis of shared values and norms. However, the concept of subculture also provides a useful framework for understanding conformity and diversity in organizational values. It is unclear from the current study whether cultural themes evident in the administrative team were shared by other NWCC subcultures. An important future study might assess the role of the college's other subcultures (such as the strongly evident faculty subculture) and the interactions of these subgroups in creating or

changing the collective culture. Clearly, an expanded study of other organizational groups would enhance understanding of shared and paradoxical values within the college.

Schein (1993b) characterizes the problem of coordination and integration in an organization as ultimately a problem of meshing subcultures. The greatest hindrance occurs through variations in hierarchical subcultures, because of the myth that all management speaks the same language. Schein claims that variations in hierarchical subcultures cause difficulty in program implementation and change. Again, it is unclear from the current study whether cultural themes evident at the executive level are shared with the rest of the administrative team or whether study findings would be supported by other administrative groups.

#### Administrative Team Role Within the Organization

The administrative team's primary role at NWCC was found to be that of influencing organizational decisions, and modifying organizational involvement regarding problem-solving or decision-making. This thesis identified decision-making as a form of organizational action that expressed the cultural themes of a key group within the community college: the executive administrative team. While this bias was supported by evidence linking organizational actions to cultural themes, what became obvious during the course of this study was the fact that the administrative team was not the primary decision-making body within the institution. The college president, while espousing shared decision-making, was observed to be the principal architect of strategy and proposals for action. In response, the administrative team developed a strong ability to serve as a sounding board for Richard. They played a significant role in influencing his proposals, strategies, or decisions through a series of behaviors such as raising questions, sharing information, sharing opinions, identifying issues, and seeking input from others.

Staff members discussed why this particular decision-making scenario appeared to work for the institution. Reasons given included that fact that Richard was extremely well-liked throughout the organization, and that he made good decisions. Interview transcripts indicate that team members may not have been practiced in decision-making at the executive level. This study indicates that this decision-making model worked perhaps for all those reasons, but also because there were a significant number of shared values which shaped the eventual outcome or action taken.

In all but two cases (flexibility and direct involvement), values that emerged as important to Richard were shared by the majority of the administrative team. These included such cultural themes as community, change and innovation, fairness, honesty, hard work, learning and development, humor, teamwork, delegation and shared decision-making, and recognition of others. These themes were traced to at least 11 large and small decisions influenced by this team during the research period. This finding suggests that who makes the ultimate decision may not be as important to the organization as the quality of the decision itself. Because a strong value for shared decision-making existed at NWCC, this administrative team had influence over the quality of most decisions.

Another significant role that was observed the administrative team played in the life of the organization was that of *traffic cop*. Behaviors that were directly observed to fit the traffic cop metaphor included: (a) deciding to involve another individual or group in a particular decision, (b) deciding not to involve others in a discussion or strategy, (c) managing conflict, and (d) discussing how to process a particular issue or topic.

Traffic cop behavior illustrated a heavy processing component to organizational life at NWCC. In many instances, tentative decisions or strategies brought to the administrative team by Richard were discussed or tested in other organizational groups. This practice

enhanced the shared aspects of decision-making or action within the organization and in some cases gave the symbolic illusion of participation to predetermined decisions.

Platt (1989) studied institutions of higher education to determine the relationship between the culture of a college and its decision-making behavior. Her results indicated that, although decision-making behavior typically appears to be an independent process, in reality, it is bounded, in part, by cultural assumptions and beliefs that affect the way problems are defined, approached, and decided. Beyer's (1981) work was seminal to her study. This thesis also suggests that cultural themes influence the process of decision-making. The strong role of the administrative team in influencing the decision process, and in particular the process of involving others, reflected staff values and assumptions regarding shared decision-making, teamwork, and the importance of community.

