

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

William T. Leinbach for the degree of Doctor of Education in  
Education presented on August 4, 1997. Title: Leadership  
in Crisis at Meadow View Community College: A Case Study.

*Redacted for Privacy*

Abstract approved

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Larry Kenneke

This case study of leadership in crisis at Meadow View Community College (fictitious name) was undertaken to add to the practical and theoretical knowledge and understanding of presidential leadership issues that actually occur in American community colleges. The college under study was one of nearly one-third of the community colleges in a western state that recently experienced conflict, controversy and crisis in leadership. The leadership crisis was defined as the college president and members of his administration receiving from campus constituents three votes of "no confidence" in approximately two years. The study focused on the problem of what can be learned from a case study of one community college enduring a crisis in leadership. Research questions guiding the study were: (a) what does the literature have to say about leadership and leadership in crisis; (b) how did the crisis in leadership occur at the Meadow View Community College and what were the situational preconditions and catalytic events surrounding

the crisis; (c) what were the perceptions of the leadership crisis as viewed by the Board of Trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, student leadership, and the college president; (d) what did Meadow View Community College constituents learn from the leadership crisis experience; and (e) what can this case study of leadership in crisis contribute to the body of knowledge in community college leadership? The case study utilized naturalistic, qualitative research methods, triangulation of data, and rich "thick description" of respondents' constructions of the leadership crisis context. Respondents ( $N = 34$ ) included the college president, board members, administrators, faculty, staff, and student leaders. Events, patterns and themes which characterized the leadership crisis context were described and fixed and variable factors were identified. Findings suggested how the college president and Board of Trustees may have averted the crisis in leadership.



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Leadership in Crisis at Meadow View  
Community College: A Case Study

by

William T. Leinbach

A THESIS

submitted to

Oregon State University

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

Doctor of Education

Presented August 4, 1997  
Commencement June 1998

Doctor of Education thesis of William T. Leinbach presented  
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William T. Leinbach

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This case study of leadership in crisis at a community college charted some new territory in community college leadership research. I want to express my sincere gratitude to the people who helped make it a reality.

I am indebted to Dr. Charles Carpenter and Dr. Dale Parnell for encouraging me to conduct this study and for making it possible to investigate important aspects of community college leadership in greater depth and detail.

I am grateful to Dr. Larry Kenneke, Dr. Dale Parnell, Dr. Eleanor Brown, Dr. Dan Walleri and Dr. Corrine Manogue for serving on my doctoral committee. I am indebted to them for their helpful comments and suggestions and for their friendly encouragement, support and patience. I am especially indebted to Dr. Parnell who gave freely of his time, knowledge and expertise. This manuscript benefited greatly from his critical review and insightful comments and suggestions. I alone, however, am responsible for any errors or omissions contained in this document.

A special note of thanks is due the Oregon State University Community College Leadership Program faculty and fellow cohort members for their interest, support and encouragement.

I am most grateful to the trustees, president, administrators, faculty, staff, and student leaders of Meadow View Community College (fictitious name) who spoke so

candidly with me about the leadership crisis at their college.

Finally, my greatest debt is to my wife and children who suffered through the process with me in the hope that life would eventually return to normal.

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LEADERSHIP IN CRISIS AT MEADOW VIEW  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A CASE STUDY

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

This case study of leadership in crisis at Meadow View Community College (fictitious name) was undertaken to add to the practical and theoretical knowledge and understanding of presidential leadership issues that *actually occur* in American community colleges. The investigation was a single, descriptive, in-depth case study of a community college that experienced a crisis in leadership. The president and members of his administration at the college under study had received from campus constituents three votes of "no confidence" in approximately two years.

In the United States there are approximately 1,500 public and private two-year colleges which comprise nearly 40 percent of our higher education institutions (American Association of Community Colleges, 1994). Of the approximately 12 million people enrolled in undergraduate higher education, over 43 percent attend community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges, 1994).

Community colleges nationwide serve a similar purpose. They provide a diverse cross-section of students a quality liberal arts and sciences education and/or specialized professional/technical training opportunities at a reasonable cost. Community colleges offer a variety of

certificate and associate degree programs along with personal enrichment courses and developmental instruction to help ensure student success. Many community college students graduate from their certificate or associate degree programs while others transfer credit to four-year colleges and universities. Community colleges also work in partnerships with local high schools and businesses to provide specialized job training and/or retraining opportunities to develop a quality workforce and promote economic development. Thus, the community college enterprise plays a significant role in American society and in our system of higher education (Adelman, 1992). However, like any organization, community colleges are not immune to crises in leadership.

This case study report of a crisis in leadership at Meadow View Community College contains six chapters. It follows accepted naturalistic qualitative case study reporting methods and guidelines (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper, and Allen, 1993; Goetz and LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wolcott, 1990; Yin, 1994.) Chapter one comprises a brief discussion on background information of the problem, statement of the problem, significance of the study, approach of the study, limitations of the research, and explication of researcher biases and assumptions.

Chapter two contains a review of selected literature intended to help the researcher and the reader view the case study from alternative theoretical perspectives. Seven theoretical approaches and perspectives on leadership are reviewed including trait, behavioral, power/influence, contingency or situational, transactional and transformational, cultural and symbolic, and post-industrial. Specific topics of leadership in higher education, the president's constituencies, leadership effectiveness, derailment, success and failure in the college presidency, and moral and ethical dimensions of college leadership are also presented.

Chapter three reviews the relevant methodological literature and presents and discusses the naturalistic inquiry paradigm. Chapter topics include (a) validity, reliability, and generalization, (b) characteristics of naturalistic research, (c) qualitative methods in data collection and analysis, and (d) the case study approach to conducting and reporting research.

Chapter four outlines and discusses the researcher's use of naturalistic inquiry and qualitative methods in this case study. Discussion includes the natural research setting, human as instrument, purposive sampling, emergent design, grounded theory, and phases and processes of inductive data analyses. Facts and details about observations, documents, interviews and respondents are

included. A brief discussion of confidentiality and anonymity concludes the chapter.

Chapter five is a descriptive account of the leadership crisis at Meadow View Community College. It describes situational circumstances and catalytic events surrounding the votes of no confidence.

Chapter six summarizes the results of the research questions and includes tentative conclusions of the study. Constituent perceptions of the leadership crisis, what they learned from their experiences, and how the leadership crisis may have been avoided are presented and discussed. Implications of the study for community college leaders and ideas for future research are also discussed. An epilogue concludes the report.

### Background of the Problem

There is an acknowledged "leadership crisis" in American institutions of higher education (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989; Fisher & Tack, 1990; Fisher, Tack, & Wheeler, 1988; Razik & Swanson, 1995; Roueche, Baker, & Rose, 1988). Bennis and Nanus (1985) wrote that the chronic "crisis of leadership" in America's institutions is the pervasive inability of organizational leaders to cope with the needs and expectations of their constituents. Burns (1978) wrote, "the crisis of leadership today is the

mediocrity or irresponsibility of so many of the men and women in power" (p.1).

According to studies by Fisher and Tack (1990) and Fisher and others (1988), effective leadership in American colleges and universities has reached crisis proportions in recent years. The authors reported that in 1985, 15% of the 2800 presidents they studied were considered by their peers and selected experts to be effective. In contrast, a later study (Fisher & Tack, 1990) reported that only three percent of a representative sample of presidents from four-year and two-year public and private institutions were identified as effective leaders. The crisis in leadership has spawned a "crisis of confidence" in higher education. Roueche, Baker and Rose (1988) suggested "this crisis of leadership is critical in the community college" (p. 49).

American community college presidents are being challenged by increasingly chaotic internal and external environments (Baker, 1992a, 1992b). The report of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges Commission (1988) on the future of community colleges recognized the more complicated and risky nature of today's community college presidency. College presidents today face a number of pressing problems: declining enrollment of traditional-aged students, reductions in federal and state funding, problems with access, reduced public support, unionization and faculty activism, and democratized

governing boards (Fisher & Tack, 1990). These conditions prompted some observers to question whether the college presidency was becoming tougher and less attractive, suggesting that perhaps college presidents may prefer to bail out of their jobs sooner than they would otherwise.

In a study spurred by a wave of resignations of prominent chief executive officers from Duke, Columbia, Yale, and other universities, Mooney (1992) investigated presidential tenure and reported that presidential tenures had not varied significantly for the previous eight years. On average, the length of presidential tenures continues to be around seven years. The study was conducted for the Association of Governing Boards of Colleges and Universities and it compared the turnover rate for academic years 1984-85 to 1991-92 in college presidencies nation-wide from about 3,400 degree-granting institutions including public and private two-year colleges. While the results of the study may have shown consistency across broad categories of institutions, it did not reflect trends *within* highly specialized groups of institutions, such as community colleges. The study also did not show whether or not those groups tended to change CEOs more frequently than others.

In The Community College Presidency: Current Status and Future Outlook, Vaughan, Mellander, and Blois (1994) surveyed 337 public community college presidents and reported that, all things considered, the presidency is a

relatively stable position, with a reported average tenure of 7.3 years for presidents in their current positions. The authors noted, however, that approximately half the respondents expected not to be in their current positions within five years from the time of the study, "respondents felt greater satisfaction with their chosen profession than with the particular circumstances in which they currently found themselves" (Vaughan et al., 1994, p.48).

Understanding presidential leadership issues in higher education, especially their *contexts and circumstances*, is important for extending the knowledge base of the field as well as for understanding and improving practice (Birnbaum, 1989, 1992a, 1992b; Merriam, 1988). Although many studies have provided aggregated information on the college presidency in terms of longevity and tenure, relatively few studies have revealed details of particular *leadership contexts*. That is, what specific types of events and circumstances characterized successful or unsuccessful college *leadership contexts*, how did presidents view their jobs, how did *constituents* view their leaders, and what were the *reasons* for any leadership crises and/or early departures of presidents from their colleges?

In an article in The Chronicle of Higher Education, Cage (1995) reported that one nationally recognized community college president, Dr. Robert McCabe, president of Miami-Dade Community College, chose to "call it quits"



(i.e., retire) sooner than he expected. Dr. McCabe stated that the reason for his retirement was increased tension caused by dealing with a "difficult board of trustees."

Understanding leadership contexts and the reasons that community college presidents leave office has implications for understanding not only community college leadership, but also for understanding what can sometimes go wrong while one is president. Studies of situations where things go wrong are "curiously understudied" given the frequency with which they occur (Hogan, Curphy, & Hogan, 1994, p. 498).

This case study was conducted in a western state that saw in a period of two to three years nearly one-third of its community colleges embroiled in conflict, controversy and upheaval as a result of leadership crises. Presidents received votes of "no confidence" from their faculty and staff, were fired outright by their Boards, or were otherwise pressured into leaving their positions. This high incidence of community college leadership crises prompted this researcher to move beyond a general curiosity of what was happening in one state to a systematic, focused, in-depth case study of one of the community colleges in that state that had experienced a crisis in leadership.

Although much research exists in the area of educational leadership focusing on leadership characteristics, qualities, practices, and habits of effective leaders in organizations, there has been little

practical research into *real-life* situations investigating leadership issues and crises as they *actually occur* in educational organizations. Educational institutions are dynamic and changing environments and what might have been effective leadership several years ago may or may not be appropriate today. Experienced practitioners understand that usefulness and appropriateness of any prescriptions for practice must be judged in relationship to the specific circumstances of practice in their own setting, thus, "the interest in learning by *positive and negative example* from a case study presupposes that the case may, in some way, be comparable to one's own situation" (Erickson, 1986, p. 153, *italics added*).

Therefore, this single, descriptive in-depth case study is offered as a response to the need for more naturalistic research into educational leadership crises (Birnbaum, 1992a; Bogdan & Biklen, 1992).

### Statement of the Problem

This case study focused upon the problem of what can be learned from an investigation of one community college enduring a crisis in leadership. Research questions guiding the study included: (a) what does the research literature have to say about leadership and leadership in crisis; (b) how did the crisis in leadership occur at Meadow View Community College (fictitious name) and what were the

situational preconditions and catalytic events surrounding the crisis; (c) what were the perceptions of the leadership crisis as viewed by the Board of Trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, student leadership and the college President; (d) what did Meadow View Community College constituents learn from the leadership crisis experience; and (e) what can this case study of leadership in crisis contribute to the body of knowledge in community college leadership?

### Significance of the Study

The significance of this research study was its investigation of a critical occurrence of a contemporary leadership phenomenon in a real-life context with implications for improving practice in educational leadership (Birnbaum, 1992a; Erlandson et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994).

### The Approach of the Study

This study focused on the occurrence of a crisis in leadership at a particular community college. The intent of the study was to provide an in-depth description of how the crisis occurred, how it might have been avoided, and what was learned. A naturalistic qualitative single case description was chosen because open-ended, holistic, and

inductive characteristics of this approach matched the objectives of the study. The study was "hypothesis-generating" not "hypothesis-testing" (see Chapter 3). The qualitative research approach utilized purposive sampling, emergent design, multiple sources of data (observations, interviews, documents and records), and a rich, "thick" description of respondent's constructions of the leadership crisis context. Findings were used to generate some tentative conclusions about how the crisis may have been avoided. No generalizations were made beyond this specific case study.

### Limitations

Although the naturalistic research paradigm and qualitative approach were well-suited to the study, certain limitations existed. First, case study research itself has inherent biases. It is "one of the few modes of scientific study that admit the subjective perception and biases of both participants and researcher into the research frame" (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984, p. 95). Second, statistical generalization of case study findings to other community colleges and educational settings is not possible. Data for the study was purposively, rather than randomly selected and therefore the study and the results were context-specific and not generalizable. A third limitation was potential bias in the researcher-as-instrument approach to data

collection. Throughout the study measures were taken to reduce researcher-introduced biases; however, the possibility of its presence in unknown areas remained.

### Researcher Biases and Assumptions

The researcher recognized certain biases (or preferences) which were present at the time the study was conducted. The researcher was partial to the following assumptions and views:

- Profound conflicts of interests, values, feelings, and actions tend to pervade social and organizational life.
- When people interact they affect each other. Because of this complex interaction, people have different experiences and don't always see the same things in the same ways--they have unique perspectives.
- Perspective connotes a view with a particular focus or vantage point. Any one focus of observation provides only a partial view. A more complete picture is an image created from multiple perspectives.
- Knowing the perspectives of others extends meaning and enhances understanding.
- Many elements are implicated in any given action and each element interacts with others in ways that mutually shape them all.

- There is a danger in reacting too heavily to "the brightest light" or "the loudest noise." However, the dangers of overlooking or not listening to all relevant constituent concerns are greater.
- Consumers of information in this report will be able to derive naturalistic generalizations about the case study that will become useful extensions of their personal and professional understandings.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF RELEVANT LEADERSHIP LITERATURE

#### Overview

The literature selected for review in this study belonged to the general body of literature on leadership in higher education. Special attention was given to those works that were found particularly relevant to this case study and influential in illuminating the theory and practice of community college leadership.

Leadership is "one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth" (Burns, 1978, p. 2). There are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are researchers or theorists who have attempted to define the concept (Bass, 1981). Researchers representing separate disciplines of inquiry have looked at leadership problems in different ways and have asked theory-specific questions about the nature of leadership. Bass (1990) cited over 7,500 studies on leadership, but only a small subset of that literature focused on higher education.

Because no objective criteria exist for assessing the presence, absence, or degree of leadership, leadership is to a great extent in the eye of the beholder (Bensimon, Neumann, et al., 1989). Wills (1994) suggested that leadership is what its constituents say it is. Leadership in organizations seems to exist to the extent that

organizational participants believe it does. That belief depends in part on how participants, through their interactions, construct realities of organizational life and define leadership roles. Roueche et al. (1988) developed a definition of leadership specifically related to the community college setting: "Leadership is the ability to influence, shape, and embed values, attitudes, beliefs and behaviors consistent with the increased commitment to the unique mission of the community college" (p. 34).

Gardner (1990) pointed out that "leaders act in a stream of history...as they labor to bring about a result, multiple forces beyond their control, even beyond their knowledge, are moving to hasten or hinder the result" (p.8). Similarly, Razik and Swanson (1995) wrote, "an examination of leadership reflects one conclusion--leadership is not definitive but elusive and constantly changing, reflecting an ever-changing society and world" (p. 40). Therefore, researchers' efforts to understand the elusive nature of leadership have reflected a number of theoretical perspectives and approaches.

### Leadership Research and Theories

Leadership research and theories can be grouped into six major categories which are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The categories include: (a) *trait* studies which attempt to identify a leader's personality traits and



intelligence and their relationships to specific skills; (b) *behavioral* studies which examine what leaders do, and the types and patterns of activities observed; (c) *power/influence* theories which investigate sources and amounts of power available to leaders and how that power is used; (d) *contingency or situational* theories which emphasize the importance of situational factors in the internal and external environments and their influence on leadership; (e) *transactional/transformational* theories which focus on mutual relationships between leaders and followers, and (f) *cultural and symbolic* theories which focus on the creation, maintenance, change, interpretation and reinterpretation of events in leadership contexts. Also included in this review, but which did not fit into the foregoing categories, is an *alternative theoretical perspective* on leadership needs for the twenty-first century.

### Trait Approach

The trait approach emphasizes the personal attributes of leaders. Early leadership theories were concerned almost entirely with theoretical issues focusing on the qualities of the leader (Bass, 1981). These studies were based on the assumption that individuals possessed certain physical characteristics, personality traits, and intellectual abilities that made them natural leaders (Razik & Swanson,

1995). Trait theories attributed leader success to possession of extraordinary abilities such as tireless energy, penetrating intuition, uncanny foresight, and irresistible persuasive powers (Yukl, 1989).

Much of the recent trait research has been on personality traits and specific skills and their relationships to role requirements and levels of effectiveness or success (Bentz, 1990; Hogan et al., 1994; Lombardo, Ruderman, & McCauley, 1988). One of the key principles coming out of the trait approach is the idea of balance, that is, tempering one trait with another. For example, "tempering a high need for power with emotional maturity required to ensure that subordinates are empowered rather than dominated" (Yukl, 1989, p. 271), or balancing a desire for change against the need for continuity. The trait approach focuses on the individual, but what the individual leader or manager actually does on the job is the focus of the behavioral research approach.

### Behavioral Approach

Early research in the behavioral approach focused on activity patterns and how managers spent their time. In recent years, however, studies have examined the roles, functions, and practices of leaders in order to identify the behaviors and skills that might be taught to potential leaders (Yukl, 1989). Other kinds of behavior research have

sought to identify differences in behavior patterns between effective and ineffective leaders (see Birnbaum 1992a, 1992b).

Eleven categories of behaviors were identified by Yukl, Wall, and Lepsinger (1990) as generic to most taxonomies of leadership: informing, consulting and delegating, planning and organizing, problem solving, clarifying roles and objectives, monitoring operations and environment, motivating, recognizing and rewarding, supporting and mentoring, networking, and managing conflict and team building. All eleven were considered relevant to leadership effectiveness, but the authors noted that the relative importance and use of the behaviors will differ by individual, organizational level and across leadership situations.

Likert (1961) developed a continuum of leadership styles which is still referred to today because it provided a systematic understanding of leadership concepts applicable across organizations. Likert (1961) distinguished among four leadership styles: exploitative authoritative, benevolent authoritative, consultative, and participative (democratic). Likert's studies demonstrated that in situations where leaders used consultative or participative leadership, there was evidence of trust, collaborative goal setting, bottom-up communication, and supportive leader behavior. In organizational situations where exploitative

authoritative or benevolent authoritative leadership was utilized, organizations were characterized by threats, fear, punishment, top-down communication and centralized decision-making and control. Likert (1961) suggested that the more effective leaders were those who utilized participative decision procedures.

The behavioral approach to research identifies what effective leaders do in terms of their activities, but it does not take into account situational factors such as differences in composition of groups or the internal and external environmental variables that influence the practice of leadership. Other research studies attempt to understand leadership behavior from the specific approach of power and influence.

#### Power/Influence Approach

Research from the power-influence approach to understanding leadership attempts to explain leadership effectiveness in terms of the types and amounts of power possessed by a leader and how that power is used. Power is used not only for influencing subordinates but also for influencing peers, superiors, and people outside the organization. The power of leadership depends to a considerable extent on how the leader is perceived by others. The manner in which a leader exercises her/his power largely determines "whether it results in enthusiastic

commitment, passive compliance, or stubborn resistance" (Yukl, 1989, p. 270).

In a classic study, French and Raven (1959) investigated social power and distinguished among five different bases of power which they termed (a) reward power, (b) coercive power, (c) legitimate power, (d) expert power, and (f) referent power. Reward power was defined as the "ability to administer positive valences and remove or decrease negative valences" (p. 445). Coercive power was viewed as the use of threats and negative valences, i.e., punishment. Legitimate power was considered the most complex of the five. The source of legitimate power was found to be in the social structure or cultural values of an organization which allowed one person to exercise power over another by virtue of superior position in a hierarchy of authority. However, even this type of power is not a guaranteed one. French and Raven (1959) pointed out that if there was an attempted use of legitimate power *outside the accepted range* of legitimate authority of the office, it will "decrease the legitimate power of the authority figure" (p. 448).

Referent power had its basis in the desire of followers to identify with the leader, to be one with the leader or to be like him or her. Expert power referred to a special knowledge or skill held by one person and found useful to another. For example, doctors, lawyers, accountants, or a

friendly person giving directions possess expert power. Of the five types of power in the French and Raven (1959) typology, legitimate, referent, and expert power were the most often cited in the literature on educational leadership.

Razik and Swanson (1995) observed that within the human systems of organizations and institutions, legitimate (or organizational) power is granted to those in key positions and is the most common source of power in organizations. Bensimon et al. (1989) asserted "the most likely sources of power for academic leaders are expert and referent power" (p. 38). Fisher (1984, 1991, 1994) viewed referent power in the college presidency in terms of charismatic power.

According to Fisher (1984, 1994), academic leaders can cultivate charismatic power by remaining distant or remote from constituents, by attending to their personal appearance and style, and by exhibiting self-confidence. Self-confidence was related to cultivating a style of speaking and walking that conveyed a sense of self-assuredness. Style consisted of presidential comportment, attitude, speech, dress, mannerisms, appearance, and personal habits. But, Fisher (1984, 1994) asserted social distance was considered the key to charismatic power. Fisher (1994) suggested that college presidents should emphasize the importance of the trappings of their office as symbols of its elevated status and not establish close relationships

with faculty and not be overly visible. He advocated that a leader should be present in the workplace only for brief, informal moments or on important occasions, and that leaders should avoid day-to-day familiarity because familiarity "makes the leader more debatable and less likely to be inspiring...familiarity invariably breeds debate, questions, doubts, and reservations" (Fisher, 1994, p. 65). Fisher (1994) therefore argued that distance recognizes and uses the trappings of office which should be "adjusted only to suit the personality and sophistication of the audience or constituency" (p. 65). The concept of charismatic power proposed by Fisher (1984, 1994) appeared to be much different from the referent power traditionally defined by French and Raven (1959) as the willingness of followers to accept influence by a leader they like and with whom they identify.

Charisma in leadership was discussed by other authors as well. Bass (1985) suggested charisma may provide some leaders with an extra measure of influence that moves their institutions toward higher levels of performance. But, this may not always be true. Charisma can be a two-edged sword. Charisma can have a dark side to it (Birnbaum, 1992a). Charismatics sometimes have an unhealthy narcissism that can lead to a grandiose sense of certainty, disdain for subordinates, unwillingness to tolerate dissent, and a sense that normal rules don't apply to them (Goleman, 1990, cited

in Birnbaum, 1992a). When charismatics fail as leaders, they may still project qualities commonly associated with good leadership because they have considerable talent for self-presentation and the capacity to create favorable impressions of themselves (Hogan, Raskin, & Fazzini, 1990, cited in Birnbaum, 1992a).

Abbott and Caracheo (1988) limited their treatment of power to the context of organizations and argued that there are only two bases of power--authority and prestige. Power based on authority is derived from the leader's established position within a social institution's hierarchy and is delegated by the institution. Prestige power is based on the leader's possession of natural or acquired personal characteristics such as honesty, integrity, expertise, and so forth, which are valued by others in the organization. Prestige power must be earned by the leader through demonstration of these characteristics. The authors argued that reward and coercive power are not bases of power as French and Raven (1959) purported, but ways in which power is exercised in an institutional environment based on either authority or prestige or both.

Power and influence theories and theories based on leader traits and behaviors have provided significant contributions to leadership research. Leadership can be understood further through research into the particular circumstances and contexts of leadership situations.



### Contingency/Situational Approach

The contingency/situational approach to leadership proposes that the effects of leader behavior are contingent upon the leadership situation. A major assumption is that different leader behavior or trait patterns will have varying degrees of effectiveness in different leadership situations, and that an identified behavior pattern for one situation is not optimal for all situations.

The approach emphasizes the importance of situational factors such as leader authority and discretion, the type of work performed, subordinate ability and motivation, and the expectations of subordinates, peers, superiors and outsiders (Yukl, 1989). Thus, leadership relationships, behaviors and effectiveness are mediated by leadership situations and how they are interpreted.

All organizations, and the events that occur in them, can be viewed and interpreted in a number of ways. *Meaning* of an event is what is most important, and meaning exists only as it is interpreted through one belief system or another. What people see and do in organizations is strongly determined by personal theories (implicit or explicit) of events and how those events get interpreted. Take a community college committee meeting, for example. Suppose that Sharon is trying to reach a decision, Greg wants to make sure everyone has a chance to participate, Mary is there to prove herself and win points, and Bob sees

himself as attending a pointless ritual. Depending on their perceptions and interpretations (of past meetings and that meeting), each individual may see others and the current situation differently.

One of the more useful tools available for leaders to understand organizations and events in them was proposed by Bolman and Deal (1984). They suggested that organizations and events can be looked at from four different vantage points or "frames" which they identified as (a) structural, (b) human resource, (c) political, and (d) symbolic. Each frame addressed a critical task of management and leadership. The *structural frame* emphasized the formal roles and hierarchical systems of relationships in an organization. The *human resource frame* focused on the needs of people with the belief that they have inherent needs for achievement and creativity. The *political frame* viewed organizations as fragmented into special interest groups in competition over power and scarce resources. And, the *symbolic frame* viewed organizations as cultures and subcultures with specific values, reminding the leader that reality is socially constructed and symbolically mediated.

To benefit from the use of multiple frames, two fundamental components of leadership in organizations must be recognized--a "commitment to values" and a "flexible approach" to the complexity of organizations (Bolman & Deal, 1984, p. 300). Values tend to guide leadership behavior,

but leaders may often underappreciate the complexity of their organizations and may become overresponsive and inflexible:

When faced with formidable challenges, managers (even leaders) tend to become inflexible...staying with the same problems and employing the same solutions makes [them] feel comfortable and in control...the leaders of the future will need to sidestep this tendency, to find opportunities in organizational crises (Bolman & Deal, 1984, p. 296).

The perspective of multiple frames suggests that leaders and followers with different perspectives will interpret the meaning of leadership situations differently. This is consistent with evolving ideas about higher education organizations as they have been portrayed as bureaucracies, collegiums, political systems (Carroll, 1992) and organized anarchies (Cohen & March, 1986). As people interpret events through different frames, disagreements and conflicts inevitably emerge. Bolman and Deal (1984) proposed that the sequential application of each frame to the same event or issue can help to clarify what is happening and generate options of interpretation and action. The comparison of frames also can help clarify and resolve many situations of confusion and conflict.

According to Bolman and Deal (1984), leaders need to be committed to values, to think flexibly about organizations and events, to see them from several angles, to have visions of new strategies or patterns on everyday thought and deed, and to adapt their style to fit emerging issues. Flexibility

of a leader's thinking fosters flexibility in their behavior. Leaders who "understand and use only one or two of the frames are like a highly specialized species: They may be well adapted to a very narrow environment but extremely vulnerable to changes in climate" (Bolman & Deal, 1984, p. 109).

Another useful and fairly popular way of looking at situational factors that influence the practice of leadership is to view leadership contexts as *transactional* or *transformational*.

#### Transactional/Transformational Approach

Much of the literature on educational leadership reflected the influence of James McGregor Burns (1978), who distinguished between two types of leadership--the *transactional* and the *transformational*. Transactional leadership was characterized by typical bureaucratic activities of leadership where people engage in relationships for the purpose of exchanging things of value, pursuing their own purposes and goals, and forming temporary relationships. In contrast, the transformational leader goes beyond the bureaucratic actions of the transactional leader; he or she builds upon the *followers'* need for meaning and organizational purpose,

Leadership over human beings is exercised when persons with certain motives and purposes mobilize, in competition or conflict with others,

institutional, political, psychological, and other resources so as to arouse, engage, and satisfy the motives of followers (Burns, 1978, p. 18).