Decisions that illustrate or symbolize cultural themes were also evident throughout the data. These included both significant and small actions and decisions. A recent decision to invest \$4.5 million over the next several years in technology illustrated the importance of change and innovation to the administrative team. A 1990 reduction-in-force decision by this same group illustrated the value in hard work and efficiency as a key to effectiveness. Recent discussion and decisions regarding locating several board meetings off campus at outreach centers and business sites illustrated the importance of community to the team. Alteration of the budget calendar indicated a responsiveness to internal customers who complained about the workload crunch that traditional budget calendars created. A decision to allow partial openings and to staff the college switchboard on snow days illustrated responsiveness to the college's external customers. Regular discussion, review, and decisions to revise numerous administrative regulations during the research period indicated the importance of policy and fairness to administration. The administrative team's support for Richard's decisions to reorganize and replace two vice-president positions during the

research period was symbolic of the growing importance of delegation and shared decision-making to this president and team. Numerous decisions by the executive administrative team to channel discussions to College Council, Academic Affairs Council, or other groups and committees were also symbolic of the value for shared decision-making. The decision to develop a budget package to promote further staff development funding illustrated the importance of learning and development for the group. The development of integrated faculty/ management negotiation work groups illustrated the significance of teamwork. Significant discussion and decisions to enhance the advisory committee awards dessert illustrated the importance of recognition of others to this team. Clearly, the symbolic importance of decisions, whether individual or group, cannot be overstated for community college leaders.

Schwartzman's (1989) study of decision-making and meetings is useful in understanding the administrative team dynamics at NWCC. Schwartzman emphasizes in her work that meetings may be important in American society because they generate the appearance that reason and logical processes are guiding discussions and decisions. According to Schwartzman, what is important in a meeting setting is not the decision but the relationship negotiations, struggles, and commentaries that ultimately influence organizational power and structure.

Schwartzman (1989) suggests that meetings are what decisions, policies, and problems are about. She suggests that meetings transform the behavior of individuals into organizational action. Meetings and meeting dialogue become transformed into minutes and reports, which become evidence of organizational action, results, decisions, and control. She characterizes meetings as, "communicative events that organize interaction, thereby structuring communication, as well as providing an interpretive scheme, generating cultural patterns that come to serve as models of and for activities and beliefs" (Schwartzman, 1989,

p. 61). In the case of NWCC, it became clear that decision-making was not the primary focus for executive administrative team meetings.

Studies of decision-making models indicate that the administrative team setting may in fact have used a variety of models. Schwartzman's (1989) view corresponds with March and Olsen's (1976) *artifactual or non-decision-making model*. This model shifts the focus from decisions to interaction and is characterized by the assumption that decision outcomes are an unintended product of processes with dynamics of their own. March and Olsen also present the notion that most decision models are actually folk models. They propose that decisions are "a stage for many dramas" (p. 12), including: (a) an occasion for executing standard operating procedures and fulfilling role-expectations, duties, or earlier commitments; (b) an occasion for defining virtue and truth, during which the organization discovers or interprets what has happened to it, what it has been doing, what it is going to do, and what justifies its actions; (c) an occasion for distributing glory or blame for what has happened in the organization, and thus an occasion for exercising, challenging, or reaffirming friendship or trust relationships, antagonisms, power, or status relationships; (d) an occasion for expressing and discovering self-interest and group interest, for socialization and for recruiting; and (e) an occasion for having a good time, for enjoying the pleasures connected with taking part in a choice situation. Research supporting evidence of the importance of policy and operating procedures, honesty and shared information, the importance of recognizing others, the use of humor, and the informal nature of the administrative team setting all confirmed this view.

Additional decision-making models that appeared to fit the administrative team setting included two models first identified by Baldrige (1971). The bureaucratic model, which is characterized as hierarchical, traditional and formal, is based on authority and designated power. This corresponded with Richard's strong decision-making role as

president. The next is the rational model, which places high value on logic and order. Decisions within this context follow a logical and linear process, and the outcome is determined primarily by common values of the organization. This corresponded with the influence of policy and fairness within the Administrative team setting. Of interest to note is Hamm's 1992 study which found the rational decision-making style most effective among community colleges studied.

Hamm (1992) describes decision-making as one of several regularly-occurring organizational activities that has significant impact on the life of the organization. Taylor (1982) also writes about the importance of understanding decision-making practices for academic managers. This author claims that the need for a better understanding of decision-making by academic managers is reflected in the nature of problems which confront colleges and universities today. As institutions of higher education have increased in size and complexity, public demands for accountability have increased. Academic managers, however, often remain unaware of their decision-process behaviors. Therefore, they remain unable to modify and improve their decision-making behaviors.

This study points to the importance of culture in shaping organizational decision-making. Cultural themes at NWCC influenced the role of the administrative team in processing decisions and involving others. Strongly shared values resulted in good decisions, regardless of how or by whom they were made. The presence of symbolic actions and decisions for each cultural theme illustrates the symbolic importance of decision-making to the institution as a whole.