"The genius of leadership", Burns (1978) wrote, "lies in the manner in which leaders see and act on their own *and* their follower's values and motivations" (p. 19, italics added).

Transforming leadership "occurs when one or more persons *engage* with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality" (Burns, 1978, p. 20). Thus, the test of a leader is the ability to achieve significant change that represents the mutual interests of followers and leaders.

Other authors have extended, elaborated, or taken issue with the transactional and transformative leadership views of Burns (1978). For example, a key ingredient of transformative leadership for Bennis and Nanus (1985) was the notion of empowerment. Leaders empower followers by bringing significance, competence, community, and enjoyment to leader-follower work relationships.

Bensimon et al. (1989) suggested that the transformational model of leadership had three underlying assumptions which "conflict with normative expectations in higher education" (p. 74), making it unlikely that transformational leadership is appropriate in academic organizations. The assumptions they identified were that (a) leadership emanates from a single highly visible individual, (b) followers are motivated by needs for

organizational affiliation, and (c) leadership depends on visible and enduring changes. The authors suggested that the presence of two forms of authority in academic organizations, the administrative and the professional, limits the authority of the president and therefore the opportunity for transformational leadership. Bensimon et al. (1989) also maintained that the transactional, not the transformational, better characterizes the reality of leadership in higher education:

The conceptual foundations of transactional theory appear highly adaptable to those features of academic organizations most likely to obstruct transformational leadership: the concept of governance as a collective process that involves all important campus constituencies, with particular emphasis given to the participation of the faculty...[and] the faculty's prerogative to declare no confidence in the president, which often has the same power to dismiss a president as does a vote by the college trustees (p. 74).

Bensimon et al. (1989) added that "transactional leadership tends to be spurned despite its obvious application to higher education, because it is seen as descriptive of an 'managerial' rather than a 'leadership' profile" (p. 75).

Birnbaum (1992a) found that effective presidents at the institutions he studied tended to synthesize and use both the transactional and transformational approaches to leadership. The transactional had its usefulness in supporting status quo and what currently worked. The transformational approach focused on restoring values and improving behavior in an evolutionary way, thus presidents

"did not consider values more important than instrumental activities, but realized that if they were to have influence they must attend to both" (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. 29-30).

Transactional and transformational approaches to leadership considered the values and motivations of both leaders and followers in the leadership context. Another equally important and influential factor for leaders is working within organizational culture and managing symbolic meaning.

#### Cultural and Symbolic Approaches

Cultural and symbolic theories view leadership in organizations as a continuous interchange among participants of mutually-influenced socially constructed realities. Schein (1992) described culture as "a phenomenon that surrounds us at all times, being constantly enacted and created by our interactions with others" (p. 1). He proposed that these "dynamic processes of culture creation and management are the essence of leadership" (Schein, 1992, p. 1). Analysis of leader behavior and organizational culture thus are viewed as inseparably connected (Schein, 1992; Smith & Peterson, 1988).

In the early literature on organizational culture, Schein (1985) developed a conceptual hierarchy to describe culture at three levels--artifacts, values, and assumptions. At the first level, culture is made visible and tangible

through symbolic forms such as rites, ceremonies, rituals, myths, sagas, stories, language systems, and norms of the organization. The second level consists of values which reveal how people explain and rationalize what they say and do as a group. Values link artifacts to assumptions. The degree of congruity or conflict among values often determines the degree of members' socialization in the organization. The third and deepest level of the cultural hierarchy are assumptions--the essence of culture. They represent learned responses to environmental expectations and exert a powerful influence over what people believe, how they think, and what they do.

Culture in higher education has been defined by Kuh and Whitt (1988) as the "collective, mutually shaping patterns of norms, values, practices, beliefs, and assumptions that guide the behavior of individuals and groups in an institution of higher education and provide a frame of reference within which to interpret the meaning of events and actions on and off campus" (p. 13). Cultural influences can occur at many levels, within the institution and its departments, as well as at the system and state levels (Tierney, 1988). Bensimon et al. (1989) suggested that the cultural view of leadership is highly compatible with the characteristics of academic organizations which are characterized by ambiguity of purpose, diffusion of power



and authority, and the absence of clear and measurable outcomes.

Literature on organizational culture in community colleges referred to leaders as either founders or transitioners (Baker, 1992a, 1992b). Founders were important in the initial stages of cultural development and their effectiveness was measured by the degree to which they successfully envisioned and communicated a future for the organization and motivated others to commit to it. Transitional leaders, on the other hand, were seen as change agents with significant opportunity to redirect the culture of an organization.

It is not surprising, therefore, that much of the literature suggested that the unique talent of successful leaders in organizations was their ability to *work with culture*. Leaders are becoming more aware of the critical role that culture plays in institutional learning and change and "how intricately intertwined their own behavior is with culture creation and management" (Schein, 1992).

According to Schein (1992), leaders embed and transmit organizational culture in five ways: (a) by what they pay attention to, measure, and control; (b) by their reactions to critical incidents and crises; (c) by deliberate role-modeling, coaching, and teaching; (d) by their choice of criteria for allocation of reward and status; and (e) by

their choice of criteria for recruitment, selection, promotion, retirement and termination of personnel.

Academic institutions vary in cultural characteristics and institutional cultures impact actions and results in the organization. Institutional cultures facilitate some actions, proscribe others and play a major role in determining what a president can and cannot do (Birnbaum, 1992a, 1992b). Leadership exhibited by a president at one college may prove unsuccessful at an institution with a different culture (Biggerstaff, 1992). In spite of this, many college administrators:

often have only an intuitive grasp of the cultural conditions and influences that enter into their daily decision making....[they] tend to recognize their organization's culture only when they have transgressed its bounds and severe conflicts or adverse relationships ensue. As a result, they frequently find themselves dealing with organizational culture in an atmosphere of crisis management, instead of reasoned reflection and consensual change (Tierney, 1988, p. 4).

By attending to an organization's culture, "presidents can discover the reasons why styles, structures, and strategies work well in some situations and fail in others (Biggerstaff, 1992, p. 60). By bringing the dimensions and dynamics of organizational culture to the fore, leaders can begin to understand the cultures of their institutions as well as the likely consequences of leadership decisions before, not after, they act.

According to Tierney (1988), a leader's understanding of organizational culture encourages them to (a) consider

real or potential conflicts not in isolation but on the broad canvas of organizational life, (b) recognize structural or operational contradictions that suggest tensions in the organization, (c) implement and evaluate everyday decisions with a keen awareness of their role in and influence upon organizational culture, (d) understand the symbolic dimensions of instrumental decisions and actions, and (e) consider why different groups in the organization hold varying perceptions about the institution.

In a similar vein, Birnbaum (1992a) suggested that organizations can be analyzed at two distinct levels, the substantive and the symbolic (see Pfeffer, 1981). The substantive dimension involves understanding how decisions and other organizational actions result in observable, objective outcomes. The symbolic aspect focuses on how organizational activities are perceived and interpreted by participants. Birnbaum (1992a) proposed that presidents can influence their institutions on both levels through what he referred to as "instrumental leadership" and "interpretive leadership." College presidents provide instrumental leadership through their technical competence, experience, and judgment. They "coordinate the activities of others, make timely and sensible decisions, represent the institution to its various publics, and cope with the everyday crises caused by environmental change and internal conflict" (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. 152).

Interpretive leadership, on the other hand, involved managing perceptions of institutional functioning and the relationship of the institution to its environment. This kind of leadership emphasizes the *management of meaning* through the actions or words of the leader. Presidents provide interpretive leadership when they "change perceptions by highlighting some aspects of the institution and environment while muting others, by relating new ideas to existing values and symbols, and by articulating a vision of the college in idealized form that captures what others believe but have been unable to express" (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. 154). Though the two forms of leadership are conceptually distinct, they interact with each other. Instrumental acts often have symbolic significance, and interpretive acts affect the way people behave and think. Both forms of leadership are involved to varying degrees in all presidential actions.

According to Schein (1985), "the only thing of real importance that leaders do is to create and manage culture" (p. 2). He also pointed out it is more likely that culture controls leaders than leaders control culture. Thus, to be effective, leaders must align their strategies with their institutions's culture rather than compete with it. According to Schein (1985, 1992), a leader has opportunity to clarify his or her vision and values through reactions to critical incidents. How a leader responds to a crisis will

often create new organizational norms and procedures while revealing some of the leaders underlying assumptions about the importance of people and the value of the work to be accomplished.

Institutional culture based on mutual values, mutual trust, and institutional integrity was investigated by Clark (1992). He conducted a qualitative case study of a two-year unionized college that successfully managed to deal with internal organizational conflicts. The culture held an institutional value system of collaboration based upon "a trust dynamic and a value system expressed, modeled, and rewarded by the organizational leadership" (Clark, 1992, p. 202). Institutional and individual integrity were paramount. "Honesty, credibility, clear communication, and 'walking the way we talk'" (Clark, 1992, p. 198) were considered fundamental aspects of a culture embracing institutional integrity and successfully dealing with campus crisis and conflict.

Institutional cultures may have different characteristics to them, but the events that take place within them are given a particular meaning by the actions, reactions, and interactions of leaders.

Pfeffer (1981) proposed that the role of leadership in organizations may be largely (but not entirely) restricted to symbolic actions. The purpose of symbolic actions is the management of meanings. Pfeffer (1981) distinguished

between substantive outcomes and symbolic results in management of meaning. Substantive outcomes refer to actions and activities in tangible, measurable results, such as salary allocations, capital or operating budget allocations, and so forth. In contrast, symbolic outcomes are measured by sentiments of affect, values, beliefs, and constituent satisfaction. Many administrative actions can have both real immediate effects and symbolic connotations. An example is the allocation of resources. According to Pfeffer (1981), the fact that a resource allocation can be consistent with the power dependence relations in an organization and still leave those members who have received less well satisfied "speaks to the capacity of management to legitimate and rationalize actions" (p. 8). It is important to understand how organizational benefits and resources get allocated; but at the same time, it is important to understand how such allocation patterns are perceived and justified by organizational participants in the sense of managing what it *means*.

Meaning can be "created through use of language, ceremonies, symbols, and settings" (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 44) to produce socially constructed realities. Those socially constructed realities are "as much the tools of managers [or leaders] as economic analysis, theories of leadership, and organizational design" (Pfeffer, 1981, p. 46).

Socially constructed realities and the use of symbolic actions is particularly important to college presidents. Parnell (1990) wrote, "the college president of the 1990s must understand the importance of symbolism and be sensitive to the meanings attached to a range of activities...the effective leader plans and shapes the symbolism of his or her actions" (p. 27).

Parnell (1990), Pfeffer (1981), and Schein (1992) emphasized the importance for leaders to understand institutional culture and symbolically manage meaning in organizations. It follows that if leaders are not aware of institutional culture and likely consequences of decisions and actions or the assumptions of the group upon which they impose solutions, "they are likely to fail" (Schein, 1992, p. 373). College leaders, therefore, are constrained to pay attention to socially constructed realities and symbolic actions within an institution's culture. Unfortunately (or fortunately), continuously shifting external and internal environmental factors in the college setting may impact or *change* institutional culture.

The notion of *change* in organizations is key to the concept of culture and *learning* in organizations. Schein (1992), Senge (1990), and Wheatley (1994) suggested that *change* is fundamental to organizations. Change requires leaders and their organizations to *learn*--learn how to see themselves as a system of relationships with a greater sense



of identity and autonomy (Wheatley, 1994); learn how to search for truth, problem solve, trust, and improve (Schein, 1992); and learn how to learn (Senge, 1990). Thus, *learning* ultimately must be made part of organizational culture.

According to Schein (1992), a learning culture must "contain the shared assumption that solutions to problems derive from a pragmatic search for truth and that truth can be found anywhere, depending on the nature of the problem" (p. 366). What must be avoided in a learning culture is an automatic assumption that wisdom and truth reside in any one source or method. Schein (1992) stressed that information and open communication are central to organizational well-being and the learning culture,

a fully connected [information] network can only work if high trust exists among all participants and that high trust is partly a function of leader assumptions that people can be trusted and have constructive intent (p. 370).

Also, according to Schein (1992), the only way to build a learning culture that *continues to learn* is "for leaders themselves to realize that they do not know and must teach others to accept that they do not know" (p. 367). Learning then becomes a shared responsibility.

Wheatley (1994) also viewed organizations as capable of learning. She saw organizations as systems of relationships that have the capacity to determine identity, empower members, learn from informational interchange, and self-renew. Wheatley (1994) asserted that organizations "need a



broad distribution of information, viewpoints and interpretations" (p. 64), and that they "need to stop describing tasks and instead facilitate *process*" (p. 38). She emphasized quality interaction and pointed out that "leadership is *always* dependent on the context, but the context is established by the *relationships* we value (Wheatley, 1994, p. 144).

Senge (1990) characterized a "learning organization" as an organization "where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning how to learn together" (p. 3). He proposed that an organization can become a "learning organization" through the art and practice of five basic disciplines: (a) *personal mastery* in continually clarifying and deepening personal vision, focusing energies, developing patience, and seeing reality objectively; (b) *mental models* through recognizing the deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, pictures, and images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action, (c) *building shared vision* through fostering genuine commitment to values and purposes rather than compliance; (d) *team learning* through developing diversity and productive patterns of member interaction and genuine "thinking together"; and, (e) *systems thinking* through integrating the other disciplines

into a coherent body of theory and practice. Thus, according to Senge (1990), the ability to think systematically, to analyze fields of forces and understand their joint causal effects on each other, and to abandon simple linear causal logic in favor of complex mental models will become more critical to learning organizations and their leaders.

Understanding institutional culture, its subtle characteristics and potential for organizational modification and improvement through learning will aid college leaders in spotting and resolving potential conflicts and in managing change more efficiently and effectively.

As shown in previous sections, research into leadership is multidimensional and has drawn from many scholarly disciplines and ideas. However, none of the theories or perspectives contained all the necessary variables to adequately characterize the complexity of leadership and its contexts, or to predict best-case leadership scenarios. Previous leadership studies have had their critics, and one scholar has offered an alternative theoretical perspective to understanding leadership and leadership needs for the twenty-first century.

### Alternative Theoretical Perspective

Rost (1991) criticized previous leadership studies and their emphasis on peripheral aspects of leadership such as traits, styles, preferred behaviors, contingencies and situations, and so forth. He contended that such studies did not address the essential nature of leadership, and that most of the theories of leadership reflected an "industrial paradigm" that is no longer acceptable or applicable to leadership needs for the twenty-first century.

The "crisis in leadership" today, according to Rost (1991) is not from a lack of good leaders with vision, but that "our school of leadership is still caught up in the industrial paradigm while much of our thought and practice in other aspects of life have undergone considerable transformation to a postindustrial paradigm" (p. 100).

Rost (1991) argued that the industrial paradigm's view of leadership conveyed three notions about the nature of leadership: leadership as "being number one...producing excellence"; leadership as "the leaders in office.. or an administration"; and, leadership as "that of one person directing other people" (Rost, 1991, p. 98). In other words, leadership was equated with good management. Rost (1991) proposed that leaders and followers today still act, choose and think based on this model of an industrialized leadership paradigm.

A more appropriate way to view leadership today, according to Rost (1991), is with a definition that contains the assumptions and values necessary to a transformed, postindustrial society. Such a model of leadership would include:

collaboration, common good, global concern, diversity and pluralism in structure and participation, client orientation, civic virtues, freedom of expression, critical dialogue, qualitative language and methodologies, substantive justice, and consensus-oriented policy-making process" (Rost, 1991, p. 181).

Thus, Rost (1991) defined leadership as "an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes that reflect their mutual purposes" (p. 102).

In Rost's (1991) model, the influence relationship of leaders and followers is *multidirectional* and *noncoercive*. Leaders and followers are *active* instead of *reactive*. They purposefully desire certain changes that are substantive and transforming. They actively develop and advance purposes. Instead of controlling options to develop consensus as managers do, they seek *new and creative* approaches and expand options as a technique for problem solving. They take high risk positions and help people work for the common good and help people *build community*.

The alternative views of Rost (1991) and the general theories and perspectives of leadership presented thus far provided important and relevant information about the nature of leadership and leadership contexts. Specific studies on

leadership in higher education is an important subset of that research.

### Leadership in Higher Education

Leadership in higher education, like leadership in general, is difficult to describe and determine because it depends not only on the position, behavior, and personal characteristics of the leader but also on the nature of the situation or setting (Hoy & Miskel, 1982). Bensimon et al. (1989) noted that the college setting has been variously described as (a) a *bureaucracy*, (b) a *collegium*, (c) a *political system*, and (d) an *organized anarchy*. When colleges are viewed as a *bureaucracy*, emphasis is on structured management and the leader's role in making decisions and getting results. As a *collegium*, colleges are seen as participative and the leader strives to meet constituents' needs through processes of consultation and interpersonal skills. When colleges are viewed as a *political system*, leaders can be seen as mediators or negotiators among competing groups, and influencing through persuasion and diplomacy. In the college as *organized anarchy*, leaders are constrained by inherent organizational ambiguities.

The notion of American colleges as organized anarchies was advanced by Cohen and March (1974). According to Cohen and March (1986), an organized anarchy is "any organization

that has problematic goals, unclear technology, and fluid participation" (p. 2). In the case of colleges and universities, Cohen and March (1986) explained that (a) goals are problematic because they are characterized by a loose collection of changing ideas more than a coherent structure, (b) technology is unclear because the organization does not understand its own processes and it operates on the basis of a simple set of trial-and-error procedures (the residue of learning from accidents of past experiences and imitation), (c) participation is fluid because individual participants vary from one time to another and they vary among themselves in the amount of time and effort they devote to the organization.

Cohen and March (1986) identified four ambiguities connected to the anarchy and faced by college presidents:

1. Ambiguity of *purpose*--what are the goals of the organization and in what terms can action be justified? Do constituents agree? Are goals clearly stated and are there defined specific procedures for measuring the degree of goal achievement?
2. Ambiguity of *power*--how powerful is the president and what can he/she accomplish? Do presidents have as much power as they think they do?
3. Ambiguity of *experience*--what is to be learned from the presidency and how does the president

make inferences about his/her experience? Are the inferences correct?

4. Ambiguity of *success*--when is a president successful and how is this assessed?

According to Cohen and March (1986), these ambiguities impact the actions and the effectiveness of college presidents more than they realize,

presidents easily come to believe that they can continue in office forever if they are only clever or perceptive or responsive enough...they easily come to exaggerate the significance of their daily actions for the college as well as for themselves (p. 204).

Thus, Cohen and March (1986) concluded:

we believe that a college president is, on the whole, better advised to think of himself as trying to do good than as trying to satisfy a political or bureaucratic audience; better advised to define his role in terms of the modest part he can play in making the college slightly better in the long run than in terms of satisfying current residents or solving current problems (p. 205).

Other scholars had different views of the college presidency and analyzed other issues. Kerr and Gade (1986) researched the state of the academic presidency at more than 800 institutions of higher education. They analyzed how the college presidency is affected by changing times, by environments of mixed constituencies and conflicts of interests, and by the styles, strategies, and tactics of those in office. To understand the college presidency they argued, "it is necessary to appreciate the context of each individual presidency--to comprehend the tyrannies of time

and of place, but also to appreciate the vagaries of human behavior in approaching decisions" (Kerr & Gade, 1986, p. xi, *italics added*).

Kerr and Gade (1986) reported that a variety of presidential behaviors and interactions with multiple constituents in particular leadership settings impacts levels of presidential success and longevity. They reported that the average tenure for college presidents was about seven years and that about 15 percent of college presidents were involved in separations each year. Variations in length of tenure among institutions were viewed as a surplus over a minimum tenure of about three years. That is, a new president usually is given about two years to prove competence, then another year or so for a faculty or a Board to enact a change (see Birnbaum, 1992a, for a discussion of "the honeymoon period"). Kerr and Gade (1986) proposed that the average surplus over the three year period is a better measure of what is happening to longevity, which is "plus seven to nine years historically and plus four years on the average today for all presidents and plus two years for many community college presidents" (p. 21).

Kerr and Gade (1986) also investigated what college presidents do after serving a presidency. They reported that 15 percent of former incumbents go to another presidency, 20 percent return to teaching, about 15 percent into other administrative positions in higher education, 25



percent into retirement or semiretirement, and 25 percent find employment outside academics. Thus, Kerr and Gade (1986) submitted that "the presidency is an episode in a career and not a career until retirement" (p. 22).

Implications of findings on the nature of the college presidency in Kerr and Gade's (1986) study were reflected in comments of several college presidents (cited on pp. 33-34, 202-219). They were found particularly relevant to characteristics of the present case study.

The secret of any organization is *trust*. Almost anything will work when enough trust is present. Without it, nothing works (*italics added*).

When you make a decision, however large or small, ask what is the *right* decision...all things considered (*original italics*).

Be accessible, be credible, and involve more people earlier (from 85 percent of the presidents interviewed).

When you're wrong admit it. Almost everyone will know it anyway. Your capitulation will be seen as reasonableness, not weakness.

Remind yourself daily that general administration must always be the servant, never the master.

Though these presidential admonitions reflect years of experience and may serve to guide college leaders, Kerr and Gade (1986) emphasized that the college presidency is context-bound, that contexts vary greatly, and that there is no single best or even possible strategy for all leadership contexts. Few presidents can sufficiently control or totally influence the context that surrounds them. The specific context "may either liberate them or suffocate

them, it may let them bloom or cause them to wither" (Kerr & Gade, 1986, p. 170). Thus, Kerr and Gade (1986) concluded,

the multifaceted interaction of environments and participants in particular contexts makes it impossible to know precisely how many or how much of each are the result of the time and place, on the one hand, or of human performance on the other...That is always the puzzle (p. 170).

Relatively few scholars have attempted to study the puzzle of leadership crisis contexts in American higher education and even fewer have studied the community college setting. Carroll (1992) investigated the forced resignations of three college presidents including one from a community college. Carroll (1992) suggested that leadership crisis events in college settings can be best understood through an organizational theory embracing both institutional politics and academic culture. He suggested that the type and mix of power used by a president and a faculty within a crisis context affect the outcome. Identified sources of presidential power in Carroll's (1992) study were (a) control of information and decision points, (b) interpretation of institutional reality, (c) selective personnel appointment and removal, and (d) legitimate and personal power. Identified sources of power for the faculty were legitimate power, negative sanctions and personal power. Carroll (1992) concluded that *bona fide* presidential power is ultimately legitimate power based on constituent endorsement which may be determined through faculty

interpretation of presidential words and actions within the local academic culture.

In other research, Vaughan (1986) conducted an in-depth study of outstanding presidents of public two-year colleges. Based on surveys from 68 community college presidents who were considered exemplary by their peers, the author reported that respondents ranked "integrity, judgment, courage, and concern for others as the top personal attributes the successful presidential leader should possess" (p. 4). Respondents also identified "producing results, selecting qualified people, resolving conflicts, communicating effectively, and motivating others" (Vaughan, 1986, p. 4) as desirable skills and abilities. Significant in Vaughan's (1986) study was the inclusion of perceived personal failures by presidents. Identified personal failures included, "being too far removed from the faculty, being superficial, being a poor listener, and spending too much time away from campus" (p. 155).

Vaughan (1986) also found that community college presidents "do not seem to understand fully their role as leader...there seems to be a struggle among presidents to determine how they can give strong leadership without alienating the faculty and board" (p. 230). The struggle tended to result from issues surrounding "the autocratic image associated with the community college presidency," "unionization on campus," "participatory governance," and

"the obvious need for strong leadership" (Vaughan, 1986, p. 230). Vaughan (1986) added that the successful community college president would have to reconcile these seemingly diverse elements.

Many factors contribute to the successful leadership of a community college president. One of the most crucial is an understanding of the roles, values, and needs of her/his constituents.

### The President's Constituencies

The interpretation that constituencies give to a president's actions has important consequences for the exercise of leadership. Colleges have many constituencies--students, parents, alumni, legislators, secondary schools, employers, and community groups. But most observers tend to agree that the three most prominent are trustees, faculty, and administrative staff (Birnbaum, 1992a). According to Birnbaum (1992a), these groups are considered in both normative statements and research studies to be the major legitimate, continuing participants in institutional governance. They are the groups that presidents are presumed to lead and deal with on a regular basis. Others may become involved in a variety of college issues and activities, but their participation usually is more issue-specific and intermittent.

Though the three major constituents' views may overlap, each has distinct organizational roles to fill. Constituents interact with different aspects of the institution's environment and construct different pictures of institutional reality. A president's actions and behavior, therefore, is subject to different interpretations depending on whether the observer is a faculty member, an administrator, or a trustee (Bensimon, 1991). The president is "always in the middle, among, and between the constituency groups" (Parnell, 1990, p. 24). Unfortunately, presidents who satisfy one constituency are likely to find it consequently more difficult to satisfy others (Pfeffer and Salanick, 1978, cited in Birnbaum, 1992a).

The level of constituent support among trustees, faculty and administrators was investigated by Fujita (1990) who studied thirty-two universities and colleges including community colleges. She found that trustees and administrators commonly made positive assessments of their presidents, and that differences in constituent support for the president were primarily due to differing assessments by the faculty. Fujita (1990) reported that presidents were evaluated as good by 88.2 percent of board leaders and 87.2 percent by administrative colleagues. In contrast, only 50.9 percent of faculty respondents evaluated their presidents as good. Fujita (1990) found that faculty

support was invariably accompanied by support of the other two groups.

### The President and Faculty

"Probably the most difficult but most important constituency is the faculty" (Parnell, 1990, p. 24). Yet, faculty assessments of the quality of their presidents tend to be less than satisfactory. Russell (1990, cited in Birnbaum, 1992b) reported that only 57 percent of a national sample of full-time faculty were found to be satisfied with the quality of their presidents, and only 54 percent were satisfied with the relationship between faculty and administration on their campuses.

The faculty represent the institution's instructional programs and its commitment to academic values. Faculty are interested in a president's concern for curriculum and student development (Birnbaum, 1992a, 1992b), look for a president's support of faculty values and acceptance of faculty procedures and advice (Kerr & Gade, 1986), and are concerned with whether the president operates in a manner consistent with a collegial community (Birnbaum, 1992a, 1992b). However, the relationship between the president and the faculty can be uncertain. Faculty criticisms of a president are many and varied, and often contradictory:

If he is always home, he is a nobody; if he is often away, he is neglecting his homework. If he spends little time with faculty members, he is

aloof; if he spends much time with them, he is interfering in their proper business. If he balances the budget, he is stingy; if he cannot balance the budget he is irresponsible and incompetent...the president will always be between the rock and the hard place (Theodore Hesburg, quoted in Kerr & Gade, 1986, p. 213).

Leadership effectiveness and attributions of positive outcomes "depend greatly on the president's image among faculty constituents" (Bensimon, 1991, p. 651). Like most images, the image of a president is constructed additively, from many gestures and actions that reinforce one another to form a pattern. Presidents who take the role of the faculty, that is, share their values, their beliefs and ways of thinking, seem to induce commitment and support and their constituents appear to be more forgiving of their weaknesses and mistakes (Bensimon, 1991). Fujita (1990) found that presidents seen as reaching out to faculty, soliciting their opinions, dropping into their offices, eating lunch with them, and so forth, were more highly supported than those seen as insular, unapproachable, or authoritarian.

Birnbaum (1992a) categorized faculty support for presidents as low, mixed, or high. Presidents who had low faculty support were characterized as autocratic, isolated from the faculty, double-dealing and dishonest, not wanting to make changes, and tended to rely too much on charisma and not enough on consultation. Mixed faculty support tended to have ambiguous interpretations, that is, quick action was interpreted as vigorous and decisive leadership, while

deferred decisions were seen as reflecting thoughtful consideration and understanding of institutional culture. The majority of presidents in the study with mixed or low faculty support were characterized as having an authoritarian leadership style. Birnbaum (1992a) developed a composite description of authoritarian college presidents as,

those whose emphasis was on achieving tasks with little or no concern for people. [They were] criticized as being impatient with process, indifferent to faculty participation in governance, micromanaging specific institutional processes or programs, acting too quickly with little or no faculty consultation, being aloof or cold, failing to communicate adequately, being difficult to deal with, not suffering fools gladly, or being unpredictable (p. 81).

Some presidents in Birnbaum's (1992a) study also were criticized "for avoiding appropriate management systems so they could insert themselves into any decision they wished and act with no limitations on their discretion" (p. 82).

Faculty dissatisfactions with a president may become rationalized and presidents may not know the extent of faculty concern, "presidents often remained unaware that they had lost faculty support because they developed self-sealing systems of interaction with supportive constituencies that reinforced their views of effectiveness" (Birnbaum, 1992b, p. 19). Such a situation may prevent presidents "from hearing any disconfirming evidence and thus making presidential learning or change unlikely" (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. 102).



High faculty support was found primarily among relatively new presidents (three years or less in office), "seventy-five percent of new presidents but only twenty-five percent of old presidents enjoyed high faculty support" (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. 73). Initial faculty support for a new president tended to be high for several reasons, (a) the faculty constituency participated in the selection process, (b) dissatisfaction with the previous president made the change desirable, and (c) the new president was seen as possessing attributes that would act as a corrective for the perceived weaknesses of the previous president. Birnbaum (1992a) found that presidents who had high faculty support were seen as "honoring and working within established governance structures, accepting faculty participation in decision making and being concerned with process" (p. 78). They were also perceived to be,

very fair and ethical, as having high integrity and competence, not dictatorial or heavy handed. They kept promises once made...stated their positions, and were not seen as having hidden agendas. As a consequence, they were described as principled, decent, honest, and trustworthy (Birnbaum 1992a, p. 78 - 79).

The single most frequently identified dimension used by faculty to assess their presidents was a willingness to be influenced (Birnbaum, 1992a, 1992b; Fujita, 1990). Birnbaum (1992a) also found this was true for trustees and administrators. To be influenced, presidents needed to be good listeners. To listen effectively, presidents needed to

consult broadly enough to permit the emergence of multiple views and to remain open to evidence that may disconfirm their own predilections, and to actively seek, rather than merely passively receive, information about constituent perceptions and campus functioning (Birnbaum, 1992a; Leinbach, 1993).

Faculty support for presidents also may be affected by the presence of unions and/or membership in an institutional system. Birnbaum (1992a) reported that the presence of a faculty union and membership in an institutional system may reduce faculty support for a president and therefore constrain the leadership that the president can exercise. He noted, however, that neither element necessarily makes good leadership impossible, in fact, "exemplary presidents were found both on unionized and system-related campuses" (p. 163).

Careful attention to the faculty constituency plays an important role in presidential support and effective college leadership. Another equally important factor is the president's selection of administrators who serve with her/him on an administrative team.

#### The President and Administrators

The president's selection of college administrators influences the level of effective leadership exercised in the institution (Birnbaum, 1992a; Bogue, 1985; Fisher, 1980;

Fisher et al., 1988; Gardner, 1990; Moore, 1980). The college president, as chief executive officer of the institution, functions as part of an *administrative team*. The president's cabinet or council is made up of purposively selected members who serve to inform and advise the president.

Effective college presidents surround themselves with the most able people they can find (Birnbaum, 1992a; Fisher, 1980; Fisher & Tack, 1990). Knowledgeable, capable, ethical, critical and creative administrative team members enhance effective leadership. However, recruiting administrative team members of high caliber doesn't always happen.

Gardner (1990) and Birnbaum (1992a) observed that leaders often recruit individuals "who have as their prime qualities an unswerving loyalty to the boss" (Gardner, 1990, p. 150). When this criterion prevails, effective leadership teams are "illusory" (Birnbaum, 1992a), and all too often become "a ruling clique or circle of sycophants" (Gardner, 1990, p. 150). Such a clique, as Gardner (1990) explained, tends to increase the leader's isolation and withholding of candid criticism necessary to individuals in positions of power, "even more serious, such a clique generally neglects one of the prime tasks of the team: to activate widening circles of supplementary leadership" (p. 150 - 151).

Presidents are cautioned not to fill administrative cabinets or councils with only the people who agree with them (Birnbaum, 1992a; Bogue, 1985; Gardner, 1990; Moore, 1980). To be well-informed and capable of rendering good decisions, presidents need to be able to rely on administrative team members and others to provide alternative perspectives along with relevant information and feedback to avoid systematic biases and selective processing of information (O'Reilly, 1983). Any leader can be blinded by the realities of a situation, "he may be arrogant and screen out dissonant feedback" or "his staff may fear to furnish dissonant feedback" (Bogue, 1985, p.129). In The Effective College President, Fisher et al. (1988) reported,

effective presidents do not surround themselves with yes-people. They encourage people to think creatively and to consider alternatives that appear on the surface to be impossible. Through listening to people who think differently, effective presidents stretch and grow (p. 109).

In a similar line of thought, Bogue (1985) asserted "administrators need the force of dissent to keep them from both arrogance and the illusion of knowledge" (p. 136), and "a hospitality to dissent keeps the administrator from the destructive tendency of assuming pathological motives on the part of those with which he may disagree" (p.135). Bogue (1985) also proposed that presidents need to test the validity of their ideas "in the hot crucible of experience in competition with the ideas of others...it may be more comfortable to work with sycophants than critical

colleagues...but [presidents] need about [them] stalwart spirits, quick minds, and courageous hearts" (p. 136).

The need for critical colleagues on administrative teams is especially evident in institutional decision-making processes. O'Reilly (1983) observed that administrative decision-makers often have strong preferences and biases for certain preconceived outcomes. Decision makers may tend to selectively seek out favorable information while avoiding other types in ways calculated to maximize acceptance of their decisions. "In organization settings, groups of like-minded decision makers may exaggerate these biases toward selective perception and actually act collectively to censor or derogate information in opposition to their desired ends" (O'Reilly, 1983, p. 120). According to O'Reilly (1983), decision makers may seek two kinds of information-- information used to *make* decisions and information used to *support* decisions. He noted it is not uncommon for leaders *qua* decision-makers to actively seek certain kinds of information or to hire outside consulting groups, not for use in *making* decisions, but solely for the purpose of supporting a decision that has *already* been made. Thus, administrative information gathering may be incomplete and communications with constituents may be withheld or distorted.

Presidents who wish to improve their own effectiveness and that of their institutions will recruit and retain only

the best and most able people. They will also develop effective working relationships with the college's Board of Trustees.

### The President and Board of Trustees

The relationship of the college president with the governing board is "the most personal and sometimes tenuous" (Parnell, 1990, p. 23). Boards of trustees are defenders of the *public interest* and though they do not administer the institution, they require the assurance that it is being administered effectively. According to Kerr and Gade (1986), one of the first duties of a board of trustees is "to assure an effective presidency for the sake of the institution, but also for the sake of the board; only with an effective presidency can a board be effective" (p. 177). Selecting and retaining a college president, trustees mostly look for "integrity, competence, results, good external relations, effective consultation with the board, adaptability, and tranquility on campus" (Kerr & Gade, 1986, p. 29).

Chait, Holland, and Taylor (1993) investigated effective boards of trustees. They interviewed 108 board members and presidents at 22 colleges in the United States. They defined effective boards as those that (a) adapt to the distinctive characteristics of an academic environment, (b) rely on the institution's mission, values, and traditions as

a guide for decisions, and (c) act so as to exemplify and reinforce the organization's core values. Chait et al. (1993) reported that specific characteristics and behaviors distinguish strong boards of trustees from weak boards. They categorized six dimensions of effective trusteeship, which are briefly summarized below (Chait et al., 1993, pp. 2 - 3):

1. *Contextual Dimension*: The board understands and takes into account the culture and norms of the organization it governs.
2. *Educational Dimension*: The board takes the necessary steps to ensure that trustees are well-informed about the institution, the profession, and the board's roles, responsibilities, and performance.
3. *Interpersonal Dimension*: The board nurtures the development of trustees *as a group*, attends to the board's *collective* welfare, and fosters a sense of cohesiveness (original italics).
4. *Analytical Dimension*: The board recognizes complexities and subtleties in the issues it faces and draws upon multiple perspectives to dissect complex problems and to synthesize appropriate responses. It searches widely for concrete information and actively seeks different viewpoints from multiple constituencies.

5. *Political Dimension:* The board accepts as one of its primary responsibilities the need to develop and maintain healthy relationships among key constituencies. It consults often and communicates directly with key constituencies, and attempts to minimize conflict and win/lose situations.
6. *Strategic Dimension:* The board helps envision and shape institutional direction and helps ensure a strategic approach to the organization's future. It anticipates potential problems and acts before issues become urgent.

Chait et al. (1993) found that "the vast majority of trustees are not systematically prepared for the role prior to their appointment to a governing board," and that "many boards of trustees constitute a collection of 'successful' individuals who do not perform well as a group" (p. 8). Less effective boards tended to "inject 'sound business practices' into campus governance, and they expected to modify the academic culture so that it approximated more closely their own familiar world and their own prior experience" (Chait et al., 1993, p. 11). Depending on specific circumstances, such trustees may be viewed as ignoring, underestimating, or violating campus cultures.

Effective boards, according to Chait et al. (1993), also "understand college mission especially well and rely on



it as the essential context for major decisions" (p. 13). Effective boards frequently and explicitly make "reference to the college's history and heritage" (p. 14), "anticipate problems and act before issues become urgent" (p. 100), and "regularly interact with the college's constituents and genuinely respect the legitimate roles of others in the governance process" (p. 127).

Fisher (1994) held a different and somewhat contradictory view on the president/board relationship. He argued, "countless presidencies have failed not because of inept presidents, but for want of enlightened behavior on the part of the board" (p. 60). In The Board and the President, Fisher (1991) asserted, "governing boards are largely responsible for the poor condition of the presidency...they have approved policies and practices that have unintentionally compromised the ability of the president to lead" (p. 1). Fisher (1991) asserted that governing boards rightly hold college presidents accountable but constrain them with less authority to get the job done:

The result has been lessened respect for the presidential office and for those who hold the position, and a growing tendency for governing boards to get overly involved in the administration of the institution. That involvement has led to ever closer relationships between boards and faculty, students and staff, thus increasing the estrangement of the president from each group. In such situations the leader, to survive at all, must become a master at pandering to each group until, almost inevitably, he or she succumbs to their collective ineptitude as the obvious scapegoat. In such situations,

effective leadership is all but impossible (p. 66 - 67).

According to Chait et al. (1993), president and board relationships are reciprocal and mutually reinforcing. Presidents and boards rely on each other to supply the information, credibility, and support that enables them to perform their respective roles effectively. The president can play a "crucial role in encouraging, or undermining, effective board functioning" (Chait et al., 1993, p. 114).

College presidents associated with effective boards "acted as true educators, helping to instill and facilitate the trustees' desire to learn more about their institution, the nature of the profession, and the roles and responsibilities of the board" (Chait et al., p. 118). Effective boards can "weigh the most complex issues intelligently and creatively, and welcome the opportunity to do so, *if* the president furnishes them with pertinent information and a supportive context for discussion" (Chait et al., p. 126). Thus, through reciprocal processes of learning, successful boards promote successful presidents, and vice versa; and, college leadership tends to become effective.

### Leadership Effectiveness

Like definitions of leadership, definitions of leadership effectiveness differ among researchers and vary

among those in organizational settings. Criteria of leadership effectiveness are often difficult to specify and are frequently affected by factors beyond a leader's control (Hogan et al., 1994).

The criteria for what constitutes leadership effectiveness depend on the objectives and values of those making the determination. Judgements about leadership effectiveness, therefore, will vary. One observer may readily see effective leadership "in a president who heals a wounded campus or renews an institution's culture, while another finds it more in a leader's potent strategy or ability to make tough and courageous decisions over strong opposition" (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. 52).

Leadership effectiveness (or ineffectiveness) seems to be ultimately determined by those involved with it and affected by it. Kerr and Gade (1986) suggested that effective leadership meant getting the best people you can find to share the vision and help achieve it. Birnbaum (1992a) argued "the most effective behaviors of a leader are those that fulfill the expectations of constituents" (p. 36). However, a leader's superiors are likely to prefer different criteria for effectiveness than his/her subordinates. Also, the expectations of a leader's various constituent groups are influenced heavily by culture and interpretation, and are likely to differ from campus to campus and situation to situation.

According to Hogan et al. (1994), Vaughan (1986), and Yukl (1989), an important indicator of leadership effectiveness is the level of follower support. Murphy and Cleveland (1991, cited in Hogan et al., 1994) observed that the evaluation of a leader's performance depends, in part, on the types of relationships that the leader has established with her or his subordinates. Hogan et al. (1994) argued from the literature on leadership evaluation that subordinates are often in a unique position to evaluate the level of leadership effectiveness. For example, Hegarty (1974) found that university department chairs who received feedback from their subordinates had improved records of performance and increased levels of effectiveness.

Because subordinates are in a unique position to judge leadership effectiveness, some researchers have investigated which leadership characteristics subordinates considered to be most important. Studies by Lombardo et al. (1988), and others, found that a leader's *credibility* or *trustworthiness* may be the single most important factor in subordinates' judgements of leaders' effectiveness.

Researchers in academic settings investigated other leader traits and behaviors that impact leadership effectiveness. In The Effective College President, Fisher et al. (1988) conducted a two-year national study investigating whether there were certain leadership traits or behaviors that enhanced a person's ability to be

effective in a presidential position. The authors compared 95 effective presidents (as determined by peer selection and experts) and their representative (unselected) counterparts and found that they differed in a variety of dimensions. Fisher and Tack (1990) expanded on the characteristics of effective leaders listed by Fisher et al. (1988). According to Fisher and Tack (1990, pp. 8 - 10) effective college presidents:

identify opportunities, analyze the information at hand, consult others, and then make a decision;

think carefully about what they say and do;

believe strongly in the power of ideas and vision;

are more inclined to encourage staff and faculty to take risks, to think differently, to be creative and to share their thoughts no matter how diverse;

surround themselves with exceedingly able people;

actively seek input from those directly affected by decisions and encourage the creation of mechanisms to provide this feedback;

balance distance and privacy with closeness and familiarity...lead warmly with care and respect.

In a study of how presidents assess their own effectiveness, Birnbaum (1989) reported that college presidents were found on average to rate themselves as more effective than the average president and much more effective than their predecessors. Birnbaum (1989) also found that college presidents tended to see themselves as responsible for campus improvements and campus events that had positive effects, while denying responsibility for campus events with

negative consequences. College presidents often ascribed their successes to personal skills and abilities, and failures to the environment or bad luck. However, Zaleznik (1993) suggested that a leader's learning from her/his mistakes and making improvements serves to enhance leadership effectiveness.

On the other hand, some characteristics of leaders and their environmental contexts negatively impact leadership effectiveness, and presidential careers tend to *derail*.

#### Derailment

The vast majority of research on leadership effectiveness sought to determine what leadership effectiveness is or how it could be taught. Other researchers such as Hogan et al. (1994) examined leadership effectiveness in terms of what it was *not*; that is, leadership performance in a *negative direction*. Many studies of this type examined persons whose careers were in jeopardy or who had "derailed" (Bentz, 1990; Lombardo et al., 1988).

Lombardo et al. (1988) argued that studying derailment specifically illuminates aspects of leader effectiveness not usually connected with measures of success alone,

successful executives seem to engage in specific behaviors which produce a general description of them as loyal or having integrity. Not blaming others, admitting personal mistakes, putting organization over self, and admitting personal

limits are not often cited in studies examining predictors of success. Considering reasons why people fail illuminates the role *honor* and *integrity* play in career success (p. 213, italics added).

Derailment in a managerial or executive role can be defined as "being involuntarily plateaued, demoted, or fired below the level of anticipated achievement or reaching that level only to fail unexpectedly" (Lombardo et al., p. 199).

Bentz (1990) studied the notion of derailment while analyzing the correlates of executive performance at Sears. He found that among the persons who had appropriate positive characteristics, such as skill, intelligence, confidence, ambition, and so forth--a subset had failed. Bentz (1990) believed that failed executives had alienated subordinates through some overriding character flaws or personality traits which ultimately prevented them from being effective. Bentz (1985, cited in Hogan et al., 1994) suggested that the primary themes associated with failure were dishonesty, moodiness, and playing politics.

Lombardo et al. (1988) examined an inventory of qualitative studies involving over 400 company executives. They found that derailed individuals were much more likely to be seen as "lacking the cognitive capabilities or skills to think strategically, make high-quality decisions in ambiguous circumstances and demonstrate needed political skills than the successful" and "to be seen as unstable, abrasive, or untrustworthy" (Lombardo et al., p. 212). Also

associated with derailment were a failure to direct, motivate, teach, develop and select wisely.

Other types of behaviors not often measured as success characteristics, but which appear to be so according to Lombardo et al. (1988) are adapting to different kinds of bosses, (e.g., new presidents or new board members), being cool in a crisis, and a willingness to learn from all kinds of people and situations. Benezet, Katz, and Magnusson (1981) suggested that college leaders who learn from errors are more valuable to an institution than those who don't,

learning to lead a college becomes a conscious experience if one acknowledges that more learning results from errors than from successes...the most tangible reward of the president's willingness to learn from errors is that they occur less frequently as his term goes on" (p. 108).

Research attempts to understand leadership success and failure prompted Hogan et al. (1994) to suggest that there are "bright side" and "dark side" characteristics to leadership. "Bright side" characteristics were categorized as agreeableness, conscientiousness, intelligence, surgency, and emotional stability. Hogan et al. (1994) argued that effectiveness requires both the presence of positive characteristics and the absence of what they called "dark side" characteristics, "irritating tendencies that alienate subordinates and interfere with [effective leadership]" (p. 499).

Many [leaders] who are bright, hard-working, ambitious, and technically competent fail (or are in danger of failing) because they are perceived



as arrogant, vindictive, untrustworthy, selfish, emotionally unstable, overcontrolling, insensitive, abrasive, aloof, too ambitious, or unable to delegate or make decisions (Hogan et al., 1994, p. 499).

Dark side tendencies, according to the authors, become apparent on the job only under certain circumstances and the passage of time, but that subordinates are almost always aware of them.

Positive and negative aspects of leadership contexts, leader traits, behaviors and situational factors tend to contribute to leadership effectiveness and ultimately to a president's success or failure.

### Success and Failure in the College Presidency

Robert Birnbaum (1992a) conducted a landmark study of success and failure in the college presidency and how academic leadership works. His five-year longitudinal study included thirty-two educational institutions representing universities, four-year state colleges, four-year independent colleges, and two-year community colleges (eight institutions in each category). The study's objective was to examine "how college and university presidents and other leaders interact and communicate, assess their own and other's effectiveness, establish goals, learn, transmit values, and make sense of the complex and dynamic organizations in which they work." (p. xii). Findings of the study shed considerable light on the nature of academic

leadership as well as success and failure in the college presidency.

Birnbaum (1992a) identified three types of academic leadership, "the modal presidency", "the failed presidency", and "the exemplary presidency." Each categorical type was viewed as having a common beginning but with different outcomes. "New presidents" to college campuses tended to enter their roles believing they were effective institutional leaders based on previous accomplishments and their selection over other candidates in a competitive search process; however, other factors also tended to immediately impact their leadership effectiveness. New presidents often inherited the problems of their successors and found themselves under the watchful eyes of faculty, staff, administrators and trustees who looked for actions that symbolized and validated the change in leadership.

Birnbaum (1992a) observed that new college presidents are faced with strong and self-fulfilling expectations that they will act to correct the deficiencies of their predecessors. They are likely *initially* to be judged as successful because,

their desire to learn and make sense of a new situation appears to demonstrate a high level of concern for constituent interests, their approach and focus of attention are seen as a welcome counterbalance to the behavior of the previous incumbent, and the succession crisis disturbs ongoing social systems and mutes criticism (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. 98).

In their first months on the job, new presidents tended to be very visible spending time touring campus, talking with campus participants, asking questions, seeing and being seen. Presidents were likely during this early part of their term "to publicly profess a consultative style, and to formally communicate to the campus their desire to receive input and their openness to both criticism and support" (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. 86). Their efforts at communication were rewarded by initial perceptions of presidential openness, skill, and commitment which led new presidents to be seen as responsive to their constituents.

During the early phases of their terms, presidents also were likely to hear more praise than criticism of their actions, "potential criticism of a new president is muted because the expectation of good leadership overwhelms any evidence to the contrary" (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. 87). This was the so-called "honeymoon period." During the honeymoon period, presidents can do little wrong. Constituents who supported a new president's actions were quick to say so, and those who were troubled tended to watch and wait rather than speak up. However, "newness" tended to fade with time. Eventually, constituents were less inclined to give the president the benefit of the doubt on the basis that he/she has not yet settled into the position. Also, as new presidents went from issue to issue and problem to problem, their responses were initially seen as separate individual

events. Campus constituents did not yet know enough to place them into a context or interpret them, and the meanings of the president's actions tended to be unclear while the actions were being observed serially (Birnbaum, 1992a). Thus, it takes time for novelty to wear off and for enough information to be collected before campus constituents recognize meaningful patterns of presidential words and behaviors.

According to Birnbaum (1992a, 1992b), "new" college presidents eventually will turn out to be "modal", "failed", or "exemplary" presidents.

The modal presidency. The modal presidency as characterized by Birnbaum (1992a, 1992b) was the typical or average presidency. It began with high support from campus constituencies (faculty, administrators, and trustees), it ended without the support of the faculty. Initial presidential successes and the withholding of criticism during the "honeymoon period" led modal presidents (a) to become more certain of themselves, (b) to overestimate their effectiveness, (c) to become less sensitive to complaints, and (d) to diminish two-way communications. Birnbaum (1992a) reported:

As modal presidents gain experience, they communicate and respond more to trustees and other administrators than to faculty... faculty leaders see this happening and conclude that even when faculty are consulted it is usually a *pro forma*

exercise to provide a patina of legitimacy (p. 93).

As faculty criticism develops, it may be discounted by modal presidents as coming from unrepresentative cabals or stoically accepted as reflecting an unfortunate but inescapable consequence of firm leadership (p. 90).

As relationships with faculty diminished, modal presidents tended to take increasing comfort in their administrative colleagues (Birnbaum 1992a). Most new presidents tended to restructure their administration to develop their own teams and to create reporting lines and structures familiar to them. After the reorganization, new (and/or remaining) senior administrators, who owed their positions to the president tended to bolster the president's sense of competence even as faculty backing diminished (Birnbaum 1992a). This tendency for leaders and their teams to reinforce each other's views, isolate themselves from disconfirming evidence, and become increasingly rigid and resistant to change was not unique to colleges (Katz, 1982; Pfeffer, 1983; Finkelstein and Hambrick, 1990, cited in Birnbaum, 1992a, 1992b).

The failed presidency. Failed presidencies started out like modal presidencies (Birnbaum, 1992a). However, in failed presidencies the president not only lost the confidence of the faculty (like the modal president), but also lost the confidence of his or her board and/or

administrative colleagues. According to Birnbaum (1992a), the most common cause of a failed presidency is,

when presidents respond to a crisis by taking precipitate action without appropriate consultation, which is seen as violating faculty rights...it almost always involves the president engaging in a task-oriented, rational managerial act that appears insensitive to the human aspects of the organization and misreads faculty culture (p. 94 - 95).

Carroll (1992) observed that this type of situation can lead to early presidential departures and votes of "low confidence" preceding the more serious vote of "no confidence." However, Birnbaum (1992a) noted that presidents who were indifferent to faculty views and whose boards were unable or unwilling to intercede, could sometimes weather the immediate storm and continue in office longer. Actions of presidents leading to faculty disaffection initially may be supported by their boards or administrative colleagues "because they appeared to reflect presidential competence, courage, or a 'can-do' attitude" (Birnbaum, 1992a, p.96). Failed presidents tended to lose the ability to influence either institutional processes and outcomes or symbolic interpretations (Birnbaum, 1992b). But, whether presidents ultimately remained or departed, associated emotions and memories of incidents related to the events and circumstances of their tenures tended to remain in the collective faculty psyche (Birnbaum, 1992a, 1992b; Carroll, 1992).

Birnbaum (1992a) found that failed presidents almost uniformly had a linear view of leadership. Under pressure they acted expediently and took unilateral action to respond to what they perceived as a threatening environment. Because their strategies tended to be linear, they saw few alternatives to the courses of action that they followed and believed that they had no choice in what they did. Moreover, they displayed the common distortion of maintaining or even increasing their commitment to the actions they took, regardless of negative outcomes, to cognitively justify their past decisions (Birnbaum, 1992b).

In some cases a failed presidency was not characterized by the occurrence of a precipitous event; instead, presidents developed a downward leadership trajectory in a steady erosion of confidence over time (Birnbaum, 1992a). In any instance, "as a failed president's inability to work constructively with the faculty becomes evident, it eventually leads to loss of board or administration support as well (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. 96). These factors stand in stark contrast to characteristics of an exemplary presidency.

The exemplary presidency. Modal presidents lost faculty support and failed presidents lost not only faculty support but also trustee and administrative support. In contrast, exemplary presidents maintained the support of

faculty, administrators, and trustees *throughout* their institutional careers. Birnbaum (1992a) reported the following about exemplary presidencies:

Exemplary presidents are seen as both competent and as sensitive to the *social and political* dynamics of their institutions (p. 97, emphasis added).

The most important characteristic of exemplary presidents is that they are seen as continuing to respond to the faculty and willing to open themselves to faculty influence. They listen to faculty, and they support existing faculty governance mechanisms (p.98).

[Exemplary presidents] viewed their institutions as collective enterprises, and their concern for task was integrated with and inseparable from their concern for *people and process* (p. 101, emphasis added).

Two key factors in Birnbaum's (1992a) description of exemplary presidency leadership were cognitive complexity and the level of constituent support. Cognitive complexity meant that presidents could see the organization from multiple perspectives, or "cognitive frames" (Birnbaum, 1992a; see also Bolman & Deal, 1984). The level of constituent support was considered the most important aspect of exemplary leader effectiveness.

Findings of Birnbaum's (1992a, 1992b) studies on success and failure in the college presidency suggested ten principles of good academic leadership: (a) making a good impression, (b) knowing how to listen, (c) balancing governance systems, (d) avoiding simplistic thinking, (e) de-emphasizing institutional bureaucracy, (f) re-emphasizing core values, (g) focusing on institutional strengths, (h)



encouraging others to be leaders, (i) evaluating your own performance, and (j) knowing when to leave.

On the last principle, Birnbaum (1992a) observed that though it may be in their institution's best interests for presidents to leave voluntarily, the actual decision to leave is difficult because the presidency for many is the culmination of a career. Birnbaum (1992a) admonished college presidents, however, "campus leadership positions are roles not careers...presidents should be prepared to leave when they no longer have the support they need" (p. 193).

Though Birnbaum (1992a, 1992b) admitted that his research cannot be generalized to the world of higher education, he suggested that presidential paths, or trajectories, "once established, tend to become self-reinforcing and difficult to change" (Birnbaum, 1992b, p. 21). He further "guesstimated" (his term) that by the time presidents leave office, "approximately one-fourth of all incumbents will have followed the path of exemplary presidents; one-half, of modal presidents; and one-fourth, of failed presidents" (p.103). Whether new presidents to a campus follow a modal, failed, or exemplary path is related to the characteristics of the president, the history of the institution, the nature of the environment, and luck (Birnbaum, 1992a, 1992b).

Though leadership effectiveness is often discussed and researched in terms of leader traits, behaviors, power, internal and external environments, constituent support, and so forth, the "moral/ethical" dimension of leadership cannot be overlooked.

### Moral/Ethical Dimensions

Many researchers and practitioners in education maintain that educational leaders must be sensitive to the moral and ethical dimensions of their leadership (Birnbaum, 1992a; Bogue, 1985; Hankin, 1992; Hodgkinson, 1991; Maxcy, 1991; Moriarty, 1992; Tatum, 1992; Vaughan, 1992). Effective college leadership builds on both technical and ethical foundations (Birnbaum, 1992a; Bogue, 1985; Maxcy, 1991). Citing the Josephson Institute for the Advancement of Ethics, Tatum (1992) wrote that those in leadership positions "should be honest, have integrity, keep promises, possess fidelity, be fair, care about others, respect others, be responsible citizens, work for excellence, be accountable for their actions, and protect the public trust" (p. 191).