The researcher believes that the process of conducting this study with the executive administrative team at NWCC resulted in a greater focus on the decision-making process by individuals and perhaps by the group as well. Their candor, and expressed value for change and development provided evidence that this group seemed able to learn, modify, and



improve upon their decision-making process and related interactions. A follow-up study would confirm this view.

### The Role of History in Shaping Cultural Themes

Andrew Masland's (1985) cultural windows were used to focus observations in the administrative team setting and to guide participant interviews. This framework proved to be extremely useful in helping to narrow the initial focus for observations. Also, the use of each window provided an easy guide for interviews with study participants. As a result, the researcher was able to obtain vivid descriptive stories concerning important historical events, heroes, symbols, and traditions.

What became obvious during the course of the study was the fact that historical influences, such as key organizational figures or events, tempered some cultural themes. For many of the administrative team's evident values, there was a corresponding historical figure or event that was widely discussed in regard to that value. For example, the strong seeds of community education sown early in the college's history grew into several viable outreach centers that currently extend the sense of community partnership. The college's second president cultivated a spirit of change and innovation that still exists. A previous era of mistrust fostered a strong value for open, honest communication and shared information. These historical influences have, in some cases, strengthened existing values and in other cases resulted in the creation of new, contrasting values. These historical influences were outlined in many stories told by study participants.

Clark (1972) describes the value of organizational stories in recounting particular accomplishments or actions of key individuals and groups. He claims that organizational stories tend to represent that which is unique about an organization. As a group develops and accumulates a history, some of this history becomes embodied in stories about events

and leadership behavior. Thus the story reinforces cultural assumptions and teaches these assumptions to newcomers (Schein, 1992). Research conducted on organizational stories indicates that stories are an important form for (a) communicating historical experiences and providing individuals with a way to weave this experience into discussions of current activities, (b) distinguishing one's organization from others, (c) socializing new members into an organization, (d) documenting successes and failures and drawing conclusions from these examples, (e) indirectly communicating information to individuals about topics too sensitive to discuss directly, and (f) shaping and sustaining individuals' images of the organization in which they work (Masland, 1985).

This group's stories revolved around college founding and siting challenges, a subsequent era of growth and competition, efforts to pass bond measures through the years, an era of conflict and mistrust, the transition from past president to Richard, and the influence of reduced local and state financial support on college finances. These stories pointed to the unique value of the community for this institution and illustrated the success of hard work, community outreach, and teamwork. NWCC stories pointed out the problems associated with competition, conflict, and demonstrating candor. Stories pointed to the importance of change and the need for efficiency throughout this institution's life.

Organizational heroes were an important aspect of these historical stories. Heroes are individuals who are or have been significant to an organization. They often represent values and beliefs in human form (Deal & Kennedy, 1982; Dill, 1982). Clark (1970), and Kuh and Whitt (1988) emphasize the importance of key individuals in a collegiate setting. The influence of dominant actors, such as presidents, founding fathers, or popular faculty members is captured in studies by Clark (1970), Kelly and Bredeson (1991), and Ortiz and Hendrick (1987).

Several heroes were mentioned in NWCC stories. Joe, a former president, was the first and most prominent figure. Stories about Joe revolved around the early growth and building of the campus, and mentioned a *can do* spirit and an ethic of hard work, growth, and change. He was described as "hands-on," "caring," and "autocratic." This key figure contributed to the continued existence of today's values of community, change and innovation, and hard work. Joe likely also contributed to Richard's current style of direct involvement and control of the decision-making process.

Paul, also a past president, was mentioned in stories describing an "era of conflict and mistrust." The moral of these stories generally concerned the importance of collaboration, candor, and sharing of information. Paul was fondly mentioned for his contribution to college diversity. He was also mentioned in stories which had, as a moral, the importance of college leaders being directly involved in the life of the internal and external community. Paul's role in the organization likely reinforced Richard's current extent of involvement in the community and strong value for sharing organizational information.

Finally, Frank was mentioned for his advocacy of a key organizational group: the students. Melissa and Tom were mentioned for their promotion of community outreach and responsiveness to the district's external customers and partners.