Moriarty (1992) and Vaughan (1992) asserted that community college presidents, as stewards of the public trust, must continuously think and behave as if ethics and moral leadership were their most important responsibility. Because college leaders are involved in processes of

gathering information, interpreting events, making decisions and selecting one course of action over another, they are constantly called on to make value choices and to mediate and resolve conflict. Conflicts are an inevitable part of organizational life and are an essential, necessary and healthy part of their functioning (Burns, 1978; Hodgkinson, 1991). Effective college leaders act with a moral foundation that permits them to keep their balance in unsettling conditions, "values permit principled and consistent action, even in the midst of uncertainty" (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. 183).

The values leaders hold and the choices they make define the moral dimension of their leadership, since they require leaders to act outside the guidance of rules, "values infuse presidents' behavior with meaning, provide legitimacy for their actions, and set a moral tone to their behavior" (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. 184).

Vaughan (1992) proposed that ethics should be at the center of campus culture. He defined professional ethics as "that set of principles, beliefs, and rules of moral conduct that guides the actions of the members of the college community" (p.5). Vaughan (1992) also suggested that college leaders should continuously demonstrate an ethical approach to leadership by being above reproach in their own professional and personal actions. A leader's words and actions about moral leadership "ring hollow when there is

little evidence of the leaders personal integrity or personal awareness of ethics" (Moriarty, 1992, p.55).

*Constituents always ask that their leader's actions support their rhetoric* (Birnbaum, 1992a; Bogue, 1985; Hankin, 1992; Hodgkinson, 1991; Moriarty; 1992; Tatum; 1992; Vaughan; 1992).

Tatum (1992) suggested that there are certain myths of ethical behavior that tend to influence how some leaders conduct themselves and make decisions, but which should not be used to excuse unethical behavior. One of the most common myths is *"If it is legal, it is ethical."* It is a familiar strategy used by politicians and business executives who take refuge in the law claiming that the legality of an action cleansed them of all wrongdoing. Tatum (1992) pointed out that being legal does not equate with being ethical. People may generally believe that if something is not specifically prohibited by law, it's O.K. to do it. However, not all unacceptable or wrong behaviors are proscribed by law.

A second myth described by Tatum (1992) is *"If you have a right to do it, it is the right thing to do."* This is a spin-off of the first. Tatum (1992) observed that even though it is perfectly legal and even though the person may have a right to do it, some actions *destroy trust* (see also Bogue, 1985, p. 138).

One of the most important leadership tasks, according to Gardner (1990), is to reinforce or develop processes that constantly work to engender trust and regenerate an institution's values. Leadership ultimately is a moral act based on trust and values. Values can be implicit in what a leader does, but in a symbolic environment actions tend to speak louder than words. Leadership, as an art form (DePree, 1989), is improved by "the display of *personal integrity*" (Bogue, 1985, p. 4, italics added). Public articulation of shared values and visible demonstration of those values by leaders "engenders others trust, and trust induces an increased openness to influence" (Birnbaum, 1992a, p. 185). Institutions that involve themselves in achieving consensus and empowering people rather than strengthening the hierarchical structure are much more apt to create an environment conducive to ethical behavior than are others, "shared governance on campus is one safe-guard against unethical behavior" (Tatum, 1992, p. 206).

Bogue (1985) observed "the moral fibre of men and women in leadership positions is tested daily in actions of authority and power" (p. 138). Leaders tend to bring their institutions in harm's way "not so much by lack of technical skill as by the sacrifice of their integrity" (Bogue, 1985, p. 138). Community college leaders have opportunities available almost daily to demonstrate integrity and exhibit

ethical behavior thereby weaving their own behavior into the fabric and culture of the institution (Vaughan, 1992).

Part of the trust that all constituents have in leaders is a communicated belief in the *rightness* of what is being done (Greenleaf, 1991). When community college leaders emphasize values in the decision-making process and encourage members of the college community to ask if a decision or an act is right or wrong they "tap into institutional values normally associated with effective institutions of higher education" (Vaughan, 1992, p. 23). According to Tatum (1992), college leaders would do well to preface every decision they make by asking themselves: Will this build trust? Will it build long-term trust? How might it destroy trust?

Hodgkinson (1991) proposed "the integrity or moral virtue of an administrator is the chief component of credibility" (p. 61). Bogue (1985, p. 149 - 150) identified five principles that describe the leader of integrity, which are briefly summarized below.

*Curiosity.* Leaders in a community of learning model in their own lives what they expect of colleagues and students, a sustaining curiosity, intense intellectual drive, and excitement and hunger for learning expressed in reflection and action.

*Candor.* Leaders speak the truth--with sensitivity or more force when appropriate. They ask for the truth, value

dissent, and are willing to endure the discomfort carried by the truth.

*Courtesy.* Leaders treat each person with dignity, from professor to groundskeeper, from governor to student. They resist arrogance because arrogance offends a person's dignity.

*Courage.* Leaders are willing to risk, to stand in isolation, to confront wrong-doing, to communicate directly and forthrightly, and to accept the mistakes of self and others and learn from them.

*Compassion.* Leaders create hope and inspiration in others by investing colleagues with trust and high expectations and by opening opportunity for development.

Other useful principles for achieving effective and ethical leadership were offered by Hodgkinson (1991), "know the task, the situation, the followership, and oneself" (p. 153) and "let the leader seek to be--so far as possible--good and true" (p. 154).

The foregoing review of relevant research literature was purposively selected to facilitate connections between what currently is known about leadership in higher education and the particular elements and context of the crisis in leadership that occurred at Meadow View Community College.

## CHAPTER 3

## REVIEW OF RELEVANT METHODOLOGICAL LITERATURE

## Overview

The selection of a research methodology depends in large part upon its usefulness to the purposes of the research. Silverman (1993) observed, "it is an increasingly accepted view that work becomes scientific by adopting methods of study appropriate to its subject matter (p.144). Similarly, Hammersley (1992) wrote, "our decisions about what level of precision is appropriate in relation to any particular claim should depend on the nature of what we are trying to describe, on the likely accuracy of our descriptions, on our purposes, and on the resources available to us" (cited in Silverman, 1993, p. 26).

Real problems for research, according to Erlandson et al. (1993), "always appear in particular contexts" (p. 43). While relevant data leading to resolution of the research problem may come from many sources, solutions are always bound by the contexts (Erlandson, et al., 1993). Thus, one of the roles of the researcher is "to gain a "holistic" (systemic, encompassing, integrated) overview of the context under study" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.6).

In addition to arriving at an understanding of the problem in its *real context*, Silverman (1993) suggested that the investigator may open new avenues of action and



perception among those studied, "Organisational leaders may be ignorant of the dysfunctional aspects of certain programs or processes and an exposure to the research findings may serve to correct their misconceptions" (p.174).

Selecting research methods appropriate to the subject matter, gaining a holistic understanding of the context under study, and sharing research findings with those studied are important aspects of research in fields of education, sociology and anthropology. In such fields of research, "the naturalistic paradigm is the paradigm of choice" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.260).

#### The Naturalistic Inquiry Paradigm

The naturalistic inquiry paradigm "provides a means of exploring and understanding contexts--their successes, their issues, and their problems" (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p. 176). The essence of naturalistic research is "the ability to get inside the social context, to share constructed realities with the stakeholders in that context, and to construct new realities that enhance both the knowledge of the researcher and the knowledge and efficacy of the stakeholders" (Erlandson, et al. 1993, p. 68). Thus, a principal task of naturalistic research is "to communicate a setting with its complex interrelationships and multiple realities to the intended audience in a way that enable and

require that audiences interact cognitively and emotionally with the setting" (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p. 163).

The naturalistic research paradigm differs in many ways from the conventional, or positivist, research paradigm. The aim of naturalistic inquiry is not to develop a body of knowledge in the form of nomothetic (lawlike) generalizations that are statements free from time or context. The aim of naturalistic research is "to develop shared constructions that illuminate a particular context and provide working hypotheses for the investigation of others" (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p. 45). Key differences in the axioms, or underlying assumptions, for the conventional (positivist) and naturalist research paradigms are illustrated in Table 1.

#### Validity, Reliability and Generalization

Naturalistic and conventional research paradigms also differ on conceptualizations of what makes a study credible or trustworthy. A primary assumption underlying naturalistic qualitative research is that reality is holistic, multidimensional, and ever-changing; it is not a single, fixed, objective phenomenon waiting to be observed, measured and discovered (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Moreover, if the primary rationale for conducting an investigation is

understanding (Agar, 1986), rather than prediction or discovery of a law or testing a hypothesis, the criteria for

TABLE 1

Contrasting Conventional (Positivist) and Naturalist Axioms

<i>Axioms About</i>	<i>Conventional Paradigm</i>	<i>Naturalist Paradigm</i>
Nature of reality	Reality is single, tangible, and fragmentable.	Realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic.
Relationship of knower to the known	Knower and known are independent, a dualism	Knower and known are interactive, inseparable.
Possibility of generalization	Time- and context-free generalizations (nomo-thetic statements) are possible.	Only time- and context-bound working hypotheses (ideo-graphic statements) are possible.
Possibility of causal linkages	There are real causes, temporally precedent to or simultaneous with their effects.	All entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects.
Role of values	Inquiry is value-free.	Inquiry is value-bound.

(adapted from Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

determining a study's trustworthiness are also going to be different.

In the conventional paradigm, the terms *validity* (internal and external) and *reliability* are often used to describe and determine the trustworthiness of studies. To make comparisons in the conceptualizations of what is credible or trustworthy in naturalistic and conventional paradigms, the traditional terms *reliability*, *internal validity*, and *external validity* are paired with the preferred qualitative terms *dependability*, *credibility*, and *transferability*, respectively.

Many naturalistic and qualitative researchers consider the terms *dependability*, *credibility*, and *transferability*, viable alternatives for more meaningfully assessing the "trustworthiness" of qualitative research (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Reliability and dependability. The underlying issue here is whether the process of the study is consistent and reasonably stable over time and across researchers and methods. In other words, have things been done with reasonable care (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Within conventional studies, reliability is typically demonstrated by replication, "if two or more repetitions of essentially similar inquiry processes under essentially similar conditions yield essentially similar findings, the

reliability of the inquiry is indisputably established" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 298).

However, reliability in qualitative research tends to be problematic simply because human behavior is never static, and situations constantly change. Thus, according to Merriam (1988) replication of a qualitative study will not yield the same results.

Because what is being studied in education is assumed to be in flux, multifaceted, and highly contextual, because information gathered is a function of who gives it and how skilled the researcher is at getting it, and because the emergent design of a qualitative study precludes a priori controls, achieving reliability in the traditional sense is not only fanciful but impossible (Merriam, 1988, p. 171).

Since reliability in the traditional sense seems to be inappropriate when applied to qualitative research, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested thinking about the "dependability" or "consistency" of the results obtained from the data. That is, given the data collected and the methods used, are they consistent and dependable? Silverman (1993) emphasized "authenticity" rather than reliability as the salient issue in qualitative research, "the aim is usually to gather an 'authentic' understanding of people's experiences" (p.10).

Yin (1994) tended to approach the problem of reliability differently. He suggested there is a need for better documentation of research methods in case studies, "in the past, case study research procedures have been poorly documented" (p.37); and, "one prerequisite for

allowing [another] investigator to repeat an earlier case study is the need to document the procedures followed in the earlier case" (p. 36). Along with better documentation of methods, a case study's reliability, or dependability, or authenticity is also strengthened through triangulation, i.e., the use of multiple sources (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Silverman, 1993; Yin, 1994).

Internal validity and credibility. Internal validity, in conventional use, is primarily a concern for causal relationships. An investigator attempts to infer that a relationship between two variables is causal or that the absence of a relationship implies the absence of a cause (Cook and Campbell, 1979, cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

More useful to the qualitative researcher, however, are questions of credibility and authenticity rather than causality (Miles & Huberman, 1994). That is, do the findings of the study make sense? Are they credible to the people studied and to the readers? Is there an authentic portrait of what was studied?

Judging the validity of a qualitative study rests upon an investigator's ability to show that he or she has represented the multiple realities of the stakeholders adequately, i.e., the researcher has presented a credible rendering of how the informants viewed themselves and their

experiences (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984; Merriam, 1988). It is important in naturalistic qualitative research to understand the perspectives of those involved in the phenomenon of interest, to uncover the complexity of human behavior in a contextual framework, and to present a holistic interpretation of what is happening (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Several strategies for ensuring internal validity by an investigator have been suggested by researchers (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 1993; Yin, 1994). Among the strategies were (a) triangulation through use of multiple sources of data, (b) member checks through asking participants for verification of factual content, and (c) explication of researcher biases through clarifying the researcher's assumptions, preferences, and theoretical orientation at the outset of the study.

External validity and transferability. External validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. That is, how *generalizable* are the results? Because of different fundamental assumptions within the conventional and naturalistic research paradigms, interpretation of the term "generalizing" differs.

In conventional research generalizations are made from samples to populations or universes. Generalizations to other settings or people are made through assumptions of some equivalency between the sample and the population from which it was drawn. The research utilizes random sampling, control of sample size, and statistical inferences within specified levels of confidence.

Naturalistic qualitative research, on the other hand, does not and cannot generalize in the same way. Erickson (1986) argued that the production of generalizable knowledge is an inappropriate goal for qualitative interpretive research, "the search is not for *abstract universals* arrived at by statistical generalizations from a sample to a population, but for *concrete universals* arrived at by studying a specific case in great detail and then comparing it with other cases studied in equally great detail" (p. 130). According to Silverman (1993) the issue of generalizing in qualitative research "should be couched in terms of the generalisability of cases to theoretical propositions rather than to populations or universes" (p. 160).

Erlandson et al. (1993) wrote that generalizations in the traditional sense would be problematic for naturalistic research because "every context shifts over time as the persons in the context, their constructions of reality, and the relationships among them also shift (even if the



individuals are the same)," thus "no true generalization is really possible; all observations are defined by the specific contexts in which they occur" (p. 32).

Generalizing from samples to universes simply is "incorrect when dealing with case studies" (Yin, 1994, p. 36).

Firestone (1993) recognized these differences in determining generalizability and suggested three levels of generalization: (1) from sample to population, as in conventional research; (2) analytic, for theory-connected studies; and (3) case-to-case transfer, more helpful for qualitative studies (cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994). Schofield (1990) usefully distinguished generalizing to "what is" (other actual contexts), "what may be" (sites undergoing some similar process), and "what could be" (exemplary or ideal cases) (cited in Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In an alternative view, Stake (1978) described what he termed "naturalistic generalization" (cited in Merriam, 1988). That is, people look for patterns that explain their own experience as well as events in the world around them. A thorough knowledge of the particular allows one to see similarities in new and foreign contexts (see also, Dewey, 1938). Generalizability in this sense is ultimately related to what the reader is trying to learn from the case study. Readers of case studies draw on their tacit knowledge, intuition, and personal experience by "recognizing

similarities of objects and issues in and out of context and by sensing the natural covariations of happenings" (Stake, 1978, cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 176). Reader or user generalizability involves leaving the extent to which a study's findings apply to other situations up to the people in those situations. "It is the reader who has to ask, what is there in this study that I can apply to my own situation, and what clearly does not apply? (Walker, 1980, p. 34, cited in Merriam, 1988).

Though a particular context has "meaning only in the idiographic sense, that is, *for that context at that time*" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.216), there may be other contexts with similar features. Transferability from one context to another may occur because of those shared characteristics. The degree of transferability is a "direct function of the *similarity* between the two contexts, or the degree of congruence between sending and receiving contexts" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 124). To establish transferability, however, similar information must be available for both sending and receiving contexts. The research report supplies information only about the studied context. This may make it possible for a reader to judge the degree of transferability to some other context.

A function of the case study is to provide essential judgmental information about the studied context through a "thick description" of that context (Erlandson, et al.,

1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, Merriam, 1988). Guba and Lincoln (1989) explained:

The thick description enables observers of other contexts to make tentative judgments about applicability of certain observations for their contexts and to form "working hypotheses" to guide empirical inquiry in those contexts. This is an important distinction: In a traditional study it is the obligation of the researcher to ensure that findings can be generalized to the population; in a naturalistic study the obligation for demonstrating transferability belongs to those who would apply it to the receiving context (cited in Erlandson, et al., 1993, p. 34).

Through this rich, thick description, "anyone else interested in transferability has a base of information appropriate to the judgment" thereby improving the generalizability of a study's findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, pp. 124-125).

Thus, naturalistic qualitative research conceptualizes and utilizes more appropriate research terms to describe and determine what makes a study credible or trustworthy.

### Characteristics of Naturalistic Research

Characteristics of naturalistic research follow from a logical dependence upon the axioms outlined in Table 1. These include preference for and reliance upon (a) a natural setting, (b) the human as instrument, (c) purposive sampling, (d) inductive analysis, (e) emergent design, and (f) grounded theory.

Natural setting. The natural setting or "real-life" context is preferred because a fundamental assumption of the naturalistic paradigm is that realities are wholes that cannot be understood in isolation from their contexts, nor can they be isolated for separate study of the parts. Thus, the context's *gestalt* has primary importance--the whole is more than the sum of the parts.

Marshall and Rossman (1989) suggested that the ideal research site is where (a) entry is possible, (b) there is a high probability for a rich mix of processes, people, interactions, and/or structures that characterize the research problem, and (c) the researcher can devise an appropriate role to maintain continuity of presence for as long as necessary (cited in Erlandson, et al., 1993).

Human as instrument. The human investigator as a research instrument is considered ideal for naturalistic case studies (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994). This is because of the understanding that all instruments interact with respondents and objects but that "only the human instrument is capable of grasping and evaluating the meaning of that differential interaction" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 39). Humans have the ability to be infinitely adaptable, to sense out salient factors and follow up on them, and to make continuous

adjustments and changes, all while actively engaged in the inquiry itself (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Moreover, the human as research-instrument has the advantage of possessing not only *propositional knowledge*, but also *tacit knowledge*. Polanyi (cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985) distinguished between propositional and tacit knowledge. Propositional knowledge is expressible in language form and is composed of all interpersonally shareable statements, which for most people are observations of objects and events. In contrast, tacit knowledge (intuitive, felt), may also dwell on objects and events, but it is a knowledge gained from experiences with them, experiences with propositions about them, and reflections on those experiences. Polanyi (1962) explained that tacit knowledge is always knowing more than we can say. Tacit knowledge permits us to comprehend metaphors, to know ourselves, or to know how to do something as simple as riding a bicycle. Tacit knowledge "applies equally to connoisseurship as the art of knowing and to skills as the art of doing, wherefore both can be taught only by aid of practical example and never solely by precept" (Polanyi, 1962, p. 88). Thus, experience and practical involvement with the research are key.

For the qualitative researcher, tacit knowledge includes a multitude of inexpressible associations which give rise to new meanings, new ideas, and new applications.

"Tacit knowledge becomes the base on which the human instrument builds many of the insights and hypotheses that will eventually develop..." (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 198). These perhaps may eventually be cast into propositional form.

Utilization of tacit knowledge in addition to propositional knowledge is important to case studies. Often the nuances of the research context and the multiple realities of respondents can be appreciated only in a tacit way, because much of the interactions between the researcher and the context and the respondents occur at this level.

Purposive sampling. Naturalistic sampling is based on informational not statistical considerations. Purposive sampling is a well-known and widely used sampling strategy in qualitative research and is "the most appropriate sampling strategy for a qualitative case study" (Merriam, 1988, p. 52). In most case studies, it is impossible to interview *everyone*, observe *everything*, and gather *all* relevant materials in the case.

Erlandson et al. (1993) emphasized that purposive sampling is a procedure governed by emerging insights about what is relevant to the study, and the deliberate seeking of both typical and divergent data that the insights suggest. Such an approach maximizes the range of specific information that could be obtained from and about a particular context.

According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), sampling to obtain maximum variation facilitates the uncovering of a full array of multiple realities without suppressing divergent types of information. With divergent types of information, the likelihood of bias will have been reduced (Yin, 1994).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) characterized purposive sampling with the following features:

1. Emergent sampling design: No a priori specification of the sample is determined before the study. Sampling depends on the particular ebb and flow of information as the study is carried out.
2. Continuous adjustment or "focusing" of the sample. Insights and information accumulate and the investigator develops working hypotheses about the situation. The sample may be refined to focus more particularly on those units that seem most relevant.
3. Serial selection of sample units. One sample unit leads to another. Successive units are selected based on the need to extend, test, and fill in information already obtained.
4. Selection to point of redundancy. Sampling ends when no new information emerges. The criterion is informational redundancy, not a statistical confidence level.

Goetz and LeCompte (1984, p.78 - 82) proposed additional strategies to select informants prior to the collection of interview data. They identified the following:

1. Comprehensive sampling--examining every case, instance, or element in a given population (e.g., interviewing all board members).
2. Quota selection--identifying the major subgroups and then taking an arbitrary number from each.
3. Reputational case selection--instances chosen on the recommendation of an "expert" or "key informant."

Purposive sampling is an integral part of the ongoing process of naturalistic data collection and analysis, which is primarily an inductive rather than deductive process.

Inductive data analysis. Inductive data analysis often characterizes qualitative case studies. According to Goetz and LeCompte (1984), inductive data analysis "begins with collection of data--empirical observations or measurements of some kind--and builds theoretical categories and propositions from relationships discovered among data" (p. 4). Lincoln and Guba (1985) defined inductive data analysis simply as "a process of 'making sense' of field data" (p. 202).



The use of inductive data analysis presumes a preference for an open and relatively unstructured research design which increases the possibility of coming across unexpected issues (Merriam, 1988; Silverman, 1993). Many researchers adhere to the notion of *inductive purity* which spurns early attempts to impose theories and concepts which may blind the researcher to important features in a case and cause a misreading of local participants' perspectives (Silverman, 1993). In contrast, Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that a lack of conceptual structure, or bounding or focusing, may lead to indiscriminate data collection and data overload. Miles and Huberman (1994) suggested that "better research happens when you make your framework--and associated choices of research questions, cases, sampling, and instrumentation--explicit, rather than claiming inductive 'purity'" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 23).

Emergent design. Research designs in naturalistic inquiry are fundamentally different from those in traditional research. Naturalistic designs are not preordinate, but are emergent. Erlandson et al.(1993) wrote "the design of a naturalistic study is usually not fully established before the study begins but emerges as data are collected, preliminary analysis is conducted, and the context becomes more fully described" (p. 66). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that "naturalistic studies are virtually

impossible to design in any definitive way before the study is actually undertaken" (p. 187). However, neither of these views necessarily implies that naturalistic studies do not have a characteristic pattern of unfolding and development. From the start of data collection, the qualitative analyst is "beginning to decide what things mean--is noting regularities, patterns, explanations, possible configurations, causal flows, and propositions" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.11). According to Miles and Huberman (1994), a *conceptual framework* explains, either graphically or in narrative form, "the main things to be studied--the key factors, constructs, or variables--and the presumed relationships among them" (p.18).

Grounded theory. Grounded theory is theory that follows from the data rather than preceding them, as in conventional inquiry (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). No a priori theory could anticipate the numerous realities likely to be encountered in the field, nor could it encompass the many factors related to contextual elements and values which make a difference at the local level (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Marshall & Rossman, 1989). Formulation of grounded or local theory therefore is "an aggregate of local understandings" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p.204).

Consequently, generation of a qualitative study's conclusions are considered tentative because (a) different

interpretations are likely to be meaningful for different realities, (b) interpretations depend heavily for their validity on the contextual factors involved, and (c) mutual shaping influences and local value systems may vary sharply from site to site (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods are used to study what people do and what happens to them in their natural contexts (Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 1993; Yin, 1996). Qualitative methods give us "a strong handle on what 'real life' is like" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). Qualitative methods can study processes as well as outcomes (Merriam 1988; Silverman, 1993) and they are relatively flexible (Silverman, 1993). With their emphasis on *real-life* settings and people's lived experiences, qualitative methods "are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on the events, processes, and structures of their lives" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.10).

Because *real life* occurs in a multiplicity of settings, there is no standard approach to conducting qualitative research (Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 1993). Qualitative research tends to be more of a craft than a strict adherence to methodological rules, "no study conforms exactly to a standard methodology; each one calls for the researcher to bend the methodology to the

peculiarities of the setting" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 5).

In validating qualitative research, three forms of research validation are often used: (a) *prolonged engagement* (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985); (b) *respondent validation or member checking* (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Silverman, 1993); and, (c) comparing different kinds of data in *triangulation* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 1993; Yin, 1994). *Triangulation* is treated in a separate section of this chapter and in Chapter 4.

Regarding *prolonged engagement*, time is required to allow the researcher to be integrated into the research context so that his/her presence is not considered a major stimulus of respondent behavior (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984). Prolonged engagement provides a foundation for credibility by enabling the researcher to learn the culture of an organization over an extended time period that "tempers distortions introduced by particular events or by the newness of researchers and respondents to each other's presence" (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p.132).

Validation in the form of *member checking* is often utilized by the researcher during the interview process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Erlandson, et al., 1993). Information obtained during interviews is reflectively summarized by the researcher and "played back" to the

respondents. In so doing, the researcher communicates what he/she believed had been said or what had been understood up to that point. This process is advantageous for two reasons. First, the respondents are often reminded of new or additional information upon hearing the summary; and second, it invites the respondents to react to the validity of the constructions which the interviewer had made. This gives the respondents opportunity to clarify or refine their responses and enhances the validity of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Erlandson, et al., 1993).

#### Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection is separated from data analysis in a conventional study. In naturalistic qualitative research, however, data collection and analysis is a *simultaneous* activity and one of the major features that distinguishes naturalistic research from traditional research (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 1993; Yin, 1994).

The continuous recursive analysis of data leads to emerging insights and hunches which are used to direct successive phases of research. Simultaneous analysis and data collection allows the researcher "to direct the data collection phase more productively", as well as to develop a data base that is "both parsimonious and relevant" (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p. 108).

Merriam (1988) described data in qualitative case studies as (a) detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors, (b) direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts, and (c) excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, and records.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) wrote that naturalistic qualitative case study data analysis is not an inclusive phase that can be marked out as occurring at some singular time during the inquiry process (for instance, following data collection and preceding report writing). Data analysis "must begin with the very first data collection, in order to facilitate the emergent design, grounding of theory, and emergent structure of later data collection phases" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 241-242).

According to Miles and Huberman (1994), collected data are useful to a case study if they can (a) identify *new leads* of importance, (b) *extend* the area of information, (c) *relate* or bridge already existing elements, (d) reinforce main trends, (e) account for *other information* already in hand, (f) exemplify or provide more evidence for an *important theme*, and (g) *qualify* or *refute* existing information. Thus, naturalistic qualitative data analysis is the "process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data...a search for general statements

about relationships among categories of data" (Marshall & Rossman, 1989, p. 112).

Naturalistic qualitative case study data analysis is similar to that of traditional ethnographic inquiry described by Goetz and LeCompte (1981, cited in Lincoln and Guba, 1985). That is, as data are recorded and classified, they also are compared across categories. The discovery of relationships among the data begins with an analysis of initial observations and undergoes continuous refinement throughout the data collection and analysis process. It continuously feeds back into the process of category coding. As events are constantly compared with previous events, new dimensions as well as new relationships are discovered.

The "method of constant comparison" (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) for data processing is useful in case studies. It provides an excellent fit with the need for continuous and simultaneous collection and analysis of data. The method of constant comparison generates theoretical properties for categories and delimites data which serves to economize resources and provide workable limits for the research (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested four decision criteria to end data collection and processing: (a) *exhaustion of sources* (although sources may be recycled and tapped multiple times); (b) *saturation of categories*

(continuing data collection would produce tiny increments of new information in comparison to the effort expended to get them); (c) *emergence of regularities* (the sense of data integration); and (d) *over-extension* (the sense that new information was far removed from the core of viable categories that emerged).

As naturalistic qualitative data are collected, constantly compared, categorized and analyzed, they also are triangulated.

### Triangulation

Triangulation of data is crucially important in naturalistic qualitative case studies (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 1993; Yin, 1994). Since all data must be interpreted in terms of their contexts, it is extremely important that sufficient materials be collected to give holistic views of the studied context (Erlandson, et al., 1993).

Through triangulation, several different types of sources are sought which provide insights about the same events or relationships (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Silverman, 1993; Yin, 1994). The use of multiple sources of evidence in triangulation allows the investigator to address a broader range of questions and issues. Yin (1994) reported that case studies using



multiple sources of evidence were rated more highly, in terms of overall quality, than those that relied only on single sources of information.

Through triangulation of data, potential problems of construct validity are addressed, "because the multiple sources of evidence essentially provide multiple measures of the same phenomenon" (Yin, 1994, p.92). Triangulation serves to enhance meaning (Erlandson, et al., 1993), "overcome partial views" (Silverman, 1993, p. 157), and provides "thick description" of relevant information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The most important advantage presented by using multiple sources of evidence through triangulation is *converging lines of inquiry*. That is, any finding in a naturalistic qualitative case study is likely to be much more convincing and accurate if it is based on several different sources of information, "following a corroboratory mode" (Yin, 1994, p. 92).

Common sources of qualitative case study data used in triangulation are observations, interviews, and extant documents and records.

### Observations

Observations are first-hand experiences with the research environment. As a research technique, observations may "intrude as a foreign element into the social setting

they would describe, they create as well as measure attitudes, they elicit atypical roles and responses, they are limited to those who are accessible..." (Webb, et al., 1981, cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 104). However, observations also "maximize the inquirer's ability to grasp motives, beliefs, concerns, interests, unconscious behaviors, customs, and the like" and "to grasp the culture in its own natural, ongoing environment" (Guba & Lincoln, 1981 cited in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 273).

Observations can be classified in at least two ways, *participant* or *nonparticipant*. As a participant-observer, the researcher would play two roles simultaneously, that of observer *and* that of a legitimate and committed member of the group. As a nonparticipant-observer, the researcher would be a spectator.

### Interviews

Interviews provide valuable data for qualitative case studies. Interviews can be described as a conversation with a purpose (Dexter, 1970, cited in Merriam, 1988). Though many tend to think of interviews simply as an investigator asking questions of a subject or respondent, in many case studies interviews take the form of a dialogue or an interaction (Erlandson, et al., 1993). Interviews help the researcher to understand and to put into context the

interpersonal, social, and cultural aspects of the environment under study (Erlandson, et al., 1993).

Interviews in case studies are useful in discovering what people think, how one person's perceptions compare with another's, and how those varying responses are related in the context of common group beliefs and themes (Fetterman, 1989, cited in Erlandson, et al., 1993).

Though interviews are one of the best in-depth ways to find out what people think about a subject, Yin (1994) cautioned that interviews should be considered verbal reports only. As such, they are "subject to the common problems of bias, poor recall, and poor or inaccurate articulation" (Yin, 1994, p.85).

Types of research interviews may range from those that are *structured* (very focused or predetermined) to those that are *unstructured* (very open-ended and nothing is said ahead of time). In an *unstructured* interview, the format is nonstandardized and the interviewer does not seek normative responses, but encourages the interviewee to introduce his or her own notions of what is relevant (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In the *structured* interview, the problem is defined by the researcher before the interview, questions have been formulated ahead of time, and the respondent is expected to answer in terms of the interviewer's framework and definition of the problem (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

However, the most common interview format in naturalistic case study research is the *semistructured* and *open-ended* type of interview (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Yin, 1994). With the semistructured format, interviews are guided by a set of basic questions and issues to be explored which allow for some structure and focus, but at the same time provide a wider range of flexibility. Including an open-ended feature in interviews allows the investigator to ask key respondents for the facts of the matter as well as for their opinions about events (Yin, 1994).

Yin (1994) also suggested that "if one of the interviewees refuses to comment, even though the others tend to corroborate one another's versions of what took place," the good case study report "will indicate this result by citing the fact that a person was asked but declined to comment" (p.85).

Naturalistic case study interview questions are often designed to reflect the following categories of response types suggested by Merriam (1988) and Silverman (1993).

1. Facts: statements from informed sources about the structures, policies and actions of the organization and/or descriptions of an event or community (Silverman, 1993).
2. Feelings and motives: use of open ended questions allowing the respondents to choose their own terms

in relating their perceptions, reactions, values, intentions, beliefs and desires (Silverman, 1993).

3. Standards of action: relating to what people think should or could have been done about certain stated situations, reflecting personal experience with the those situations (Silverman, 1993).
4. Experience/behavior: questions aimed at eliciting descriptions of experiences, behaviors, actions, and activities that would have been observable had the observer been present (Merriam, 1988).

Establishing an interview format and types of research questions facilitates the gathering and recording of relevant research data.

Accurate recording of interview data is important to research credibility. One of the best methods of recording interview data is to audio tape and transcribe the interviews. For many studies, however, transcribing numerous and lengthy interviews often can be prohibitively expensive and time-consuming. Therefore, Merriam (1988) proposed use of an "interview log" as an alternative to verbatim transcription for graduate student research.

The interview log is used to record necessary details of the interview including name, date, place and important statements or ideas expressed by the respondents. Words, phrases or entire sentences are quoted exactly. The notes are coded to the tape counter so the location of the quotes

can be easily accessed. The interview log also includes the researcher's observations about what was said.

Interviews are extremely useful in collecting relevant research data for case studies, but interviews have been known to also have beneficial *educative* and *empowering* effects on participants. Erlandson and others, (1993) suggested that participation in a naturalistic study should be educative and empowering wherein "the naturalistic researcher, rather than acquiring power or supporting existing power structures, seeks to *empower* all who participate in the study" (p.158). This is primarily achieved by openly soliciting and honoring each individual construction of the context under study. For the interviews to be *educative*, "each participant emerges with more information and better understanding than he or she had initially" (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p. 158).

### Documents

Documentary data are particularly reliable sources of information for case studies for several reasons. Documents tend to reveal aspects of a context or situation that could not be observed because they took place before the study began (Merriam, 1988). Documents exist independent of the research agenda and are unaffected by the research process (Yin, 1994). Documents also ground the investigation in

real-world issues and concerns and lend contextual richness to the investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

However, because documents are produced for reasons other than research, there are also potential problems associated with them. Documents may reflect idealized aspects of the organization (Patton, 1980, cited in Merriam, 1988). They might be fragmentary and their authenticity may be difficult to determine (Merriam, 1988). Yin (1994) therefore suggested, "for case studies, the most important use of documents is to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources" (p. 81).

The mode of choice in reporting on the qualitative data obtained through observations, interviews, and documents is the case study approach (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 1994).

### The Case Study Approach

Case studies are useful in presenting information about areas of curiosity and interest where little research has been conducted (Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994), and case studies "frequently provide more information about the process of administration than the content or knowledge base of the field" (Ashbaugh & Kasten, 1991, p. 4). While no naturalistic study could ever describe or explain any research context *in full*, qualitative case studies have the advantage of providing direction for dealing with the same

setting in the future or directing inquiry into other similar settings (Erlandson, et al., 1993).

Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that the case study reporting mode is the vehicle of choice for naturalistic research. The case study mode is often preferred because it is more adapted to a description of multiple realities encountered in the research context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), it could build on the reader's tacit knowledge through presenting holistic and lifelike descriptions that would allow the reader to experience the context vicariously (Erlandson, et al., 1993), and it provides the "thick description" necessary for judgments of transferability to other sites (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The case study approach also provides an assessment of the context by communicating information grounded in the particular setting being studied (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), it has the ability to deal with a full variety of evidence--documents, interviews, and observations (Yin, 1994), it could encourage and facilitate theoretical innovation (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991), and it could contribute to both theory and practice (Merriam, 1988).

Yin (1994) wrote that case studies are the preferred research strategy when "how" questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when



the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context.

Case studies also can serve to activate and enlighten people within the context under study. Authentic insights reached through case studies have "the capacity to work reflexively to change the situation studied...[because] the action possibilities created by case study are grounded in the situation itself, not imposed from outside it (Kemmis, 1983, cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 164).

Knowledge learned from case study research is different from other types of research knowledge in at least three important ways, according to Stake (1981) cited in Merriam (1988).

1. *More concrete*--case study knowledge resonates with our own experience because it is more vivid, concrete and sensory than abstract.
2. *More contextual*--our experiences are rooted in context, as is knowledge in case studies. This knowledge is distinguishable from the abstract, formal knowledge derived from other research designs.
3. *More developed by reader interpretations*--readers bring to a case study their own experience and understanding, which lead to generalizations when new data for the case are added to old data.

Unlike experimental, survey, or historical research, case study research does not claim any particular methods for data collection or data analysis, and most case studies "are qualitative and *hypothesis-generating* rather than quantitative and *hypothesis-testing*" (Merriam, 1988, p.3, italics added).

Merriam (1988) described four essential properties of a qualitative case study--*particularistic, descriptive, heuristic, and inductive*. Case studies are *particularistic* because they focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. The case itself is "important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent" (Merriam, 1988, p. 11). Because of its particularistic nature, a case study can suggest to the reader what to do or what not to do in a similar situation, examine a specific instance but illuminate a general problem, and it may or may not be influenced by the author's bias (Merriam, 1988).

Case studies are *descriptive* because the narrative account is a rich, "thick" description of the phenomenon under study ("thick description" is a term from anthropology meaning a complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated). Several aspects of a case study address its descriptive nature, (a) it can illustrate the complexities of a situation (i.e., the fact that not one but many factors contributed to it), (b) it can show the

influence of personalities on the issue, (c) it can include vivid material from a variety of sources (e.g., interviews, newspaper articles, document excerpts, etc.), and (d) it can present information from the view points of different stakeholder groups.

Case studies are *heuristic* because they illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon under study. They can bring about the discovery of new meaning, extend the reader's experience, or confirm what is known. Previously unknown relationships and variables may emerge from a case study which also may lead to a rethinking of the phenomenon under study, "insights into how things get to be the way they are can be expected to result from case studies" (Merriam, 1988, p.13).

Case studies are *inductive* because they rely on inductive reasoning. Generalizations, concepts or hypotheses emerge from an examination of the data which is grounded in the context itself. Discovery of new relationships, concepts, and understanding, rather than verification of predetermined hypotheses, characterizes qualitative case studies.

Case study research is "an ideal design for understanding and interpreting observations of educational phenomena" (Merriam, 1988, p. 2). According to Erickson (1986, p. 121 - 122) qualitative case study research is needed in education for several reasons:

1. To reflect on everyday life and to make the common or familiar strange and interesting again (People in the course of everyday life often are unaware of what is actually going on around them.).
2. To achieve specific understanding through documentation of concrete details of practice.
3. To consider the local meanings that events have for the people involved in them.
4. To engage in comparative understanding beyond the immediate circumstances of the local setting (How does what is happening here compare with what happens in other places?).

According to Merriam (1988), a qualitative case study is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit" (p.16). Thus, selection of a single case study has both academic and pragmatic usefulness. By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity, i.e., *the case*, the approach "aims to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon" (Merriam, 1988, p.10). Sometimes the study of a single case may help to illuminate how the more general process of the phenomenon works (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991).

There also are instances when the case study represents an *extreme, unique, or revelatory case* (Yin, 1994), or when it is *critical* (Erlandson, et al., 1993) and it is impossible to study the phenomenon in any other way. The situation of a *revelatory case* exists when an investigator has an opportunity to observe and analyze a phenomenon previously inaccessible to scientific investigation. In

these instances, the researcher has opportunity to meet people in the situation (perhaps as it is unfolding), and to observe, listen, and learn of stakeholder perceptions, actions and reactions. The meaning of *critical* here is when the incident reflects on a significant feature of the context being studied, i.e., "critical events are those that either highlight the normal operation or contrast sharply with it (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p.103). A case also might be selected because it is an *instance* of some issue or concern, that is, an instance (but not a representation) of a class of phenomena, "the case study is usually seen as an instance of a broader phenomenon, as part of a larger set of parallel instances (Feagin et al., 1991, p.2).

Merriam (1988) wrote that descriptive research is undertaken (a) when description and explanation rather than prediction based on cause and effect are sought, (b) when it is not possible or feasible to manipulate the potential causes of behavior, and (c) when variables are not easily identified or are too embedded in the phenomenon to be extracted for study.

The foregoing review of relevant methodological literature provided both a justification and a conceptual basis for the researcher to conduct this naturalistic qualitative case study of a crisis in leadership at a community college.

## CHAPTER 4

### METHODOLOGY

#### Overview

This case study investigated the *real-life occurrence* of a crisis in leadership at a community college. The crisis in leadership was defined as the president of Meadow View Community College receiving from his constituents three votes of "no confidence" in two years. The investigation was limited to the particular college under study and was bounded by the length of the president's tenure in office at the college. The researcher made no generalizations beyond the context of the study.

The researcher applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) definition of a research problem as "a state of affairs resulting from the interaction of two or more factors that yields a perplexing or enigmatic state, a conflict, or an undesirable consequence" (p.225). A purpose of this case study was to "resolve" the problem in the sense of accumulating sufficient knowledge to lead to understanding, "a kind of dialectical process that plays off thetical and antithetical propositions that form the problem into some kind of synthesis" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.225).

Real problems, according to Erlandson et al. (1993), always appear in particular contexts. While relevant data leading to a resolution of the research problem may come

from a variety of sources, any proposed solutions are bound by those contexts. Thus, one of the roles of the researcher in this study was to gain a systematic, holistic, integrated, and encompassing overview of the context and phenomenon under study (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

To understand the problem of the leadership crisis in its particular context, the investigator's approach to the research was eclectic. As discussed in Chapter 3, characteristics of this case study included the preference for and a reliance on (a) the paradigm of *naturalistic inquiry* (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), (b) *qualitative methods* (Marshall & Roseman, 1989; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 1993), and (c) *the case study approach* to reporting (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Feagin et al., 1991; Yin, 1994). Information outlining the particulars of this case study and the researcher's use of naturalistic inquiry, qualitative methods and the case study reporting mode are discussed below. The subject of respondent confidentiality and anonymity is also presented and discussed.

### Naturalistic Inquiry

The researcher relied heavily on axioms from the naturalistic inquiry paradigm (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) outlined in Chapter 3 for conducting this case study. The axioms supported a preference for and

a reliance upon (a) a natural setting, (b) the human as instrument, (c) purposive sampling, (d) inductive data analysis, (e) emergent design, and (f) grounded theory.

### Natural Setting

The natural setting selected for this case study was a medium-sized rural community college in a western state. The researcher had little difficulty identifying and selecting a site that would maximize the opportunity to engage the research problem (Marshall & Rossman, 1989). In a recent two or three-year period, nearly thirty percent of the community colleges in the state where the research was conducted had experienced conflict, controversy, and crises in leadership. At the selected college under study, the researcher was serving a doctoral program internship and had opportunity to observe the leadership crisis unfold in its latter stages of development.

### Human as Instrument

The investigator as a research instrument was ideal for conducting this naturalistic case study (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994). Utilization of researcher tacit knowledge in addition to propositional knowledge was important to the interview process and data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba,



1985; Polyani, 1962). Often the nuances and interactions of the research context and the multiple realities presented by respondents were discerned in a tacit way by the researcher.

### Purposive Sampling

Sampling in this case study was *purposive* rather than random (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994). Purposive sampling was used to draw upon the information-rich sources in the research context from which the investigator could learn the most about the study. Respondent sampling was characterized by emergent sampling design, continuous adjustment or focusing of the sample, serial selection of sample units, and selection to point of redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The researcher also utilized the sampling strategies proposed by Goetz and LeCompte (1984) to select informants prior to collection of interview data. Such sampling strategies included (a) comprehensive sampling (e.g. all board members), (b) quota selection, and (c) reputational case selection. Thus, the object of purposive sampling in this case study was not to focus on the similarities that could be developed into generalizations, but to detail the many specifics that gave this research context its unique flavor (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Inductive Data Analysis

Inductive data analysis characterized this naturalistic qualitative case study. Analysis began with collections of observations, interview information and documental data which formed the basis for theoretical categories and propositions derived from relationships discovered among the all data sources (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 1993). Case study data accumulated in the field was analyzed from specific raw units of information to larger subsuming categories of information and compared across categories (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Goetz & LeCompte, 1981; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The use of inductive data analysis presumed a preference for an open and relatively unstructured research design which increased the possibility of coming across unexpected issues in the case (Merriam, 1988; Silverman, 1993). Inductive data analysis was useful to the researcher because the process was more likely (a) to identify the multiple realities to be found in the data, (b) to identify the mutually shaping influences that interacted, (c) to make decisions easier about transferability to other settings, and (d) to make values an explicit part of the analytic structure (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

### Emergent Design

From the outset of the study, the researcher endeavored to infer from the research context an overall though tentative design that would provide direction for subsequent data collection and analysis (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This process of continuously sampling, collecting and analyzing data in the field was interactive and recursive throughout the study. The interactive circular process of data collection, data analysis, and design review continued until a point of redundancy was reached where no significant new information emerged or no major new constructions were developed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

It was conceivable that if permitted, the emergent design could grow and continue indefinitely since it was always possible to come across new questions and new insights worth pursuing. There was a point in the research process, however, where certain features of the case emerged which then were developed into a *conceptual framework* (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The conceptual framework served to further bound and limit the study. A conceptual framework used by the researcher is outlined in Table 2.

As the case study proceeded it became more and more focused, salient elements began to emerge, insights grew, revisions and modifications were made and theorizing became grounded in the data.

Table 2

Conceptual Framework.

## I. Contextual Setting

- A. Demographics.
- B. Prior history.
- C. Organizational norms, rules, and structures.
- D. Stakeholder assumptions and beliefs.

## II. Catalytic Events

- A. Identification.
- B. Nature and extent.
- C. Fixed and variable factors.

## III. Effects of Events

- A. Changes in stakeholder perceptions and actions.
- B. Changes in organizational norms, rules, and structures.

## IV. Outcomes

- A. How crisis may have been avoided.
- B. Perceived gains and losses.
- C. What was learned.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory in this case study was discovered empirically rather than expounded a priori (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory tended to be patterned, open-ended, and was extended as more and more knowledge began to fall into place.

Naturalistic qualitative inquiry steps of purposive sampling, inductive data analysis, emergent design, and development of grounded theory all interacted and were

reiterated multiple times in the course of this study. Eventually tentative conclusions were generated about how the leadership crisis may have been avoided (see Chapter 6).

### Qualitative Methods

The assumptions underlying the naturalistic research paradigm suggested that the use of qualitative methods, as described in Chapter 3, were appropriate for the purposes of this case study. Qualitative methods gave the research a strong handle on what *real life* in community college leadership can be like. With the emphasis on real-life settings and people's lived experiences, qualitative methods were well-suited to locating the meanings respondents placed on the perceptions, events, structures, and processes involved in the leadership crisis.

For the purposes of this study, three forms of qualitative research validation were adopted and used, (a) comparing different kinds of data in *triangulation* (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 1993; Yin, 1994), (b) *respondent validation* or *member checking* (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Silverman, 1993); and, (c) *prolonged engagement* (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

In regard to *prolonged engagement* (Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), time was required to allow the researcher to be integrated into the research context so that his presence

was not a major stimulus of respondent behavior. This was achieved through the researcher's internship and on-site visits. Prolonged engagement helped the researcher build trust and develop rapport with the respondents (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). One respondent in this study commented to the researcher, "I wouldn't have done this [participate in the interview] if I hadn't had experiences with you previously [through the internship]."

This case study took approximately two-and-a-half years, from initial collection of data to final draft of the case study report. Throughout the process, the researcher had maintained prolonged engagement with respondents at the research site.

#### Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection and analysis in this case study began with the first interview, the first observation, the first document read, and never ceased until the final report was written. This *continuous and recursive* processing of data led to emerging insights and hunches which directed successive phases of the research. *Simultaneous* analysis and data collection allowed the researcher to direct the data collection phase more productively and develop a data base that was both parsimonious and relevant (Erlandson, et al., 1993).

The researcher adopted Merriam's (1988) descriptions of qualitative data for use in this study. Collected data were (a) detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors, (b) direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts, and (c) excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, and records. Accumulated data in this case study were the *constructions* offered by or in the data sources and analysis of the data led to a *reconstruction* of those constructions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Collected data were found useful to the study if they could (a) identify *new leads* of importance, (b) extend the area of information, (c) relate or bridge already existing elements, (d) reinforce main *trends*, (e) account for *other information* already in hand, (f) exemplify or provide more evidence for an *important theme*, and (g) *qualify or refute* existing information (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Phases of data collection and analysis. Three successive phases of data collection and analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) were employed by the researcher in this case study. Phase 1 was an orientation and overview phase where the object was to obtain sufficient information to get some sense of what the research context and situations of the leadership crisis were like and to get a fix on what seemed

most salient. Activities in Phase 1 took place primarily during the time of the researcher's internship at the community college under study. The initial approach to respondents was made in a very open-ended way. Once the first informational source was obtained, data analysis began and some initial very provisional insights and working hypotheses were formed. Examples of tentative working hypotheses for understanding the leadership crisis at this stage were that the president may have been a victim of aggressive faculty union leadership, and/or that the Board of Trustees may have undermined the president's authority by micromanaging and meddling in places inappropriate to their intended purpose and functioning.

Phase 2 was the phase of focused exploration. Time was allowed between phases 1 and 2 for the information gathered in phase 1 to be sufficiently analyzed, for a conceptual framework to be drafted and revised, and for a structured interview protocol to be developed. The researcher developed the case study interview protocol to obtain information in depth about the elements of study determined to be salient in phase 1. Stakeholder groups and primary respondents were identified and interviewed. Sampling was purposive and divergent respondent views were sought.

Phase 3 was the *member check* phase. The task was to verify, correct, amend or extend the information collected in phase 2 and to determine the accuracy of the data as



constructed by the informants and to establish the credibility of the case. The researcher conducted member checks by (a) summarizing for each respondent the apparent content of each interview session and soliciting agreement, including correction and expansion of content, (b) recontacting respondents at a later date for clarification and/or additional information, and (c) by checking information through triangulation of data.

After phase 3, the case study report was drafted and revised. The three phases of data collection and analysis in this research weren't necessarily mutually exclusive in their practical application to the case. The phases tended to overlap with some recycling and reiteration throughout.

Processes of data analysis. Analysis of data was a two-fold approach. The first aspect involved analysis at the research site during data collection, the second involved analysis away from the site (Erlandson, et al., 1993). The analysis of gathered data was "a progression, not a stage; an ongoing process, not a one-time event" (Erlandson, et al., 1993, p. 111). Data analysis was the overall process of bringing order, structure, and meaning to the mass of collected data. It was a search for general statements about relationships among categories of data (Marshal & Rossman, 1989). Data processing and analysis was similar to that of traditional ethnographic inquiry

described by Goetz and LeCompte (1981, cited in Lincoln and Guba, 1985). As data were recorded and classified, they also were compared across categories (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The *method of constant comparison* (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) for data processing was used in this case study. It provided an excellent fit with the need for continuous and simultaneous collection and analysis of data. The method of constant comparison generated theoretical properties for categories and delimited data which served to economize resources and provide workable limits for the research (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data representing the studied context were unitized, categorized and compared through use of raw data files, data reduction files, and data reconstruction files (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Raw data files included notes from observations, interviews, documents, and other sources. Data reduction files were those files distilled from the raw data files. Data reconstruction files tracked themes as they emerged from the raw data files and data reduction files and eventually were used to form the overall patterns and themes of the study.

Categorizing the data served three purposes. It grouped unitized data relating to the same content, devised rules for describing the properties of the categories, and

provided a basis for comparing relationships among categories (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Constructing the categories was largely intuitive. But, it also was systematic and informed by the study's purpose, the researcher's orientation and knowledge, and the constructs made explicit by participants in the study (Merriam, 1988). Categories were constructed based on the importance respondents gave to the data, the frequency with which they occurred, or their relative uniqueness in the context.

Thus, the discovery of thematic relationships in this study began with the analysis of initial observations and underwent continuous refinement throughout the data collection and analysis process. It continuously fed back into the process of category coding. As events were constantly compared with previous events, new dimensions as well as new relationships were discovered.

To end data collection and processing, four decision criteria suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985) were employed, (a) exhaustion of sources, (b) saturation of categories, (c) emergence of regularities and (d) over-extension.

Between periods of data collection and at the end of data collection, analysis by constant comparison enabled the researcher to form a *gestalt* of the research context from relatively isolated data or data that naturally emerged together (Erlandson, et al., 1993). Data analysis involved taking constructions gathered from the research context and

reconstructing them into meaningful holistic patterns (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To form this *gestalt*, or "meaningful whole," data were gathered from a variety of sources and in a variety of ways. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documents and records (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 1993; Yin, 1994). Data from these sources were triangulated.

### Triangulation

Through triangulation, several different types of data sources were sought which provided the researcher with insights about the circumstances, events and thematic relationships within the case study (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Silverman, 1993; Yin, 1994). The use of multiple sources of evidence allowed the researcher to address a wider range of questions and issues, and potential problems of construct validity also were addressed (Yin, 1994). Triangulation served to overcome partial views (Silverman, 1993), enhanced meaning (Erlandson, et al., 1993), and provided *thick description* of relevant information (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

As this case study progressed and particular pieces of information came to light, information was validated against other data sources or data collection methods; that is, with other interviews, observations and documentation. No single

item of information was given serious consideration unless it could be triangulated. Triangulation helped support or disconfirm the data. Between-method triangulation, i.e., observations, interviews, and documents was favored over within-method triangulation, i.e., observation A, observation B, observation C, etc. Data units analyzed and found common in multiple sources and/or methods were considered particularly salient for use in the descriptive account (see Chapter 5).

### Observations

Observations were first-hand experiences with the research environment. The researcher's mode in this study was *non-participant observer*. His sole purpose was to watch, listen and learn. During the investigative process the researcher was not a *bona fide* member of any campus group and did not officially participate in any college functioning. During the latter stages of the leadership crisis, the researcher was filling a graduate program internship at the community college under study. While *student-as-intern*, he attended various campus meetings and activities and took part in normal conversations with members of the college community, but his role was largely unassuming and unobtrusive.

The novel circumstances of being present at a community college where a crisis in leadership was taking place was

fortuitous. Yin (1994) suggested such a circumstance is a "distinctive opportunity...to perceive reality from the viewpoint of someone 'inside' the case study environment rather than external to it" (p. 88). Such a perspective was invaluable in producing an accurate portrayal of the case study phenomenon.

The researcher's notes and observations while *student-as-intern* were included in the case study data and were treated similarly to notes taken during interviews.

### Interviews

Interviews provided valuable data for this case study. The interview format used was the *semistructured* and *open-ended* type (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Yin, 1994). Most interviews tended to take the form of a dialogue or an interaction. Interviews with purposively selected respondents helped the researcher to understand and to put into context the interpersonal, social, and cultural aspects of the case study context (Erlandson, et al., 1993). Interviews allowed the researcher and respondents to move back and forth in time--to reconstruct the past, interpret the present, and predict the future.

Interviews in this case study were subject to distortions and biases (Merriam, 1988; Erlandson, et al., 1993; Yin, 1994; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Distortions may have been unintended or intended. Distortions may have

occurred simply because of the attention given to individuals during the research (the "Hawthorne effect" in research involving human subjects). Interview data may have been "self-censored, defensive, rosy" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p.48).

Because of the rather controversial nature of a crisis in leadership at the community college under study, respondents may have been overly cautious or guarded in their responses to interview questions. Distortions may have been introduced by respondents who had hidden agendas or by those who wanted to please, deceive or confuse the investigator (Erlandson, et al., 1993). However, such distortions were detected by checking the plausibility of the account, the reliability of the informant, and by comparing an informant's account with accounts given by other informants (Whyte, 1982, cited in Merriam, 1988). Other safeguards to introduced distortions were corroborating interview data with information from other sources such as observations and checking documentary material through triangulation of data (Yin, 1994).

The respondents. The perspective of each respondent in this study contributed greatly to the development of insight and understanding of the leadership crisis phenomenon. Merriam (1988) suggested that a good respondent (or informant, if they are particularly knowledgeable of the

situation) is "one who can express thoughts, feelings, opinions, his or her perspective, on the topic being studied" (p. 76).

Thirty-seven individuals from the community college under study were selected for participation in interviews. (For the purposes of this report some titles may have been changed but organizational roles remained the same.) Six respondent categories were represented. They included the Board of Trustees ( $\underline{n} = 5$ ), administrators ( $\underline{n} = 12$ ), faculty ( $\underline{n} = 8$ ), support staff ( $\underline{n} = 5$ ), student leadership ( $\underline{n} = 3$ ), and the college president ( $\underline{n} = 1$ ). All respondents were purposively sampled (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Yin, 1994).

Each of the six interview categories had category-specific characteristics associated with them. In the Board of Trustees category, all five members were interviewed. During early stages of the leadership crisis, the Board was in transition and two members were replaced. The five members who served during the heart of the leadership crisis and who negotiated the president's contract buyout were interviewed.