The researcher observed that the majority of stories included a past president as a central figure. Schein's (1992) text, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, describes the role of leaders as critical to the formation of culture. Leaders influence cultural embedding through what they pay attention to; how they react to critical organizational incidents; how they allocate rewards and status; their role modeling and coaching behaviors; and the criteria they use for recruiting, selecting, promoting, retaining, or retiring group members. He states:

Culture is learned and taught through a variety of explicit and implicit mechanisms. The things that solve a group's problems repeatedly and that reduce anxiety will survive and become a part of the culture. But only those solutions that are proposed or invented can become candidates for cultural elements. Cultures do not start from scratch. Founders and group leaders will impose assumptions, and influence the group. (p. 221)

The results of this study indicate that strongly evident cultural themes within this executive administrative team and the executive leaders themselves are vital to the current and future culture of this organization.

Schein (1992) reminds us that catalytic marker events or critical incidents are an important stimulus to the creation of culture. Culture is learned. If one carefully reconstructs a group's history, one will find critical events that were charged with high levels of emotion and clear cognitive redefinitions or insight. Depending on the response the group takes to that event and the results of that response, a new set of lessons is learned about how to act and what to do. This event then becomes a legitimizing piece of culture, teaching lessons to new members. The above stories illustrate how key historical events at NWCC paved the way for certain cultural themes within the administrative team.

Schein (1992) describes two types of learning mechanisms, both of which were evident for the administrative: positive problem-solving situations, which positively reinforce the value; and anxiety-avoidance situations, which positively reinforce a value that may be in opposition. Cultural themes that were positively reinforced at NWCC included community, change and innovation, and hard work. Cultural themes were strengthened as a result of anxiety-avoidance at NWCC were community, teamwork, and candor. This finding points to the importance of understanding one's organizational history and its links to current culture, as well as a leader's role in cultivating future culture.

### The Reinforcement of Cultural Themes by Symbols

Masland's (1985) cultural windows were used to focus observations and interviews on symbols of culture. Symbols reinforcing every cultural theme were found to be active at NWCC. These symbols consisted of artifacts, traditions, and prominent actions taken by the administrative team.

Artifacts that symbolized cultural themes were found for almost every commonly shared value at NWCC. Symbols providing evidence of the value of the community to this college included prominently displayed photographs of significant community leaders, and the presence of the Roadrunner as college mascot. The college vision statement attested to the significance of change and innovation for NWCC. A set of well-developed policy books, and the college philosophy and values statements illustrated the sense of fairness that permeates the executive level of the college. All-staff memos symbolized the importance of honest sharing of information by this college's president. The office for staff and organizational development stood as symbolic testimony to the importance of learning and development for this administration. The presence of Halloween costumes within the executive team meeting provided a sense of humor and informality that was evident. A board room table with no apparent head illustrated teamwork. An organizational chart depicted the flat administrative structure and importance of delegation. Three outreach centers and the Training and Business Development Center stood as evidence of customer responsiveness. Thank-U-Grams symbolized the recognition of others that existed in many forms.

Organizational traditions were abundant as symbols also. The President's Breakfast, Christmas potluck, livestock judging banquet, advisory committee awards, and end-of-term faculty receptions symbolized the importance of both internal and external communities to NWCC. Regular all-staff meetings and "Good of the Order" sharing in administrative team

meetings illustrated honest sharing of information. Regular overtime, including evening and weekend work, stood as testimony to the importance of hard work for the organization. Fall and spring all-staff inservice sessions symbolized the significance of learning and development for staff. Divisional retreats and regular meetings between Richard and the faculty association illustrated the importance of teamwork. Annual service awards, the advisory committee awards dessert, Classified Appreciation Week, and the part-time faculty dinner symbolized the recognition of others that was an integral theme within this team.

Symbolic actions that illustrated themes were also evident in the data. These were discussed in a previous section of Chapter V.

Schein's (1992) model describes organizational culture as having three levels of manifestation. The first and most obvious level involves symbols of culture. Organizational symbols can be visible, such as artifacts, or verbal, such as metaphor or language.

Organizational traditions, actions, and decisions may combine the symbolism of both artifacts and language. These outward manifestations are merely symbolic of the culture itself, which is not visible, nor in the awareness of those being observed.