The administrative category included upper-level, mid-level and lower-level administrators, e.g., vice presidents, deans, associate deans, department chairs (both professional/technical and lower-division collegiate), and directors of a variety of campus activities and programs.



It is noted here that three individuals from the administrators group, who were members of the President's Cabinet, declined to be interviewed for the study (see Yin, 1994). This reduced N to 34. The reasons given for declining to be interviewed varied. The Dean of Students explained that felt indebted to the president. The Vice President for Administration said that he had an aversion to discussing the crisis because it made him "physically sick." The Vice President for Instruction explained that she was afraid of possible reprisals and negative effects on future career opportunities if she were to discuss the leadership crisis in an interview.

The faculty category included members (active and retired) from both professional/technical and lower-division collegiate programs at the college. The support staff category was comprised primarily of campus secretaries, and the student leadership category was comprised of student leaders who were in office during the time the leadership crisis took place. The college president category is self-explanatory.

At the outset of the study, respondents from each category were chosen on the likelihood they could supply new constructions to the researcher's understanding. Later in the investigative process, respondents tended to be chosen for their perceived ability to elaborate or explicate constructions that had already been introduced (Erlandson,

et al., 1993). Interviewees from each category were selected to allow the researcher to obtain as much information as possible and to continuously fill in the gaps and focus on emerging insights until the point of information redundancy was reached, or until the available number of individuals in a category was exhausted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Before conducting interviews with respondents, an interview protocol was developed.

Interview protocol. The interview protocol was developed and utilized in Phase 2 of the study to act as a guide in conducting the interviews and to obtain informed consent from respondents. Informed consent was obtained from each participating respondent at the beginning of each interview.

Practical matters as well as a variety of preliminary questions and perspectives in developing the protocol were considered by the researcher. For example, the researcher considered if the leadership crisis phenomenon was something that respondents may be hesitant or not totally forthcoming about. What would respondents be willing to say about the situation? Would they have enough insight concerning themselves and their situation to be able to deal with certain types of questions?

At the same time, the researcher considered possible attitudes, perspectives and questions of the respondents.

For example, the researcher presumed that the majority of interview respondents would be relatively straight forward in the interviews. However, the researcher also was aware that some respondents may engage in what Miles and Huberman (1994) termed "impression management" (p. 10). That is, the manipulation of how respondents wanted others (e.g., the researcher) to see the situation or themselves. Some potential respondents may have felt it was more expedient to keep a low profile and not say much, or not be interviewed at all, than to run the risk of being asked questions they may not want to answer for fear of what the implications might be.

The researcher considered that respondents also may have had certain questions to ask themselves such as, who wants to know and why? Will I reap any political benefits from responding? Will I be doing them a favor? Can any harm come to me if I answer honestly?

Consideration of the foregoing types of questions by the researcher and potential perspectives and questions by the respondents suggested that the interview process may have had a *mutual shaping* effect on both the researcher and the respondents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). That is, the researcher needed to determine what to ask and how to ask it of which respondents. Respondents may have been influenced not only by the researcher's motives and questions, but also by their own perceptions, attitudes and expectations.

The interview protocol specifically developed for this case study included the following elements.

1. A written letter of introduction from a doctoral committee member and a personal verbal introduction by the researcher.
2. A statement of the purpose of the research and the intended use of the data.
3. A statement of assurance of confidentiality and anonymity for the respondents.
4. A statement from the sitting community college president relating the voluntary nature of participation in the research and granting the researcher permission and access to conduct the research on site.
5. A statement on the use of a tape recorder for the interviews.
6. Semi-structured and open-ended interview questions developed and derived from the conceptual framework (see Table 2).
7. A methodological question asking for those with differing points of view or a "divergent construction" of the crisis.
8. Ending statements asking respondents to feel free to contact the researcher to add any other information of interest, and thanking them for their time, participation and cooperation.

Interview data were gathered from six interview questions in the protocol. The use of specifically developed questions was a means of translating the research objectives into specific language and was a way of motivating respondents to share their knowledge of the phenomenon under study (Merriam, 1988).

Interview questions were designed to reflect facts, feelings and motives, standards of action, and experience/behavior (Merriam, 1988; Silverman, 1993). The questions were: (a) what were your assumptions and beliefs about President Smith when he was hired; (b) what prompted the votes of no confidence; (c) what were your perceptions of the leadership crisis; (d) could the leadership crisis have been avoided, if so how; (e) what was gained and/or lost; and (f) what were any side effects, positive or negative, from the leadership crisis? Responses to the interview questions were tape recorded.

Recording interview data. During each interview the researcher used an audio tape recorder and took notes. The audio tape recorder was used to assure interview accuracy, completeness, and opportunity for later review by the researcher.

Use of the tape recorder, however, had some drawbacks. Because of the controversial nature of investigating a leadership crisis, respondents may have become overly aware,

self-conscious, or even threatened by the presence of the tape recorder during the interview. In a few instances, some respondents preferred not to have their interviews recorded at all. They consented to be interviewed, but not on tape. If respondents were uncomfortable with the tape recorder, their request for not taping the interview was honored and researcher notes became the source of data for that interview. In other instances respondents consented to the tape-recorded interview, but asked that the researcher pause or turn off the recorder when sensitive information was being related. In these instances, the researcher relied heavily on note-taking, which also had its advantages and disadvantages.

Advantages of note-taking were (a) it required the interviewer to listen and attend carefully to what was being said, (b) the notes could be flagged for important items to which the interviewer returned later, and (c) the interviewer did not need to rely on memory alone to compose a reflective summary for each interview. Interview notes were reviewed as soon as possible after each interview to jog the interviewer's memory about any additional items not previously noted during the interview process.

Disadvantages of note-taking were (a) the researcher could not hand-record everything, (b) sometimes portions of rapid handwriting tended to be a bit undecipherable later, and (c) respondents tended to have a natural tendency to

slow their tempo to permit the interviewer to keep up. In doing so, respondents may have lost a train of thought, or because the process was lengthy, simply did not relate all they may have thought about or intended to say.

Nonetheless, the majority of respondents agreed to have their complete interviews taped.

For the purposes of this study, taped interviews were transcribed using research guidelines suggested by Merriam (1988). Data from the interview log was coded according to the emerging themes or categories which emerged from the data analysis. As the study proceeded, specific interview data items were verified through triangulation with other respondents and with other sources such as observation and document analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988; Erlandson, et al., 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994).

Tape recording interviews and use of an interview log proved useful to the researcher in the interview process and in data collection and analysis. The interview process was characterized by other beneficial aspects which contributed to the accuracy and thoroughness of the study.

Other interview characteristics. The interview process was characterized by flexibility, use of interview probes, reflective summary (or member check), and potential effects on the respondents.

Flexibility during the interviews was important so the researcher could follow up promising leads or return to earlier points that needed additional information or fuller development. To achieve this flexibility, the researcher used interview probes. Interview probes took the form of (a) nods of the head or simple calls for more information, e.g., "Could you say more about that?", or "For example?"; (b) silence (wait time); (c) calls for reactions to the interviewer's reformulations of what was said, e.g., "If I understand you correctly, you seem to be saying that...;" and, (d) simple, direct follow-up questions to extend something the respondent said. Rapport and depth of probing were enhanced in interviews through the researcher's prior interaction with respondents during his internship as well as during various site visits for fieldwork.

Information obtained during the interviews was reflectively summarized by the researcher and "played back" to the respondents. It reflected what the researcher believed had been said or what he had understood up to that point. This process was advantageous for two reasons. First, the respondents were often reminded of new or additional information upon hearing the summary; and second, it invited the respondents to react to the validity of the constructions which the interviewer had made. This gave the respondents opportunity to clarify or refine their responses. This process also enhanced the validity of the



data, termed "member check" (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Erlandson, et al., 1996).

The interview process also may have had beneficial *educative* and *empowering* effects on participants (Erlandson, et al., 1993). These effects were achieved through openly soliciting and honoring each individual construction of the context under study, and through respondent consideration of interview questions, reflection on answers and dialogue with the interviewer. Indeed, many respondents commented that they were pleased with the opportunity to be interviewed, to objectively reflect on the research topic and to discuss the situation with "someone on the outside." Many considered the process cathartic.

### Documents

Documentary data were particularly reliable sources of information for this case study. If acquired documentary evidence was contradictory, rather than corroboratory to the other collected data sources, the researcher inquired further into the topic.

Archival documents and records at the community college under study were obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. The researcher filed a form with the college for access to public records and made photocopies of relevant documents and records. College employees who had actual possession of other relevant documents and records also

provided the researcher with photocopies and/or original documents which were then copied and returned.

The researcher sought and obtained documents and records that would provide accurate descriptions of actions and events that took place in the research setting. These included, but were not limited to, (a) a variety of administrative and faculty union letters and memoranda, (b) minutes from President's Cabinet, MVCC Foundation, and Board of Trustees meetings, (c) campus news releases and local newspaper articles and editorials, (d) budget and legislative documents, (e) MVCC policy and procedures documents, (f) historical accounts (pamphlets, brochures, bulletins, etc.), and (e) official documentation of proceedings related to events in the leadership crisis, e.g., the Fact Finding Committee's Interim Report, the MVCC Administrative Response to the Fact Finding Committee's Interim Report, and the Opinion and Award document from the arbitration hearing on alleged sexual harassment by a faculty member.

### Case Study Approach

The case study reporting mode was preferred because it was specifically adapted to a description of the multiple realities encountered in the research context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The purpose of this single *descriptive* case study (Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Yin, 1994) was

to examine the specific event or phenomena of a *crisis in leadership* at a particular community college. The present case study was an *instance* from a larger context (Feagin, et al., 1991) and also was both *revelatory* (Yin, 1994) and *critical* (Erlandson, et al., 1993).

Thus, the aim of this single descriptive in-depth case study was not to find the "correct" or "true" interpretation of the facts, but rather to focus on discovery, insight, and understanding from the perspectives of those being studied and to eliminate erroneous conclusions so that the reader is left with the best possible, the most compelling, interpretation of the research (Bromley, 1986).

### Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity were particularly important to this case study because of its rather controversial nature. Confidentiality and anonymity served to protect the real case and its real participants (Yin, 1994). However, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity in this case study was a double-sided problem. This was because the case study report had a dual nature--there was both an *external* and an *internal* audience. Relatively simple changes of location and names were intended to disguise an individual or a site from the external audience. The task was more difficult though, when the audience also consisted of persons in or familiar with the local

situation. Miles and Huberman (1994) observed "anonymity of individuals is difficult or impossible to assure when a case study of a group or organization is read by its members" (p. 48).

Maintaining anonymity also had other drawbacks. Important background information about a case may need to be eliminated to protect individuals' identities and the mechanics of composing the case report become more difficult than it otherwise would be (Yin, 1994). Some authors go so far as to assert that in some cases informational accuracy and detail should not be sacrificed for the sake of anonymity (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In this case study, however, the researcher exercised all reasonable precaution to preserve the confidentiality and anonymity promised to respondents through informed consent. Institutional location was disguised, use of individual names was avoided wherever possible, and all names used were fictitious. Though relevant quotes from interviews and other sources were used to illustrate patterns and themes identified in the descriptive account of Chapter 5, it was largely unnecessary to attribute most quotes to specific individuals.

To further protect respondents, the researcher performed all secretarial work including transcribing interview data and typing the drafts and final case report.

## CHAPTER 5

### DESCRIPTIVE ACCOUNT

#### Overview

This chapter reconstructs the events and circumstances surrounding the leadership crisis at Meadow View Community College (fictitious name). The leadership crisis was defined as the college president and his administration receiving from campus constituents three votes of "no confidence" in two years.

The descriptive account incorporates accepted guidelines for conducting and reporting naturalistic qualitative case study research (Erlandson, et al., 1993; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984; Lincoln & Guba, 1989; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Silverman, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wolcott, 1990; Yin, 1994). This narrative account is descriptive, not evaluative or causally explanatory. The account is based upon triangulated data gathered from observations, documents and interviews (see Chapters 3 and 4). Documents are cited where appropriate. Quotes used throughout the narration were purposively selected from the data because they best represented the categories and themes found in the data. Quotes are illustrative, not all-inclusive, of the themes supported by the data. Participant comments are in quotes. To preserve respondent confidentiality and anonymity, most quotes are not

attributed to specific persons (unless otherwise indicated in the account).

Four central themes emerged from analysis of the data and were strongly supported through triangulation. The themes tended to pervade the leadership crisis and were reflected in the votes of no confidence, but were not necessarily mutually exclusive. Identified themes were:

1. Administrative unresponsiveness to faculty and staff concerns;
2. Administrative disregard for faculty rights of due process;
3. Non-compliance with college personnel policies and procedures; and,
4. Differences in administrative stated philosophies and personal actions regarding participatory management.

Other themes related to the crisis such as biased media attention (local newspaper) and level of faculty union activism were identified, but were not as strongly supported by the data. The researcher inventoried eighty-six crisis-related articles published by the only local newspaper. Respondent views on the newspaper's objectivity in reporting the conflict on campus varied among those expressing an opinion. Level of faculty union activism was mentioned by some (but not many) respondents. They expressed opinions that the faculty union leadership was tenacious, if not

aggressive, in playing its adversarial role against the president and his administration. Past experiences on campus between the college president and the president of the faculty union seemed to create tension and animosity between the two. Dr. Smith saw the faculty union president as a person who liked to stir up trouble, and the faculty union president viewed Dr. Smith as a "Bozo."

This descriptive account of the leadership crisis with supporting quotes from the data includes (a) a brief historical background of Meadow View Community College, (b) descriptions of events which prompted the votes of no confidence, and (c) perceptions of the leadership crisis by the Board of Trustees, administrators, faculty, support staff, student leadership, and the college president.

### Historical Background of College

Meadow View Community College (fictitious name) was established in 1955 as a two-year technical college in a rural area of a western state. It grew to become one of 29 community and/or technical colleges in the state's system of higher education. As part of a state system, the college received its funding from the state general fund as determined by the state legislature. The college's Board of Trustees had five members who were appointed by the governor to serve five-year terms. At the time of the study, the college's annual operating budget was approximately \$18

million, the student enrollment was around 6,500 (3,700 average annualized FTE), and the college employed 100 full-time and more than 250 part-time faculty.

Meadow View Community College (MVCC) played a central role in its community through open access to education and economic development and community partnership programs. The college offered a comprehensive curriculum for Associate Degree in Arts and Science, Associate Degree in Applied Science, Certificate of General Studies, Adult Basic Education, GED, and English as a Second Language (ESL), along with occupational training programs and community education. The college had educational partnerships with local high schools and a state university. It also had a 2 + 2 articulation agreement which allowed high school students to receive advanced placement credits in the college's vocational programs. Students who had completed lower division collegiate course requirements could transfer as juniors to state universities. The college also had career planning and academic advising programs with assessment and testing services, a multicultural service program, education access services for students with disabilities, and a women's resource center. Many such programs and services, however, were present only in Meadow View Community College's recent history.

In the early days of the technical college, Meadow View was viewed by some people as "a high school with ash trays."



In the mid-1960s, Mr. Edward Dixon, a former school superintendent in the area, assumed the presidency of Meadow View Community College. Mr. Dixon lead the college for more than 20 years with a "steady" and "strong hand." His personal manner was "a bit brash" and his management style was considered "authoritative" and "autocratic." Although most college employees viewed him as a "benevolent dictator," people tended to "know where they stood with him" and there were "few surprises on campus." President Dixon's administrative cabinet (Dean of Instruction, Dean of Administrative Services and Finance, and Dean of Students) also were viewed as having the same "authoritative" and "autocratic" style of management. To varying degrees, they tended to "seek power" and "manipulate personnel and events" to achieve their particular purposes. During President Dixon's tenure, there was "no executive use of entrepreneurial activities or grants" and "relatively little involvement in the form of educational partnerships with the community" compared to subsequent years. In the late 1980s, Mr. Dixon retired from Meadow View Community College and the Board of Trustees began searching for a new leader and president of the college.

In their search for a new president, the Board of Trustees solicited input and involvement from faculty, staff, and other campus constituents. The Board wanted a candidate with "past successes" and "fresh ideas," someone

who was "progressive" and "active in pursuing community education and minority recruitment," someone who had "a participative management style" and who could "usher in a new era of openness" for the college.

Presented with their first opportunity to be involved in choosing a new president, the college faculty wanted a person who "stood in contrast to the previous president." They sought a president who was "student and faculty oriented" who had a "collaborative and participative management style" and who would "involve more people in decision-making processes." They were keenly interested in finding someone who would "change the organizational culture" established by the previous president and his administration.

After a national search, the college search committee and the Board of Trustees gave unanimous approval to John Smith (Ed.D.). Dr. Smith was considered by the search committee to be "the absolute best among the candidates interviewed." He was viewed as "someone who would lead the campus with more democratic methods." He described himself as a person who could get things done, a "mover and shaker." He had professional experience in community services and community education and he had been president of a two-year college in another western state where he had served for nine years. He was so successful and well-liked in his previous position that trustees there offered him a salary

increase if he would stay. However, Dr. Smith instead chose to become the new president of Meadow View Community College. The college community at MVCC was pleased with their selection of Dr. Smith, enthusiastic about their future, and eager to see their expectations realized.

Upon Dr. Smith's arrival at Meadow View Community College in January, 1988, he heard that one of the area's major employers would be implementing a sizable layoff and thousands of people would be thrown out of work. Dr. Smith "wasted no time" in responding as the college's new president. He immediately established the We Care committee to help address community concerns about the layoffs. He emphasized the college's ability to provide job-retraining programs for the displaced workers and training partnerships with area businesses and industry (under the previous president the college had not been involved with such ideas or programs). Working closely with local leaders, Dr. Smith's early success in this endeavor gave him a high profile in a difficult period. In 1989, Dr. Smith received the Thomas J. Peters Award for Leadership as an outstanding community college president from the League for Innovation and the University of Texas.

When Dr. Smith began fulfilling his role as president of Meadow View, he had decisions to make about the constitution of his administrative cabinet. By taking office, he "inherited the previous president's

administrators and their way of doing things." The new president espoused a "participative style of management," but his predecessor's administrative team was still considered "authoritarian."

Adding to the situation, the college's Dean of Instruction had applied for the presidency of MVCC, but was not interviewed. He had served as Dean of Instruction at MVCC since 1977 and was considered by the campus community as "intelligent", "resourceful", and by many (but not all) as "devious" and "manipulative." After Dr. Smith had been in office for approximately six to twelve months, issues of senior administrative infighting and non-support for Dr. Smith surfaced. Concerned about the situation, the Board of Trustees told Dr. Smith that they would support him if he chose not to renew some administrative contracts. However, deciding to work with each of the current administrators, Dr. Smith retained his predecessor's entire administrative team. Dr. Smith also later hired a new Director of Personnel and Director of Community Education to serve with him on his administrative cabinet.

From the beginning of his tenure, Dr. Smith was "actively involved with the community" and "innovative in developing new programs and services" at Meadow View. He served on the board of directors of the United Way and the area's Economic Development Council. Through his leadership, the college acquired sizable grant funding

resources, developed entrepreneurial programs, forged training partnerships with community businesses and industry, and developed the multicultural service program, education access services for students with disabilities and the women's resource center. In many of these areas, Dr. Smith received award-winning recognition from special interest groups and community organizations. Such highly visible accomplishments were applauded and well-received by nearly everyone.

However, in the college's internal environment of daily decision-making and interactions with faculty, staff and other administrators, some of President Smith's decisions and actions were far less appreciated. The combination of questionable decisions and actions by President Smith and two of his administrative cabinet members ultimately led to faculty concern, campus unrest, and votes of no confidence in the college's leadership.

#### The Votes of No Confidence

Three votes of no confidence in the college's leadership occurred over approximately two years. Most of the leadership issues reflected in those votes were directly related to the themes identified in the overview section of this chapter.

Many of the administration's "questionable decisions and practices" which lead to the votes of no confidence were

influenced by at least two identifiable factors. The first was in college personnel-related issues--primarily hirings, dismissals and salary raises. These comprised the majority of the formalized issues and concerns in the votes of no confidence. They are discussed in detail later in this chapter. The other, less tangible factor, was in the perceived personality and behavioral traits of MVCC's leadership. Though the personality and behavioral traits were openly discussed by many respondents in the interviews, the traits were only indirectly addressed in the no confidence votes.

The leadership crisis and votes of no confidence reflected directly upon Meadow View Community College's *administrative leadership*. That is, "it wasn't just the President." Along with the "questionable decisions and practices", various personality and behavioral traits manifested by the President *and members of his administrative team* produced doubts and concerns among the college's faculty, staff and other administrators about their leaders. President Smith officially led the college and was perceived to have many "positive" traits, such as "energetic", "innovative", and "talented." However, President Smith and the Dean of Administration and Finance and the Director of Personnel were named in votes of no confidence. They were criticized by the campus community for possessing and demonstrating overriding "negative"

personality and behavioral traits in their leadership. They were variously described by interview respondents as "ingenuine", "arrogant", "deceitful", "inept", "uncaring", "manipulative," "deceptive", "incompetent", "untrustworthy," and "unethical" in certain applicable areas of concern for each.

It should be noted that "some seeds of discontent" were sown before Dr. Smith assumed the presidency at MVCC. His predecessor's administrative team had already established an "authoritative" manner of operating at the college and had alienated many faculty and staff (and other administrators, as well). Adding to the situation, a senior faculty member had brought a lawsuit against the college alleging retaliation after he asked state auditors to investigate charges of "administrative wrong-doing." The lawsuit was pending during part of President Smith's tenure and the faculty member who brought the suit was active in faculty leadership during the votes of no confidence.

The three votes of no confidence tended to be cumulative, progressing over time in scope and consequence. The first vote was primarily a criticism of inappropriate personnel practices and did not directly name individuals. The second vote occurred 18 months after the first and criticized the lack of promised improvement in administrative decision-making and personnel practices since the first vote. It directly named the President, the Dean

of Administration and Finance and the Director of Personnel. The third vote of no confidence escalated to the point that it also included a criticism of the Board of Trustees.

#### First Vote of No Confidence

The first vote of no confidence occurred in May, 1992, and was the first in the college's history. The faculty association, which represented approximately half of the full- and part-time faculty, was asked by the faculty senate and others to call for a Vote of No Confidence. The vote was not directly against the administration, but was a vote which reflected "a lack of confidence in the college's personnel practices rather than toward specific individuals who may be responsible for those practices."

The faculty formally cited twelve complaints about the college's personnel practices. The complaints tended to focus on (a) fair employment practices and pay equity, (b) major administrative decision-making processes, (c) adherence to college personnel policies and practices, and (d) faculty rights of due process. Of the 85 votes cast (mostly full-time faculty), 79 reflected a degree of no confidence in the administration's practices.

Two examples of controversy-inducing decisions and actions by MVCC's leadership emerged from the data--the appointment of the Dean of Students and the suspension of a faculty member accused of sexual harassment. Each event



produced continual campus concern and tended to linger unresolved through the end of President Smith's tenure.

Appointment of dean of students. The appointment of the Dean of Students was one example of several appointments that occurred at the college which "did not adhere to established hiring policies and standards of the college", i.e., posting and advertising positions and using search, screening and interview committees.

In July, 1991, MVCC's Dean of Students resigned to accept a similar position at another community college in the state. Dr. Smith appointed an acting Dean of Students who was to "serve for six to ten months" while the president evaluated his reorganization plan. In doing so, President Smith stipulated "only those individuals who are *not* interested in applying for the permanent position will be considered for the acting dean appointment." Two MVCC employees in student services who held doctoral degrees were interested in the Dean of Students position. However, they withdrew from being considered for the interim position because of the president's stipulation. Instead, they planned on applying for the full-time position when it was officially posted and advertised by the college.

To fill the interim position of Dean of Students, Dr. Smith appointed the MVCC Director of Student Activities, who was a faculty member from the music department. Contrary to

college hiring policies for filling permanent administrative positions, the Dean of Students opening at MVCC was "never advertised or posted", "no applications were available" and "qualified applicants inside and outside the college were denied opportunities to apply." In spite of this, Dr. Smith officially made the interim position permanent.

Alleged sexual harassment by faculty member. Meadow View Community College's handling of some student sexual harassment complaints against a faculty member was an important campus issue and a catalytic event for the first vote of no confidence. Complaints against the faculty member were received by the administration in Spring 1992. The matter eventually was heard by an arbitrator who rendered a decision in September 1993.

According to the arbitration Opinion and Award document, the MVCC administration, after receiving the sexual harassment complaints, met with the faculty member and informed him that he was "being suspended with pay pending investigation of the complaints." He was "given a vague set of charges, denied his attorney, evicted from the campus as though he were a proven criminal, and consistently denied copies of the complaints despite verbal and written requests for the charges."

President Smith had appointed his Director of Personnel to oversee this matter. President Smith also contracted

with a representative from another state community college "to serve as an independent investigator." In May, 1992, the investigator submitted a report to the Director of Personnel in which he concluded that the college did not have cause to dismiss the faculty member. According to the investigator, "there was no clear violation of either sexual harassment laws or MVCC's sexual harassment policy."

The MVCC Board of Trustees met on June 1, but took no action regarding the faculty member's suspension. Because the faculty member remained on suspension his name was removed from a description of classes which he had been assigned to teach during Summer quarter, and he lost his right to teach that quarter. President Smith later met with the faculty member on August 17, to advise him that he was being reinstated. At that meeting, the faculty member received a letter of reprimand for violating MVCC's Code of Ethics and the letter was placed in his personnel file.

On August 28, the faculty member "filed a grievance challenging the reprimand." On September 8, the president "denied the grievance without a hearing or further discussion." The denial was appealed to the Board of Trustees which rendered a decision on November 16, offering "\$1,500 in recognition that the investigation could have been concluded more expeditiously." The parties engaged in settlement discussions which did not prove fruitful and the matter went to arbitration.

According to the arbitrator's Opinion and Award document, the faculty union argued that the college had violated the association contract in effecting the faculty member's suspension and reprimand. The union therefore sought remedy in removing the letter of reprimand from the faculty member's personnel file, and in back pay with interest for losses incurred by the faculty member in not teaching summer school.

According to the above-mentioned document, the college administration argued through its attorney that the grievance was "procedurally deficient," that the requested remedy was "beyond the scope of arbitration," that "the investigation was not unnecessarily prolonged," that "the contention that [the faculty member]'s due process rights have been abridged should be rejected," and that "the grievance should be denied."

The arbitrator found in favor of the faculty member. MVCC had violated three *due process* rights explicitly provided to faculty members in their bargaining agreement, i.e., the requirement of just cause for discipline, the right to representation, and the right to all information forming the basis of discipline.

The arbitrator determined that MVCC had "failed to carefully investigate" before suspending the faculty member and evicting him from his office. The suspension was "improper" because of the college's "failure to follow its

own established procedures." The arbitrator affirmed an investigation is "patently unfair when an employer chooses to disregard its own procedures and denies an accused instructor the right to see the specific complaint filed against him or her."

Administrative "procedural errors", the arbitrator decided, "violated substantial due process rights" of the faculty member and were "significant enough to support the finding that the college lacked just cause for discipline." Thus, the college "violated the collective bargaining agreement when it suspended [the faculty member] with pay... and when it issued him a letter of reprimand." The faculty member was awarded back pay with interest and the college was directed to rescind the letter of reprimand and remove it from the faculty member's personnel file. The college complied with the arbitrator's opinion and award, but the faculty member later sued the college in civil court.

The twelve complaints about administrative personnel practices mentioned earlier were investigated by an *ad hoc* committee convened by the President. The committee's recommendations were presented to the President and Board of Trustees. The committee's report focused on:

1. Better administrative communication and following the Long Range Plan (LRP).

2. Closer adherence to college personnel policies including the competitive selection process wherein all positions should be announced.
3. Better administrative use of participatory management principles by including faculty in the decision making process as well as in the implementation process whenever possible.

The president and his administrators accepted the committee's recommendations and agreed to "work diligently" to improve their administrative practices.

#### Second Vote of No Confidence

The second vote of no confidence took place eighteen months after the first vote. The faculty were concerned about "the lack of evidence" for the "promised improvements" since the first vote. They invited the President to formally meet with them on October 19, 1993, to discuss their concerns over current and continuing personnel-related problems and issues.

Adding to the already tense situation at this point, a vacancy in the Board of Trustees and a changing state financial picture impacted the college. The outgoing chair of MVCC's Board of Trustees resigned. Around the same time, the Board openly expressed some concerns regarding college hiring procedures, and were "concerned about quality." Also, the state financial office directed state institutions

to prepare to implement budget reductions. In May, 1993, the budget picture for MVCC included "up to a 4.5 percent budget cut."