Dandridge (1983) describes three functions that symbols serve: (a) to characterize and reinforce the culture of the group, (b) to inspire, attract or repel group members, and (c) to provide stability during periods of transition. Eoyang (1983) claims that symbols, when used as a means of organizational communication, serve important functions. First, they are more concise than the meanings they represent. Second, symbols are more easily manipulated than original thought. Third, the physical character of symbols makes easy storage and retrieval of information possible. Fourth, symbols can be reproduced, enhancing the reliability of their communication. Fifth, they enable the articulation of abstract ideas. In short, the main function that symbols serve for humans is that they facilitate communication of meaning.

The artifacts, rituals, and traditions found at NWCC symbolize cultural themes and communicate culture in much the same way that historical figures personify specific values. This finding points to the importance of cultural symbols in signifying underlying organizational values.

## STUDY IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Implications for Higher Education Administration

The process of learning the culture of the administrative team at NWCC proved to be an extremely useful one for this researcher. Masland's (1985) cultural windows provided a focus for observations and interviews. Focus through each window resulted in vivid, rich detail that shaped eventual understanding of cultural themes within the executive administrative team. This thesis provides a model for others to use in the study of organizational culture regardless of setting.

Given the strong role that evident symbols and historical figures or events have in shaping and transmitting culture within an organization, it is vital for those in higher education administration to consider learning more about their own cultures, especially when first entering an organization. The methodology of this study provides a clear and useful process for doing so. Organizational history, key events and players, organizational traditions and cultural symbols all contribute to an understanding of cultural themes. Interviews or discussions with organizational members, using Masland's (1985) cultural windows as a focus is recommended as an easy means for beginning to learn more about one's own organizational culture.

The importance of leaders and leadership behavior to the evolution of culture at NWCC cannot be overemphasized. Leaders influence the development of cultural themes through what they pay attention to, how they react to critical organizational incidents, how

they allocate rewards and status, their role modeling and coaching behaviors, and the criteria they use for recruiting, selecting, promoting, retaining, or retiring group members (Schein, 1992). This study certainly suggests a link between leader behavior and the cultural themes that emerge over time. Periods of organizational change or crisis are suggested as prime opportunities to assess the emergence and evolution of culture.

An increased awareness of a leader's role in transmitting culture should influence future leadership training and development. In addition, this knowledge should motivate leaders to learn more about their own organization's history. This learning is vital to community college leaders' understanding of the role they play in shaping current and future organizational culture.

Organizational decision-making at NWCC was bounded and shaped by cultural assumptions and values. This was evident in the role that the administrative team played with Richard in decision-making, and with others in terms of modifying organizational involvement around decision-making. Since this group's interactions appeared to be as important as their decisions, an understanding of the role that an administrative team plays within an organization, through an analysis of group behaviors, is an important adjunct to understanding the organization's decisions. Just as important is an understanding of cultural themes. Strongly shared values will shape decisions, regardless of the decision-making process. Further study of administrative teams in other settings is recommended to determine whether the NWCC's administrative role was unique or typical of academic settings.

This study also enhances our understanding of group and intergroup conflicts by illustrating the paradox of contrasting value sets within cultural themes. Schein's (1992) paradoxical model of groups and Hackett's (1990) model of contrasting value sets provide a framework for understanding the tension and organizational movement that contrasting



values may create. The notion of academic subcultures is also useful in understanding organizational conflict. Additional study of organizational culture in other settings would contribute to an overall understanding of the cultural themes common to academia and the influence of academic subcultures on those values and assumptions.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

This study contributed to an understanding of the administrative culture in one community college setting. Applying these same research methods to other sites would enhance our knowledge of community college culture across settings or within unique subcultural groups, such as faculty and students. The question of whether there is a unique community college culture could be explored through such studies.

The role of history, and historical events and figures in shaping cultural themes within a present-day organization was clearly present within this study. This was an important finding. Using Masland's (1985) cultural windows to investigate the role of history in other settings and with other groups would improve our understanding of how cultural evolution occurs through critical events, and leadership actions. This research is timely since many of the founding community college leaders are now retiring.

In addition, more comprehensively exploring the culture of an organizational setting or settings over time could address such questions as: How does organizational culture evolve? How do organizational subcultures contribute to overall cultural themes? How do current leaders and leadership actions contribute to future culture? Are there cultural themes that persist over time? Longitudinal studies would help identify the uniqueness of organizational culture within a setting as well as the stability or variation in cultural themes over time.

This study investigated one subculture within a single organization. A better understanding of how the evident cultural themes related to other organizational or community values would have painted a more comprehensive picture of NWCC's organizational culture. Were administrative team values shared by community leaders? By other college groups, such as faculty? By the rest of the administrative team? By the Board? Addressing the same research questions to other subcultural groups would complete the cultural profile of this community college, from the perspectives of all major stakeholders. Research over a longer period of time might uncover additional cultural themes and symbols.

A specific focus on community college leaders, or leaders within higher education, seems warranted, given the importance of presidents to this organization's culture. Better understanding the fit of leaders to organizations and the role of those leaders in influencing the organization's culture would help us improve leadership training, recruitment, and hiring.

## CONCLUSION

Organizational culture was an important influence for the executive administrative team at NWCC. Culture served to create a sense of unique identity for this group, emphasizing the importance of community to the college and this college to its community. This particular study illustrated the common values and assumptions that have developed over time with an administrative team that has shared significant organizational history. Cultural themes characterized the process of administrative team interaction through an emphasis on fairness and policy, staff development and learning, humor and informality, and teamwork. The administrative team developed a vital organizational role of influencing decision-making and modifying organizational involvement in that process. This role was strongly influenced by the cultural theme of shared decision-making and delegation. Cultural

themes also focused the group's attention to the future, and to the importance of customer and community outreach in its efforts on behalf of the organization. This study identified the executive administrative team as a unique and influential subculture at NWCC.

The interpretive framework of organizational symbolism proved valuable for this particular study of culture. The goal of interpretive researchers is to assess and clarify how subjects interpret and make sense of their organizations. Research methods focused on the interpretation of cultural symbols, and investigation of the underlying values and assumptions which they communicated. This study reinforced culture's role within NWCC and the benefit of interpretive methods for deciphering it. Results supported the belief that administrative team actions and decisions were an expression of the common values and assumptions held by team members. Symbols reinforcing each cultural theme were active within the organization. These symbols consisted of artifacts, traditions, and prominent actions and decisions taken by the administrative team. This study painted a descriptive picture of the symbolic side of organizational life at NWCC, and the role that cultural symbols played in reinforcing and supporting culture at the college.

The presence of paradox within several cultural themes shared by the administrative team pointed to a potential cultural basis for organizational conflict. Differences between espoused values and the true assumptions that guided organizational behavior illustrated the potential room for movement within this organization's *moral space*. It is quite possible that values tension or conflict were symptoms of that movement. Schein's (1992) theoretical framework provided a viable and logical theoretical foundation for assessing and discussing organizational culture, and its inherent contradictions.

This thesis suggests that cultural themes influenced the process of decision-making at NWCC. Strongly shared values shaped decisions, regardless of the decision-making style. This finding was evidenced by the cultural themes of shared decision-making and

delegation, and the related role of the administrative team in influencing organizational decisions and involvement in decision-making. This study also illustrates a setting where interaction rather than decision-making appeared to be the principal function of executive administrative team meetings.

This study benefitted from the use of Masland's (1985) cultural windows, which focused observations and interviews on organizational stories, heroes, symbols, and traditions. Historical influences, such as key events or figures, appeared to temper some cultural themes through strengthening an existing value or fostering a contrasting value. Leaders, particularly past presidents, were frequently the subject of such stories. This finding supports Schein's (1992) claim that leaders are critical to the formation of culture, and suggests that the evident cultural themes within NWCC's executive administrative team will have a significant influence on the continuing evolution of NWCC culture.

This study also illustrates the ongoing nature of organizing, which is a key feature of the interpretive perspective. Weick (1979) summarizes this perspective most clearly. He states, "Change, rather than stability, is the rule in any organization, and this means that people continually live within streams of ongoing events" (p. 117). Weick's model of organizing implies an evolutionary view of organizations, whose stable and consistent activity over time is that of "sense-making" (Weick, 1979, p. 250). "Organizations deal with streams of materials, people, money, time, solutions, problems, and choices" (Weick, 1979, p. 42). "Repeatedly organizations find themselves trying to stabilize the stream of experiences that flow through them, and the streams of actions being directed at those flows" (Weick, 1979, p. 23).