Impending budget reductions affected the college's organizational planning and were viewed as potentially translating into staff and FTE reductions. President Smith indicated that any layoffs would be applied "equitably" to all employee groups "whether faculty, support staff or administrators." Strategies for dealing with reduced funding included "not filling new positions, replacing retiring faculty with part-time personnel, and converting the summer school to 'self-support.'" An administrative saving considered by President Smith was his plan to "combine two dean positions--student services and instruction--into an executive vice president." Amplifying the "grim financial picture", the 1992 state legislature implemented a salary freeze which meant there would be "no raises" allowed for faculty and administrators.

Salient factors contributing to the second vote of no confidence included the non-renewal of six tenure-track faculty members and issues surrounding the President's reorganization of the college. The event considered most precipitative, however, was "salary raises for the president and his cabinet" during a period of financial exigency when faculty raises were denied.

Non-renewal of tenure track faculty. In March 1993, the MVCC Board of Trustees did not renew the contracts of six full-time tenure track instructors, "five were let go before they completed their three-year tenure probation and the sixth was denied tenure." This event later was referred to by faculty as "The Monday Night Massacre." Reasons for the non-renewal were debated between the faculty association and the administration.

The faculty association suspected that "budget cuts" was the real reason for the non-renewal, because of the uncertain financial picture at the college. Faculty were concerned the college was "commingling a reduction-in-force with tenure." The Board, however, initially assured critics that their decision was based "solely on tenure issues." The chair of the Board of Trustees was quoted in the newspaper as saying the decision was "entirely at the discretion of the college...we act on recommendations that are entirely performance-based...so we can get the strongest faculty." The college later changed its position on this issue to reasons of budget considerations, which was discovered to be allowable under state law.

Retaining the highest quality faculty was a personal expectation of the Board Chair. The Board of Trustees was presented with a total of twenty faculty members who were recommended for contract renewal by MVCC's tenure review committee. At a separate meeting (and earlier in the



contract renewal process), the Board chairman had told President Smith that all twenty faculty members couldn't possibly be the top quality the college was looking for. The Board Chair therefore instructed the president to "eliminate the lower thirty percent from consideration." The president did so, and six of the twenty faculty members did not receive contract renewal. Two of the six eventually filed a law suit claiming the college denied them due process and damaged their ability to find work as instructors.

College reorganization. President Smith reorganized or planned for reorganization of the college each year. Most reorganization plans and activities took place "during the summer months with little or no input from those affected by the reorganization." Yearly reorganizations varied in size and complexity. Because of the impending budget reductions, President Smith enacted a major reorganization of the college and his administrative cabinet.

President Smith's cabinet received a "reassignment of responsibilities" along with "changes in titles and salary." President Smith planned to consolidate the positions of Dean of Students and Dean of Instruction into an Executive Vice President for Instruction and Student Services. The Dean of Students position had been filled by the interim appointee in July, 1991. In December 1992, MVCC's Dean of Instruction

resigned. MVCC's senior administrators were to receive a salary increase in January 1993, but President Smith had informed the Dean of Instruction months earlier that he would not receive his salary increase along with the other administrators. The Dean of Instruction, with two weeks notice, decided to resign. Later, an interim Dean of Instruction from outside the college was appointed.

By June 1993, the college had its Executive Vice President of Instruction and Student Services. She had been Dean of Arts and Sciences at another two-year community college in the state. She described her management style as "participatory democratic" in which she sought to "enable others to make decisions." She was considered a "welcome addition" to President Smith's administrative cabinet. She immediately opened-up the budget process to Instructional Directors and worked diligently to bring instructional divisions closer together. President Smith created the position of Executive Vice President for Instruction and Student Services ostensibly to save the college money. Contradicting earlier statements, he decided to retain the Dean of Student Services position and made the interim appointee the permanent Dean of Students.

Through President Smith's reorganization plan, administrative duties were "shuffled around" and positions and titles changed. The Dean of Administration and Finance became the Executive Vice President of Administration and

Finance, the Director of Personnel became the Associate Dean of Human Resources, and the Director of Community Education became the Associate Dean of Community Education and College Relations.

Questions surrounding the hiring and promotion of the Director of Community Education was a focus of concern for many campus constituents. President Smith had known the candidate before she applied for the position. Her hiring was questioned because she was "not on the screening committee's list of recommended candidates." The president "intervened and required [the committee] to place her name on the list." She was hired "when applicants of purported equal or better qualifications weren't interviewed." President Smith was observed "to spend a lot of time with her" and the relationship appeared "more than professional." There were rumors of an affair.

Administrative pay increases and no faculty raises.

Much of the controversy prompting the second vote of no confidence centered on administrative pay increases stemming from the reorganization. Salary increases for some administrators reached as high as 21%. The campus community was concerned that "Smith and his inner circle" had received "unjustifiable" pay raises at a time when faculty were denied contractually earned increments (Professional Improvement Credits or PICs) because of "budgetary

limitations" stipulated by the state Legislature. The salary increase situation caused considerable concern throughout the campus community.

President Smith explained to newspaper reporters that his cabinet's salary increases were "payment for additional responsibilities under a reorganization of administrative staff." He referred to the pay increases as "salary adjustments," not "salary raises." The amounts of "salary adjustments" varied with the appointments. The salary for the Vice President of Administration and Finance rose 7.2%. Pay for the Associate Dean of Human Resources rose 9.5%, and salary for the Associate Dean of Community Development and College Relations rose 21% (in a thirteen month period).

The Board granted the President a 6% pay increase, though he reported and continuously maintained it was "only a 3% increase." The faculty objected, "when a paycheck goes up 6% from what you got before, that's the amount of the pay raise." On January 1, 1993, President Smith received the increase and his two-week paycheck jumped 6.3%, from \$3,864.80 to \$4,108.56 (or to \$98,605 per year, an increase of 32% in five years). The difference in the President's 6% vs. 3% pay increase was explained by the President and his Vice President for Administration and Finance. Since the pay increase came on January 1, that meant that half of Smith's increase fell on the last six months of the 1992-93 contract, with the other half applied to his 93-94 contract.

The state freeze on salary increases imposed by the legislature was effective July 1, and the President was accused of trying to "slip an extra pay raise under the wire." President Smith, however, maintained that his pay increase was allowed by state law and through Board approval. The state auditor's office, after investigating the matter, confirmed the President's position.

On the issue of payment for faculty Professional Improvement Credits, faculty leadership argued that when their contract was renewed the interim Dean of Instruction agreed that PICs would be paid "as resources were available." This was interpreted by faculty that any appropriate available resource could be used to pay the increments. The administration argued that raises weren't allowed "because of the legislature's salary freeze." The state attorney general's office later investigated the matter and stated "no community college in the state paid the increments because of the prohibitive language of the 1993 legislation."

These events and others prompted the faculty to ask President Smith to meet with them on October 19th to discuss their concerns. In a letter from the faculty union president to the college president, Dr. Smith was asked to address the following issues.

1. Salary increases made for the president and his cabinet.

2. The decision not to pay contractually earned step increases.
3. The handling of the faculty sexual harassment case.
4. The President's "breaking promises" to: (a) appoint a Dean of Students only temporarily, open the position competitively, and consolidate it into a vice presidency; (b) share budget reductions equitably; (c) distribute resources fairly; and, (d) solicit staff input prior to the reorganization.

After President Smith addressed the faculty on these issues, an all campus referendum was held to assess the faculty's satisfaction with the president's explanations. The ballot also asked respondents to rate the level of satisfaction with the overall performance of the President, the Vice President for Administration and Finance and the Associate Dean of Human Resources. The ballot used a 4-point scale ranging from "very satisfied" to "very dissatisfied." There were 136 respondents from full-time faculty, part-time faculty, classified staff, administration and exempt staff. Over 90% reported dissatisfaction with the president's explanations of the issues and with the overall performance of the President and the two administrators. Respondents to the referendum perceived a

"lack of evidence for the promised improvements" in personnel practices and in "participatory management."

Participatory management. When Meadow View Community College hired Dr. Smith, the faculty, staff and other administrators had "high expectations" for him as a leader who would "change the organizational culture" and "involve more people in decision-making processes" with a "collaborative and participative management style." "It didn't happen."

The realization of unfulfilled expectations of participatory management took place over time, "it gradually built brick after brick," each person's individual experience that participatory management "was not really true, and it was perceived to be *"a real problem."*

College employees anticipated providing "more input" and being "more involved with decision-making processes in areas that affect those implementing the decisions." They knew that "merely forming committees" didn't constitute "participatory management." The "committees went nowhere."

Faculty and staff asserted that decisions should involve those implementing them or affected by them. "There was no feedback loop in the decision-making process...there was no evaluation of the decision to see how well it's working." President Smith sometimes would "collect input but not consider it." He'd "get the input, and then be

autocratic." "It was worse than being 'autocratic,' because it was basically dishonest."

Other "autocratic administrators probably affected [the] participatory management capabilities of the President." College administrators would "do whatever the hell they wanted to anyway" despite faculty input or college policy. "It would not have come to a vote of no confidence if [participatory management] had been effective."

"Not only did things not get better [since the first vote], they got worse." After endorsing committee recommendations for improved administrative practices, Dr. Smith "fashioned a major reorganization with minimal faculty participation, secured large pay raises exclusively for himself and his cabinet and hired and promoted a cabinet level person who had been eliminated by a screening committee." "Had Dr. Smith simply followed the recommendations he had agreed to, perhaps the second no confidence vote would have been unnecessary."

### Third Vote of No Confidence

A few weeks after the second vote of no confidence, the MVCC Board of Trustees decided that a fact-finding committee should be appointed "to hear staff complaints about President John Smith and other administrators." The third vote of no confidence followed on the heels of Board's



response to the fact-finding committee's report and included a referendum seeking a state investigation.

Fact-finding. The fact-finding committee was convened by the President. The committee was comprised of eight members, including representatives from all campus groups and a Trustee (six of the fact-finding committee members were interviewed for this study). The President appointed the new Vice President for Instruction and Student Services to serve as committee chair.

During the time the fact-finding committee conducted its investigation, another trustee resigned. This reduced the Board of Trustees to only three members. Because the college was in crisis, the local newspaper called for the governor to quickly appoint two new Board members. In mid-December, the state governor appointed two replacement members to the Board--a local attorney and a retired instructor from Meadow View Community College.

After four months of gathering data, the fact-finding committee presented its report to the Board. From the outset of the committee's investigation, the faculty association had expressed anxiety over whether the committee could "give a fully unbiased report." Faculty were concerned that the committee had members who were "too inclined to support the positions taken by Smith." The faculty association, therefore, intended to hold another

staff vote to get reactions to the report. The vote would be concerned with "the substance of the report, the procedures the committee used and the trustees' response to the findings."

The Trustees initially refused to release the committee's findings, explaining that it was an *interim* report and therefore "not legally considered a public document." The campus and the local newspaper disagreed and the report was made public a short time later. The Board of Trustees was criticized by faculty and others for not releasing the report sooner and for meeting in "too many closed-door sessions." Once released, the report was generally characterized as "rather innocuous." It "omitted some of the most controversial complaints entirely" and some of the committee's conclusions were removed from the report's final writing. Faculty and staff complained the report was "laundered", "sanitized", "watered-down" and "a white-wash job."

The released report did state that MVCC's top administrators got pay raises "for assuming added responsibilities but refused to pay first-line supervisors and other staff members for doing extra work." The report noted that Dr. Smith told employees in the October 19th meeting to "seek pay increases" if they believed they weren't being compensated for additional work or

responsibilities, but "when employees asked for salary increases, cabinet-level administrators turned them down."

Among complaints submitted by concerned faculty to the fact-finding committee, but left out of its final report, were that MVCC's administration:

1. Received morally indefensible salary increases.
2. Allowed clear inequities to exist between the treatment of cabinet-level administrative salaries/workload vs. the bulk of Meadow View Community College's administrative, academic and classified employees' salaries/workload.
3. Hired a person as college relations and foundation director when more qualified applicants were passed over without an interview.
4. Suspended an instructor without due process on allegations of sexual harassment.
5. Refused to grant tenure to six instructors when the tenure reviews showed they were qualified which violated the Tenure Review Procedure.
6. Reorganized administrators without seeking faculty and staff advice.

Also excluded were staff complaints that the Associate Dean of Human Resources needed to follow and obey the relevant employment law and the faculty contract, and that President Smith tended to alienate faculty, ruled by intimidation, did not deal honestly with them, and isolated

himself from all staff but those unfailingly loyal to him. The fact-finding committee's report was considered significant because of what it both minimized and omitted.

The Board of Trustees responded in early-March to the fact-finding committee's report. Their response was summarized as "mistakes had been made" and included recommendations for "better communications between administrators and staff." Shortly thereafter, the faculty association reacted to the findings and held its third vote of no confidence.

Referendum and state investigation. Within the third vote, respondents were asked (a) how satisfied they were with the trustee's findings and decisions on fact-finding, (b) how likely the President, the Vice President of Administration and Finance, and the Associate Dean of Human Resources will be trustworthy and competent in the future, and (c) whether they favored "a state investigation of the college's management practices."

The ballot received 177 responses from 100 faculty, 66 classified staff, and 11 administrators. Approximately 87% of those voting were not satisfied with the Board of Trustee's investigation and their proposed solutions to the campus unrest. Around 92% did not believe the President would become trustworthy and competent in the future, and about 86% held the same sentiments for the Vice President of

Administration and the Associate Dean of Human Resources. Approximately 79% favored an independent state investigation of MVCC's management practices.

A few weeks after the referendum, the Board of Trustees asked the State Board for Community Colleges to appoint an investigative panel. Though the State Board had no official investigatory mechanism in place, a year earlier it had investigated a separate leadership crisis involving a new president at another state community college. The panel was to try to find what out had been causing the controversies at MVCC and to give the Trustees suggestions on what could be done. After about one month, however, the State Board declined to appoint the review panel. A representative explained that a state probe wouldn't have been appropriate for the quasi-judicial type of investigation with sworn testimony that MVCC requested. Also, the review panel "wouldn't have jurisdiction over matters of hiring and firing which were among the issues to be investigated." The State Board instead recommended that trustees themselves "move quickly to resolve the issues."

#### Aftermath of Final Ballot

After the third vote of no confidence, the Board of Trustees conducted an evaluation of President Smith as "part of the solution" to the college's problems. Though President Smith had asserted he "wouldn't go willingly", he

and the Board of Trustees eventually reached a mutual decision that "a change in leadership" was necessary at MVCC. The Board of Trustees entered into negotiations with Dr. Smith to buy out his contract. The Board agreed to pay Dr. Smith for the remaining 10 months on the second year of his three-year contract and included payment for accrued sick leave, vacation time, and medical benefits. Dr. Smith later announced his retirement from MVCC at a Board meeting.

The Board's charge was "to review the performance of the president." Though the Vice President of Administration and the Associate Dean of Human Resources also were named with Dr. Smith as "the focus of no confidence votes", the Board took no action on their positions, because "the president reviews the performance of his staff." Shortly after the Board of Trustees negotiated the contract buyout, the Board Chair resigned.

## CHAPTER 6

SUMMARY, IMPLICATIONS, AND  
SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

## Overview

This case study of leadership in crisis at a community college was undertaken to add to the practical and theoretical knowledge and understanding of presidential leadership issues that actually occur in American community colleges.

The problem of what can be learned from an investigation of one community college enduring a crisis in leadership was the focus of the study. Research questions guiding the study were: (a) what does the research literature have to say about leadership and leadership in crisis; (b) how did the crisis in leadership occur at Meadow View Community College and what were the situational preconditions and catalytic events surrounding the crisis; (c) what were the perceptions of the leadership crisis as viewed by the Board of Trustees, administrators, faculty, staff, student leadership and the college President; (d) what did Meadow View Community College constituents learn from the leadership crisis experience; and (e) what can this case study of leadership in crisis contribute to the body of knowledge in community college leadership?

This chapter contains a summary of the case study based upon the above research questions. Tentative conclusions about how the leadership crisis may have been avoided, implications for educational leadership practice, and suggestions for future research also are presented and discussed.

### What Does the Research Literature Have to Say About Leadership and Leadership in Crisis?

A review of relevant leadership literature provided the researcher and the reader with alternative theoretical perspectives on how to view the particulars of this case study. Although much has been written about theoretical perspectives and approaches to leadership, few studies have attempted to investigate the particular topic of leadership when it is in crisis, or leadership crises at educational institutions specifically.

Seven theoretical approaches and perspectives on leadership were reviewed in Chapter 2. They included trait, behavioral, power-influence, contingency or situational, transactional and transformational, cultural and symbolic, and post-industrial perspectives. Specific topics of leadership in higher education, the president's constituencies, leadership effectiveness, derailment, success and failure in the college presidency, and moral and ethical dimensions of college leadership were presented.



No single theoretical perspective or research approach to leadership could adequately describe the behaviors, events, or circumstances surrounding the leadership crisis that occurred at Meadow View Community College.

How Did the Crisis in Leadership Occur at Meadow View  
Community College and What Were the Situational  
Preconditions and Catalytic Events  
Surrounding the Crisis?

The descriptive account in Chapter 5 addressed this research question with a detailed reconstruction of the leadership crisis. In summary, President Smith was considered the best among the candidates interviewed for the presidency of Meadow View Community College. The Board of Trustees, administrators, faculty, and support staff viewed Dr. Smith as a welcome change to the previous president and also viewed him as the person who would bring the college back into the community and administer the college with a participatory management style of leadership.

Over time, however, President Smith's constituents became concerned about (a) administrative unresponsiveness to faculty and staff concerns, (b) administrative disregard for faculty rights of due process, (c) non-compliance with college personnel policies and procedures, and (d) differences in administrative stated philosophies and personal words and actions regarding participatory management.

During a period of approximately two years, these unresolved concerns led to three votes of no confidence in the college president and two of his administrators. Catalytic events surrounding the leadership crisis included (a) appointment of the Dean of Students, (b) alleged faculty sexual harassment situation, (c) non-renewal of tenure track faculty, (d) administrative pay increases with no faculty raises, (e) circumstances surrounding the fact-finding committee's report, and (e) incongruency between stated administrative philosophies and constituent observations regarding a *participatory* management. The ensuing three votes of no confidence gradually increased over time in scope and consequence, eventually included a criticism of the Board of Trustees, and ultimately lead to Dr. Smith's reluctant early retirement.

What Were the Perceptions of the Leadership Crisis as  
Viewed by the Board of Trustees, Administrators,  
Faculty, Staff, Student Leadership and  
the College President?

Perceptions of Meadow View Community College's leadership crisis, as viewed by members of the Board of Trustees, administration, faculty, support staff, student leadership, and the college President contributed significantly to this research. Constituent perceptions of the leadership crisis, including what was gained and lost are presented below. A summary of President Smith's

reflections on some of the mistakes he felt he made while in office and his advice for new community college presidents also are presented. Words in quotes are respondent comments in each category, unless otherwise noted.

### Board of Trustees' Perceptions

At the beginning of the leadership crisis, the Board of Trustees upheld their responsibility to support the president. "The honeymoon was over", but the conflict was not perceived as a significant problem, "it was a blip, it would straighten out." The Board's inclination was to give the president the opportunity to "solve the problem himself." On one hand, the Board wanted to support the president throughout the crisis; but on the other, they also felt over time that "the dilemma of public accountability vs. the problem" was something they must address.

The Board's main source for information on college functioning and activities, including any problems, was the President himself, "John offered reasonable explanations, or excuses, for his behavior and the situation which led to a perception that problems were being taken care of."

However, as the crisis developed, Board perceptions changed. Certain aspects of the President's management style were gradually realized by the Board. Communication in his administration tended to be "top-down in an authoritarian sort of way." "John said he was a *team player*

and a *participatory manager*, but that was true only if you agreed with him." With John, "everything had to be adversarial and confrontational...[the administration and the faculty union] couldn't work out an argument or work together...that was garbage and we all knew that."

As time passed, the Board began to see for themselves "indications of the criticisms against President Smith" and began "to lose trust." Dr. Smith's cumulative actions, comments, and responses to leadership issues tended to "surprise" and "frustrate" Board members. This, along with other factors (such as "his inability to deal adequately with rumors of an affair") lead Board members to conclude that he was "not being totally honest" in communicating fully with them. Board members tended to suspect that his information to them "wasn't everything that should have been relayed." "Once known...about the lying, deceit, etc., the trust was gone." "Distrust was widespread." "Folks didn't trust John."

When the conflict "festered and grew" moving "from bad to worse", the Board was asked by faculty, staff, other administrators and the community to *intervene*. Dr. Smith criticized the Board for micromanaging and not supporting him, but when it "became a point that Smith was ineffective and had no credibility, to some extent from that point on the Board's stance was *we will get to the bottom of it and we will do the right thing.*"

A rift eventually developed between the Board and Dr. Smith. President Smith had "neglected faculty concerns." The sexual harassment allegations against a faculty member was a "significant" issue which "should have been more expeditiously investigated." The Board's posture through most of the ordeal was "let's deal with the mistakes and move on." Inevitably, however, the realization came that the Board, the President and the administration "couldn't continue in a mutual relationship." "Something had to be done." President Smith asserted, "I am not going willingly" and the Board "didn't have much choice on options." As pressure mounted, the Board negotiated a contract buyout and financial settlement with President Smith inducing him to retire.

Board of Trustees's perceptions on what was gained and what was lost through their experiences in the leadership crisis are identified in Table 3.

#### Administrators' Perceptions

Perceptions of the leadership crisis by administrators (primarily associate deans and directors) tended to cluster in two general areas--the administration's *inconsistency in following college policies and procedures*, where certain practices and rules were "good for some people and not for others," and in the *claim of participatory management*, where there was a perceived "divergence in stated philosophy and

Table 3

Board of Trustees' Perceptions of Gains and Losses from the Leadership Crisis (n = 5)

<u>Gained</u>	<u>Lost</u>
Increased Board and College dialogue over issues.	College resources of time, money, and energy.
Professional and personal growth.	Personal resources of time and energy.
Better definition of roles of Board and President.	Integrity and credibility.

personal actions on the part of President Smith" and his administrators.

Respondents tended to characterize the leadership crisis in terms of the "autocratic management style" of the president and some cabinet-level administrators and the accompanying "absolute *lack of trust*" that ensued. "No matter what was done, there was such a lack of trust." This lack of trust was viewed as a "major factor" in the leadership crisis.

At first, most administrators were "strongly in favor of the president and his right to govern." He had made early progress in grants and entrepreneurial activities and Title III was a "major success." President Smith "looked at the institution as an economic development tool for the community" and MVCC would not have advanced in these areas if Dr. Smith hadn't "helped open things up."

However, "it became apparent with passage of time and with dissemination of information...more and more people became dissatisfied with the actions of the president." They "gradually became aware of denials and cover-ups and attitudes on issues" and realized that "he came in and talked the participatory game...[but] as he began to operate it became quite clear that there wasn't any participatory management...decisions were being made without appropriate input." Those affected by decisions were "not fully involved or consulted."

As things came into clearer focus, the President was viewed as a leader who was "adversarial", "inflexible", and "less than forthcoming." He had an "adversary style of behaving--even in conversations it was always the administration vs. the faculty vs. the classified staff." "Once he made up his mind, no amount of reason or discussion would change it--even if [the decision] was wrong." "[He] couldn't be trusted, he'd tell you one thing then do another." President Smith was quoted as saying to administrators in campus meetings and elsewhere, "I was hired to be right, you were hired to be wrong." "In many ways it was *who's* right instead of *what's* right."

Other factors also cited by respondents were inappropriate attempts to control administrative teams, faculty union activism, and a perceived micromanaging Board. President Smith "forbade Instructional Directors from having

lunch together on a regular basis." There was "aggressive leadership from the union" during the crisis and the union leadership was considered "tenacious." And, the Board of Trustees "stepped into the management of the college...[and] gave specific directions to the president that should have been his role, including administrative management of day-to-day operation functions."

Yet another, and often cited factor, was the effects of organizational culture. Some leadership issues were "deeply rooted" in organizational culture from the previous president and they "persisted with John." As a new president, "John relied strongly on his top-level administrators." However, "some of those administrators were responsible for many problems for John." John "only wanted to have yes-men around him, which was a greater factor than skill or ability to perform." "Maybe it wasn't John totally, it may have been the more autocratic administrators working with him." "John is gone," but "much of the problem is still here, the distrust, the lack of communication, the lack of goals that we *all* share."

Administrators' views of what was gained and what was lost through their experiences in the leadership crisis are identified in Table 4.



Table 4

Administrators' Perceptions of Gains and Losses from the Leadership Crisis (n = 12)

<u>Gained</u>	<u>Lost</u>
A united campus.	Trust, Creativity and Morale.
An understanding of how bad things can be.	Organizational momentum and effective teams and working relationships.
A new presidential advisory committee.	Credibility in the community.

The Faculty's Perceptions

With the change in leadership at MVCC, faculty members wanted a new president who was "student and faculty oriented," who had a "collaborative and participative management style," and who would "involve more people in decision-making processes." They wanted someone who would "change the organizational culture established by the previous president and his administration." The faculty anticipated that Dr. Smith would meet their expectations.

While in office, President Smith was viewed as "innovative in bringing much needed changes to the college in areas of grants and contracts" and "was really good out in the community." Initial impressions were that President Smith was "trustworthy and had good intent, but it was not substantiated over time." The former president was "a hard-

liner and everybody knew it and he made no bones about it...[however,] with the new president, he sort of spoke one line and then behaved in a different manner."

Some faculty leaders felt that the president and certain administrators "lacked consistent values of truth and honesty" and "denigrated any constraints on their behavior or procedure." Hiring practices were "contrary to policy." The administration was viewed as "high-handed" in treatment of the faculty member accused of alleged sexual harassment, "their own outside investigator had said there was no harassment 2 weeks after the suspension; yet they kept [the faculty member] out 4 months." On the pay raises, the faculty had "all accepted that there would be no pay raise...the legislature had specifically prohibited PICs for that year." Then, "Smith and members of his cabinet got a pay raise, with a range up to 21%." It was viewed as "administrative hypocrisy--tight finances, weeping and sorrowful portrayals, yet administrators got raises." It "just twisted some tails."

President Smith's decisions and actions on personnel-related issues were significant factors in the leadership crisis, but other factors contributed as well. "Much of the problem was *the lieutenants*." Dr. Smith inherited an administrative team that was "*dictatorial and vindictive*." Two members of the administrative team were "extremely aggressive interpersonally and as a management style", "rule

with an iron-hand type." "The old system was still there and it never really was what you would call *his system*", President Smith "didn't change it enough."

By retaining previous administrators, President Smith also retained some of the "accumulative frustration and animosities that had been built up over the years...so he had some organizational things that were not desirable." Many (but not all) faculty respondents commented that MVCC was not an easy place for Dr. Smith to assume office. The college had "an organizational culture that had been shaped by an autocratic regime...some people from the old regime behaved in the old manner."

President Smith "was not well served by those he inherited...they failed to give good advice." Not everybody directly under him, "but enough of them to certainly create a problem." His administrators "really catered to him--yes boss, yes boss." They gave him "inaccurate information," "filtered information," and "information he wanted to hear." At meetings, Dr. Smith would provide "inappropriate responses to questions...reflecting an *uninformed* position." He would rely on "political rhetoric," and there were "no real answers to the issues."

President Smith "shot from the hip, kept himself holed up, didn't get out." There was "a big chasm" between the president and his cabinet and the rest of campus. There

became "a closed circle in the administration from which information didn't seem to get in or really get out."

Administrative and faculty perceptions about what was happening and what needed to happen were not the same. When the administration was "still trying to be autocratic" and "didn't communicate openly and honestly," it "ended in conflict."

The expectation of participatory management also was viewed by faculty as an important factor. For them, participatory management turned out to be "committees that went no where to be overruled by executive privilege." In some cases, the whole process of committee work was "a rouse to begin with," because if committees didn't come up with "the right decision, the one that was already going to happen...it would just happen later on." Most of the committees were "ignored." President Smith "professed participatory management, but it was a catch phrase that wasn't true." "John was a team player with other administrators, not the faculty." "He had his own agenda." "Ninety percent of the changes and decisions were made in the summer when faculty were gone...when faculty had zero input." On one occasion, faculty were invited by President Smith to provide input at a particular meeting. While at the meeting, the faculty were told "what would be *at that same meeting...*there was no *listening*, no *input*."