Weick's model of organizing suggests viewing reality as a flow of experience that is organized over time into meaningful units through interpretation. Organizational history, individual perception, and present-day circumstances blend together to create organizational

reality. This view appears to be useful in considering the role of historical events and figures, as well as present-day values, assumptions, and circumstances in creating current organizational reality for executive administrators at Northwest Community College.

This study suggests a clear and useful process for learning more about one's own culture and the influences that have shaped it. This learning is vital to community college leaders who need to better understand the important role that they have in shaping current and future organizational culture.

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## **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX A**

**CONSENT FORM**

Elizabeth Goulard  
Oregon State University

### WRITTEN CONSENT FORM

Values, Assumptions and Actions in a Leadership Team:  
A Symbolic Analysis of the Expression of Culture in a Community College Setting

To Study Participants:

I am conducting a doctoral research project under the supervision of Dr. Dale Parnell that explores cultural influences within a community college leadership team. This study will attempt to describe cultural themes found within a leadership team setting, and explore how these cultural themes are expressed in the actions taken by the leadership team. This research should contribute to an understanding of the administrative subculture within a community college, as well as the cultural basis for group action and decision-making.

This research project involves observation of your leadership team meetings, analysis of documents produced by or related to the work of your leadership team, and interviews with consenting team members. This study will be conducted during the 1995-96 academic year and would involve your agreeing to participate in one to three audiotaped interview sessions. It is anticipated that your total time commitment would involve somewhere between two or three hours of interview time. All interviews will be conducted during winter term 1996.

The confidentiality of your work within the leadership team, as well as the documents that are produced in all interview transcripts will be preserved throughout the research process. As part of the dissertation, I may wish to use some excerpts from your interviews to support data analysis or results. Any references to you, your college, or your city as a result of this research will be protected through the use of code names. I may also wish to use some of these materials in the future for instructional purposes or in publications. Any use of the materials not consistent with these purposes would require your additional written consent.

Questions about this research project should be directed to Dale Parnell at (503) 737-5058 or Liz Goulard at (503) 699-1903.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, have read the above statement and agree to participate in interview sessions, subject to the conditions stated above.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## **APPENDIX B**

### **GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDE**

## GENERAL INTERVIEW GUIDE

PERSONAL INFORMATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Length of time with NWCC</li> <li>• Current role</li> <li>• Prior roles and experiences</li> </ul>
HISTORICAL INFORMATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Founding stories and historical stories about the institution</li> <li>• Key players, a description of them, key characteristics</li> <li>• Critical issues or incidents the organization faced in starting, or since then</li> <li>• Relationship with the community, other institutions</li> </ul>
CURRENT ORGANIZATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Key players, roles, characteristics</li> <li>• Key groups, relationships between groups</li> <li>• Decision-making processes</li> <li>• Relationship with the community, other institutions</li> <li>• Critical issues facing</li> <li>• Rituals or traditions, description, characteristics</li> </ul>
ADMINISTRATIVE TEAM	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role within organization</li> <li>• Other observations</li> <li>• Test emerging values and themes</li> </ul>
RESEARCH PROJECT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Answer questions</li> <li>• Next steps</li> </ul>

**APPENDIX C****LIST OF DOCUMENTS**



## LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Administrative Rules No. D006, C309, C317, C401, A101

Agenda and minutes, President's Staff meetings, fall term 1995

Board meeting agendas, fall term 1995

Capital Planning List, Equipment, and Technology, Fall 1995-96

College Council Membership List NWCC Foundation Annual Report, 1994

Expanded Institutional Statement of Purpose, NWCC

Faculty Work Plan

Memo from the president to College Council regarding equipment and technology, September 28, 1995

Memo from the president to college community regarding policy review, September 29, 1995

Memo from the president to management staff and department chairs regarding inclement weather and emergency closures, October 30, 1995

Memo from the president to all staff regarding vice president positions, November 20, 1995

NWCC Budget Calendar, 1996-97

NWCC Budget Manual, 1996-97

NWCC Numbering Guidelines, Proposed administrative rules

NWCC General Catalog, 1995-96

NWCC Organizational Chart

Philosophy, Mission, Values, and Vision Toward the 21st Century

Planning at NWCC, Past, President, and Future, October 1995

Program and Discipline Listing, 1995-96

Schedule of classes, NWCC, fall term 1995

Title III Comprehensive Development Plan, NWCC, May 1995