Another contributing factor as viewed by faculty was that "the Board got involved, perhaps too much." "In a sense, the Board butted-in where it shouldn't have, and didn't butt-in where it should have." Faculty first viewed the Board as "a solution to the problem" and then eventually decided "they weren't going to solve it." Another identified factor was President Smith's "questionable relationships with certain employees beyond acceptable limits."

Faculty members' views of what was gained and what was lost through their experiences in the leadership crisis are identified in Table 5.

Table 5

Faculty's Perceptions of Gains and Losses from the Leadership Crisis (n = 8)

<u>Gained</u>	<u>Lost</u>
Faculty unity.	Trust.
A new contract with specific language about personnel issues, RIF, reprimand and due process.	A sense of team spirit, community and effectiveness.
A new beginning.	Image in the community.

Support Staff's Perceptions

Perceptions of MVCC'S support staff on the leadership crisis were expressed primarily in terms of "frustrations"

with the administration. Support staff respondents expressed distrust in the administration and perceived them as not having "respect for others." Support staff felt they were "denied voice" and were "unsupported" by the President and members of his administration.

From the beginning of President Smith's tenure some of his actions and comments toward MVCC's support staff tended to alienate them. He contracted for a desk audit of all support staff which resulted in "lowered income for many employees." He was often overheard to say "support staff are a dime-a-dozen."

Some of the support staff stated that Dr. Smith was a "glad-hander" with "a phony smile" who "had a facade most people could see through." "He talked a lot with little substance on real issues." He "*didn't walk the talk*." He "sold himself as participatory manager," but "in reality [was] more of a dictator." He "surrounded himself with yes-men" who "weren't doing him any favors." They "treated staff like low life." "It was not just Dr. Smith, it also was [the Vice President of Administration and Finance and the Associate Dean of Human Resources]." "People didn't trust any of the administration." There was "reprisal for people who stood and asked questions or voiced concerns."

Support staff members' views of what was gained and what was lost through their experiences in the leadership crisis are identified in Table 6.

Table 6

Support Staff's Perceptions of Gains and Losses from the Leadership Crisis (n = 5)

<u>Gained</u>	<u>Lost</u>
Unionization of Support Staff.	Some good people lost their jobs.
Ownership and pride in organization.	Time and ground in producing positive results.
A new beginning.	Trust in administration.

Student Leadership's Perceptions

Perceptions of MVCC's student leadership were that the general body of students "wasn't affected in any way" by the crisis and that it had "no effect in the classroom" or on their "formal education." For most student body officers, until they got into student government, they "didn't have any clue there was a problem."

The terms of office of student leadership overlapped during the crisis period and perceptions of working relationships with President Smith and his administrators tended to vary. In the aggregate, "firsthand experiences" with President Smith were "good." However, some student leaders said that there were times when the administration "wasn't honest", "wouldn't listen", "would make promises and wouldn't follow through" or would make decisions contrary to

students' interest, such as "cutting Spring break down to three days instead of five, which was controversial."

Views of MVCC's student leadership on what was gained and what was lost through their experiences in the leadership crisis are identified in Table 7.

Table 7

Student Leadership's Perceptions of Gains and Losses from the Leadership Crisis (n = 3)

<u>Gained</u>	<u>Lost</u>
A new perspective of how people in authority are viewed.	Trust and respect.
	Time and progress.
	Sense of community.

The College President's Perceptions

Before his retirement, Dr. Smith shared his perceptions of the leadership crisis in an open interview with the researcher in phase 1 of this study. During the interview, Dr. Smith reflected on his presidency, identified problems, discussed mistakes, and offered some advice to new community college presidents.

Dr. Smith knew he was "the number one choice of the Board of Trustees" when he was hired as the new president of Meadow View Community College. The Board was "looking for someone to bring the college back into the community", someone "to change things" and "make things happen." Upon



his appointment, President Smith was "responsive to community needs" through many "job retraining programs and grants and contracts." Though "support eroded on campus", Dr. Smith had "support in the community."

Within a year of when Dr. Smith took office, an "undercurrent of non-support and negativism" surfaced among senior administrators (most notably "the Dean of Instruction"). President Smith believed that "anyone who thinks they should have been the president and is still on the payroll will second-guess most every decision of the President." The Board had told Dr. Smith, "if you wish not to renew their contract[s], we will support it." However, President Smith's position was he would "rather work with people and compromise than fire someone."

President Smith saw the college through four years of down-sizing. After five years, he "did a major reorganization." Through the reorganization he "changed duties and responsibilities and increased pay for some people." The "adjustments in pay were legal." The Board "gave a raise to the CEO", but the faculty union said "Smith gave himself a raise." Dr. Smith realized that faculty raises in the form of Professional Improvement Credits (PICs) were "not allowed by law...no community college gave them." President Smith recognized that "major problems" arose from the reorganization, budget cuts, and salary increases for administrators but not the faculty.

Other "major problems" identified by Dr. Smith were non-renewal of six tenure track faculty members and alleged sexual harassment by a faculty member. There was "union vindictiveness and furor" over the sexual harassment issue. Regarding the non-renewal of six faculty, a Board member had told President Smith, "not 100% are excellent faculty... probably 70% should be renewed, not 100% for sure." President Smith reaffirmed that the non-renewal was "a quality issue" and not "budgetary" as the faculty union had maintained.

At the time when the Board of Trustees had only three members, "the union saw a weak Board" and "used it to advantage." The faculty union "blasted the president and his administration." The Board then developed a "task force" to investigate and "study allegations." When it was finished and presented its results, "one person on the committee voiced concerns to the Board." "The chair allowed the comments." It was "a sign that the Board was listening to general employees...[and] the beginning of the end for [the] CEO." The Board was "no longer willing to support the President and administration."

The local newspaper "refused to listen to the President and the Board" and "accepted what the union said as fact", it "always made administration look bad." President Smith felt it never printed his side of the story. He had been "a CEO for 15 years and never had media or employees attack

[him]." He was "brought in with unanimity" but "in six-and-a-half years received two votes of no confidence." He regarded the issues raised in the votes of no confidence as "bogus", and considered the referendums "the work of a handful of aggressive faculty members" who were "trying to destroy" the college.

President Smith felt that the Board saw the "only way to help itself out" was to buy out his contract. President Smith intended to "retire in two years." But, for that to happen, the Board needed to "stand up and say" to the faculty union "we support the president to take care of governance." President Smith believed, the faculty's "most important job is teaching, not in shared governance."

President Smith expressed curiosity about the future of Meadow View Community College and pondered whether or not it "could end up like [another state community college] that had seven presidents in 10 years."

Mistakes identified by president. President Smith reflected on some of the identified mistakes he had made and commented on what he would have done differently (first person quotes are used here).

On the *alleged faculty sexual harassment issue*: "I didn't do a good job of expeditiously investigating the sexual harassment charge...it dragged on for three months, it should have taken three weeks." "I should have brought

in a private investigator from [town] to evaluate, investigate and make recommendations quickly." The situation needed "faster investigation and reinstatement sooner."

On the *appointment of the Dean of Students*: "It probably was a mistake too." "I promised to open it up, but didn't." "The Board was concerned." "If I had it to do over again, I probably would have opened it up and taken [a] barrage of [criticism about] reappointing the current Dean of Students over the other two [MVCC administrators]." "It was a 'Catch 22'."

On the *non-renewal of tenure track faculty*: "When the Board member said only 70 percent of tenure-track faculty should be renewed, I should have said 'Let the administration determine how many people will be recommended for non-renewal', then let the Board determine differently if they want[ed] to."

On the *reorganization*: "At a time when faculty were not able to get an increment [raise], I probably would have given a lesser amount of pay adjustment than I did", but "not apologize for pay."

On *faculty complaints*: "I should have said to the Board earlier, let's bring in union leadership, support staff leadership, and with the faculty senate, the Board, the president and senior administrators, say here are your complaints, let's sit down and work them out."

On his *"most crucial mistake"*: "I should have fired most of the senior administrators and started with a clean slate...a lot of CEOs do that."

Advice to new community college presidents. Dr. Smith reflected on his professional experiences in community college leadership and offered the following advice for new community college presidents:

1. Always be *open* with your Board.
2. Be *honest* and *trustworthy*.
3. Have a good sense of humor.
4. Don't take your job so seriously that it could destroy your health.
5. Choose an environment with some *fun* in it.
6. Accept the fact that a small decision can become magnified into a *huge* decision.
7. Be prepared to become a *very fast* learner.

Perceptions on the leadership crisis by the Board of Trustees, administrators, faculty, support staff, student leadership, and the President provided valuable insight into how the leadership crisis occurred and how those involved viewed it. The collected perceptions also provided data for identifying what the college's constituents learned from their experiences.

What Did Meadow View Community College Constituents  
Learn from the Leadership Crisis Experience?

Several lessons learned were identified from respondent experiences in the leadership crisis. Lessons learned had a variety of dimensions, both general and specific, and tended to be of two types--those related to personal values and philosophies and those with practical applications. Some lessons were considered *crucial*, while others were viewed as *slight adjustments*.

"We learned to reexamine our own values, our beliefs, and our leadership styles, and the way we do business," was the essence of what MVCC's constituents learned. Through experiencing "a heightened awareness of crisis potential," Meadow View Community College constituents resolved to make some changes. They focused on revising policies and procedures in tenure-review, hiring, retaining and releasing personnel, and improving college communications. Board members in particular resolved to "improve communications holistically," to "seek more access with the college community", and to "meet regularly with faculty and staff to explain policies and management decisions and to exchange views."

Among other lessons learned by Board members were the importance of (a) working toward "a non-adversarial relationship with the faculty union," (b) getting things "more out in the open with less use of executive session,"

(c) learning from experiences and passing along the memory of those experiences to new Board members, and (d) developing "an appropriate evaluation tool" for the college president.

College faculty and staff learned that they "could be successful in resisting unfairness and repeating the things of the past." They learned to be "watchful of old guard and old ways of doing business" and the "lingering effects of untrustworthy administrators." They learned to expect their administration "to act *morally and ethically*, not just legally."

Meadow View Community College constituents learned a fundamental lesson from their experiences with a crisis in leadership--be aware of crisis potential, pay more attention to warning signs, and take preventive action before it gets out of hand.

What Can This Case Study of Leadership in Crisis  
Contribute to the Body of Knowledge in  
Community College Leadership?

One of the purposes of this study was to generate some observations about how the leadership crisis at Meadow View Community College may have been avoided. The reader should keep in mind that analysis of the data showed some comprehensive patterns and relationships among observations, documents, and respondent descriptions, but did not reveal cause and effect relationships. The researcher's goal

throughout the entire data collection and analysis process was to treat the evidence fairly, to produce a compelling descriptive account and to rule out alternative interpretations. The researcher relied on a variety of sources and analytical elements to generate the tentative conclusions including (a) analysis of relevant literature, (b) identification of fixed and variable factors, and (c) respondent views.

The relevant leadership literature discussed in Chapter 2 provided a theoretical connection between what is already known in the research and the particulars of this case study. The literature was influential in illuminating possibilities for how the leadership crisis may have occurred and how it may have been avoided. Examples included research on leadership traits, behaviors, power and influence, situations, transactions and transformations, cultures, and leadership needs for the twenty-first century. Also included were leadership in higher education, the president's constituencies, leadership effectiveness, success and failure in the college presidency, and moral/ethical dimensions of leadership.

#### Identification of Fixed and Variable Factors

Identification of fixed and variable factors is a useful way of interpreting circumstances and events surrounding leadership crises in a particular environment



(Parnell, 1993). Fixed factors in this case were those considered beyond the president's control. The effects a president may have on a campus can be confounded by the actions of other institutional leaders, changes in the environment and internal organizational processes such as culture and history (Birnbaum, 1992a, 1992b; Fisher, 1984, 1994). Variable factors, on the other hand, were those subject to change within the particular context. Identification of both fixed and variable factors may have unclear boundaries, depending on how one interprets what is changeable or not.

Fixed factors identified in this case study were related to the college's environment, institutional culture, and actions of other institutional leaders. Finance and budget factors impacted Meadow View. The college was forced to deal with reduced state funding for several years, and in a recent session the state legislature mandated no raises for community college employees. The culture of the college was in transition, from a previously established *authoritative* administration to a *participatory* form of institutional management. Other institutional leaders at MVCC had both individual and collective effects. High-level administrators attempted to undermine the president, offended faculty and staff in word and deed, and tended to obstruct transition to participatory management. The Board of Trustees underwent changes in membership and some Board

members tended to micromanage, meddle or impose personal views and philosophies on established institutional processes.

Variable factors were related primarily to administrative decisions and actions on a variety of issues. Despite situational demands of leadership contexts, leaders have choices in what to attend to, what to emphasize or deemphasize, with whom to interact, how to present information, and how to interpret events (Zaleznik & Matsushita, 1993). Principle issues in this case included, but were not limited to, (a) hiring, retaining and dismissing college personnel, (b) handling complaints of sexual harassment, (c) college reorganization and administrative pay increases, and (d) alignment of philosophies, values, and styles of management among college leaders.

Administrative decisions and actions on personnel issues tended to infuse the leadership crisis. The manner in which the Dean of Students was hired, the handling of alleged sexual harassment by a faculty member, the non-renewal of six tenure track faculty members, and pay increases for select administrators all became focal points in the votes of no confidence. Other variable factors included responses by the president to the votes of no confidence and responses by the Board of Trustees to the fact-finding committee's report.

Identification of fixed and variable factors was a useful approach to interpreting events and circumstances underlying how the leadership crisis may have been avoided. Another useful approach was to directly ask for the views of those involved with the leadership crisis context.

### Constituent Views on Avoiding the Crisis

Constituent views and descriptions provided a general mosaic with rich central meanings about the interrelationships of events and circumstances in the leadership crisis at Meadow View Community College. To avoid inferences based on incomplete or insufficient data, respondents were asked directly if the crisis in leadership could have been avoided, and if so, how. Respondent views and suggestions are summarized below.

*The Board of Trustees.* All members of the Board of Trustees agreed that the leadership crisis could have been avoided, or at least kept from reaching its final proportions, "it didn't need to get to the point it did", "some sort of resolution could have occurred after one vote." Board members made the following suggestions for what the President and the Board could have (or should have) done differently to avoid or reduce the leadership crisis. The leadership crisis could have been avoided or reduced by President Smith:

1. If he "would have looked inward, been fully responsible and accountable, and recognized and admitted mistakes."
2. If he "had handled the [alleged faculty sexual harassment] issue more swiftly to defuse it."
3. If there was "a difference in administrative style [and] less retaliating conditions."
4. If there was "early *open and honest* dialogue with the Board."

The leadership crisis could have been avoided or reduced by the Board of Trustees if they had "done more in the *open*, with fewer *closed* sessions", and if there were "earlier intervention to ward off other votes of no confidence."

*College administrators.* The college administrators (except one) affirmed that the crisis in leadership could have been avoided:

1. If there had been "congruency between stated values and observed behavior."
2. If there had not been "simultaneous threats of budget cuts and pay raises for administrators."
3. If "the Board had not meddled in campus affairs, i.e., faculty tenure issue."
4. If the President had admitted to "mistakes" and "questionable reactions, responses and decisions"

and sought "cooperation, compromise and greater communication."

The exception held that the leadership crisis was inevitable and could not have been avoided, "because of the players involved, the mix of administrators...[Dr. Smith] shouldn't [have kept] the same administrative staff who are still considered untrustworthy."

*College faculty.* MVCC's faculty firmly believed the leadership crisis could have been averted. They "were almost desperate to have everything better." The crisis could have been avoided:

1. If "Smith had stumbled into a cabinet where people were grounded in reality and respectful of procedure"; "he needed the right people under him making the right decisions."
2. If the administration "had followed proper procedure and due process and been fair."
3. If "there had been a concerted effort to change", and "John had said 'we erred', it didn't need to be 'I'."
4. If "decisions had been made with appropriate input and genuine participatory management processes."
5. If "John had listened to all the voices."

*College support staff.* The support staff also believed that the leadership crisis could have been avoided. They suggested:

1. If leaders had been "honest", "forthright" and "treated people fairly."
2. If "fact-finding hadn't been laundered."
3. If the Board of Trustees had investigated the situation earlier.
4. If people had been listened to.

*Student leadership.* The college's student leadership surmised that the leadership crisis could have been avoided if "people had worked more toward compromise in negotiating a solution before trust was lost", and if "people had been more willing to look for solutions and not continue to focus on the problems."

#### Tentative Observations and Conclusions

Tentative observations and conclusions for how the leadership crisis may have been avoided at Meadow View Community College were derived, synthesized and developed from relevant literature, identification of fixed and variable factors, and aggregated respondent data from constituents.

The observations were related to what the college's collective leadership, i.e., Board of Trustees, President, and Administrators could have done to avoid the leadership crisis. Observations tended to cluster around themes related to administrative style, interpersonal relationships, congruency between *stated* and *observed*

administrative philosophy and behavior, adherence to college policies and procedures, and listening to constituents.

Thus, the crisis in leadership at Meadow View Community College may have been avoided:

1. If college leadership had followed established policies, procedures and processes, and admitted and corrected mistakes in a *timely* fashion.
2. If the president had made sure his administrative team was comprised of members who *shared* similar philosophies, values and a participatory style of management.
3. If college leadership had *listened* to and appropriately responded to the concerns of their constituents.

The researcher acknowledges that readers of this study may generate alternative conclusions on how the crisis may have been avoided based upon individual insights and professional experiences in similar environments.

Occurrences of unusual or critical events such as a crisis in leadership often provide opportunities for those involved to learn directly from their experiences. Though the crisis in leadership was often described as "painful" and "a difficult ordeal," Meadow View Community College constituents managed to learn from it. Whether or not they were able to apply what they learned is subject to further investigation.

### Implications for Practice

This research holds implications for community college leaders in understanding the complexities of *real-life* leadership crises and in improving the practice of educational leadership. This study focused upon the problem of what can be learned from a case study of one community college enduring a crisis in leadership.

Community college leaders and other readers of this report may derive naturalistic generalizations about the case study that will become useful extensions of their personal and professional understandings of leadership contexts (see Chapter 3). Though the results of this research cannot be generalized in the statistical sense, certain aspects of this study may apply not only to Meadow View Community College's context, but also to other community college settings depending upon the similarity of contexts and who is making the judgement. It is left to the reader to determine exactly what may transfer from this case study investigation to other leadership settings.

Implications for practice, like the conclusions, were derived from researcher synthesis of relevant literature and the descriptive account of the leadership crisis. The implications for improving the practice of educational leadership in community colleges centered around (a) leadership awareness of crisis potential, (b) recognition of



warning signs, and (c) the need to take early preventive action.

Many of the leadership implications pertain either to community college presidents or Boards of Trustees, or both. Presidents and Boards of Trustees are in unique positions to influence the practice of educational leadership. They must rely on each other for information and support that enables them to perform their respective roles effectively and prevent leadership crises from occurring (or reoccurring) at their colleges.

Therefore, as supported by the literature and the results of this case study, a community college president and Board of Trustees may be well-advised to:

1. View their institution as a collective enterprise and balance concern for task and results with concern for *people and process* (Chait, et al., 1993; Yukl, 1989).
2. Commit to a system of shared values, flexibility, and multiple frames of reference in viewing institutional functioning (Birnbaum, 1992a; Bolman & Deal, 1984).
3. Accept the importance of institutional culture and symbolism in decisions and actions (Parnell, 1990; Pfeffer, 1981; Schein, 1992; Tierney, 1988).
4. Actively seek input from those directly affected by decisions and encourage the creation of mechanisms

to provide such feedback (Birnbaum, 1992a; Chait et al., 1993; Tierney, 1988).

5. Lead with care and respect (Fisher & Tack, 1990).

Certain aspects of preventing a leadership crisis may be directly applicable to decisions and actions of the Board of Trustees. To prevent a leadership crisis from occurring or reoccurring, Boards of Trustees may be well-advised to:

1. Adapt to distinctive characteristics of the academic environment and avoid interfering in campus governance or modifying academic culture to fit Board member philosophy and experience (Chait et al., 1993).
2. Require from the president--integrity, competence, open and honest communication, adaptability, and tranquility on campus (Kerr & Gade, 1986).

For community college presidents, a key implication is that they may eventually find themselves in leadership contexts which lead to crises. Though a president occasionally might be tempted to extend his/her legitimate power beyond reasonable parameters or to force issues at the expense of his or her position, the outcome of such decisions and activities should not come as a complete surprise. As chief executive officer, the president is expected to successfully lead the institution into the future. Despite this responsibility many community college presidents may be constrained by political and cultural

realities of the institution and environmental and organizational circumstances that are beyond their control. On the other hand, community college presidents also have choices in how to make decisions, who to listen to, what actions to take, and how to manage meaning for constituents, and so forth.

What community college presidents choose to do and how they choose to do it is a function of their interactions with constituents. To lead effectively, the exemplary president (Birnbaum, 1992a, 1992b) will be in frequent contact with her/his constituents, especially the faculty. Part of constituent contact will be to explain and justify decisions and initiatives and to persuade. But much of the contact with constituents will be to *listen*, to hear what others have to say, to gauge constituent responses to issues, and to assess the level of leadership support. Therefore, much of the responsibility for preventing a leadership crisis rests firmly on the shoulders of the college president.

As supported by the literature and the results of this case study, to prevent a leadership crisis from occurring or reoccurring, a community college president may be well-advised to:

1. Employ participative leadership and decision making procedures to foster collaborative goal setting, bottom-up communication, and *trust* (Likert, 1961).

2. Make timely and sensible decisions, keep promises, and admit and correct mistakes as early as possible (Birnbaum, 1992a, 1992b; Kerr & Gade, 1986).
3. Nourish institutional culture based on mutual values, mutual trust, and *walking the talk* (Clark, 1992); and align leadership strategies with the culture rather than compete with it (Schein, 1985, 1992).
4. Notice that an industrial paradigm of leadership may no longer be appropriate in contexts where highly educated people, such as a college faculty, tend to value and prefer a *post-industrial* paradigm type of leadership characterized by collaboration, common good, client orientation, freedom of expression, critical dialogue, consensus-oriented policy-making processes, etc. (Rost, 1991).
5. Synthesize *transactional and transformative* leadership to support what currently works and to restore values and make improvements (Birnbaum, 1992a).
6. Facilitate shared responsibility in organizational learning (Schein, 1992; Senge, 1990; Wheatley, 1994).
7. Stay within legitimate parameters of position and power (French & Raven, 1959); honor and work within established governance structures, accept faculty

participation in decision-making, and be concerned with process (Birnbaum, 1992a, 1992b).

8. Listen effectively and be willing to be influenced (Birnbaum, 1992a, 1992b; Fujita, 1990).
9. Consult broadly enough to permit emergence of multiple views, remain open to disconfirming evidence, and actively seek information about constituent perceptions and campus functioning (Birnbaum, 1992a; Leinbach, 1993; Vaughan, 1986).
10. Select qualified and able people for administrative cabinets who share leadership values, avoid self-sealing systems of interaction with supportive constituencies, and do not fill cabinets or councils with yes-people (Birnbaum, 1992a; Bogue, 1985; Gardner, 1990; Moore, 1980).
11. Know when to leave (Birnbaum, 1992a, 1992b; Kerr & Gade, 1986).

Given the potential for leadership crises to occur in community colleges, recognition of warning signs and possible preventive measures by presidents and Boards of Trustees may serve to reduce or lessen both the potential and the occurrence of a leadership crisis. Preventive measures, however, are not guarantees for success. If leadership crises in community colleges are to be reduced or prevented, community college leaders will need to be aware not only of leadership crisis potential, but they also will

need to be familiar with *real-life* case studies of specific leadership crisis contexts such as the one that occurred at Meadow View Community College. Community college leaders will need to be cognizant of how leadership crises tend to occur, how they are perceived by those involved, what can be learned from them, and how they might be avoided. Examining how leadership crises occurred in the past can be helpful in trying to prevent leadership crises in the future.

#### Suggestions for Future Research

Further research into specific leadership crises at educational institutions is needed. Given the frequency with which leadership crises tend to occur at community colleges, they are under-researched. Meadow View Community College was part of one state system of higher education that in approximately two years saw nearly one-third of its community colleges in turmoil, upheaval and looking for new presidents.

Our knowledge of educational leadership can be enhanced by studying and comparing various case studies of leadership in crisis. Additional case studies would provide more data for formulating overarching themes and patterns for understanding leadership crisis contexts, outcomes, reasons for presidential departures, and possible methods of crisis prevention. Research from several cases also would increase the potential for hypothesizing and generalizing beyond this

particular case study. Interpretations of data from several cases can provide more information and be more compelling than the results from a single case. By comparing sites or cases, "one can establish the range of generalizability of a finding or explanation, and at the same time, pin down the conditions under which that finding will occur" (Miles & Huberman, 1984, p. 151).

Additional studies at other institutions are necessary also to corroborate the conclusions suggested by this study. Though synthesis of this study's findings into Birnbaum's (1992a) orientation of presidential modes of leadership appears to have considerable corroboratory power, the true worth of this and other similar case studies must be tested and compared through additional research at other sites.

One of the more practical implications of multiple studies in educational leadership crises is the possibility of developing an early warning system. By looking at studies of past leadership crisis contexts researchers and college leaders may learn more not only about how leadership crises tend to occur, but also about possible explanations for *why* they occur. With sufficient knowledge gained from description and explanation of educational leadership crises, it eventually may be possible to predict, reduce, or altogether prevent leadership crises from occurring.

To advance research in this area, future studies should look for overall patterns in what characterizes leadership

crises at educational institutions. How do leadership crises tend to occur? What are their outcomes? How might they be averted?

Results from the present case study also suggest other types of research questions. For example, what parts do boards of trustees, faculty, administrative councils, and presidents play in leadership crisis contexts? What do college leaders themselves learn from their experiences? Are certain patterns of leadership strengths and weaknesses acceptable to constituents while other patterns tend to lead to conflict and crisis? Are there fatal leadership flaws that tend to override any combination of leadership strengths, e.g., a president who isn't trusted? Is there a pattern behind bad luck in community college leadership, i.e., are there wrong places at wrong times?

A particularly promising avenue of future research is the *post-crisis* leadership context. That is, what changes take place at a college after a leadership crisis and what effects remain? What's it like being the new president of a college that just experienced a crisis in leadership? What are constituent expectations? What can an incoming president learn from his/her predecessor?

Birnbaum (1992a) suggested that about twenty-five percent of college presidencies can be characterized as exemplary, twenty-five percent as failed, and fifty percent somewhere between. Clearly, an investigation of both



successful and unsuccessful college presidencies holds promise for both the advancement of theoretical lines of thought and for implications for practice for college presidents, board members and faculty leaders. It remains to be tested by future researchers, whether consistent patterns of educational leadership crisis contexts and outcomes can be discerned, and to what level research results can be effectively applied to understanding and averting crises in leadership.

## EPILOGUE

Dr. Smith retired at age 61 from Meadow View Community College knowing that he had made some positive changes at the college during his six-year tenure. He continued his professional activities through future plans for contracted consulting work and/or teaching at a four-year university.

Three or more lawsuits against MVCC were spawned by events in the leadership crisis. The lawsuit brought by the faculty member over unsubstantiated allegations of sexual harassment and violations of due process was settled out of court in favor of the faculty member. Other lawsuits such as those brought by two faculty members who were denied tenure track renewal were still in process.

In late August, after a delay because of the campus turmoil, the college's Foundation kicked off its \$1.25 million dollar capital campaign to finance a workforce training facility and obtain matching grant money from Title III for student scholarships. The campaign ended a success.

The Board of Trustees appointed an interim president of MVCC who was a retired community college president from the same state. Because he was an interim, he left decisions of retaining the administrators who were included in votes of no confidence to the next new president. As a result, all of Dr. Smith's administrative team remained at the college, except for the Associate Dean of Community Development and College Relations who resigned her position.

The interim president's primary responsibility was to find the next president of MVCC. He used a customized search process that included representation and input from all campus groups. The search committee eventually selected a doctoral candidate (Ph.D.) who was Dean of Instruction at an eastern two-year college. In his first presidency, he was chosen because of his "established style of participatory management" and his "strong commitment to personal values and professional ethics." The newly appointed president of MVCC decided to retain the administrative team of his predecessor.

Meadow View Community College's faculty, staff and Board of Trustees were pleased about their selection of their new president, eager for campus healing and renewal to begin, and cautiously optimistic about the future.

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