

DISSERTATION

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE ACADEMIC QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE OF A
COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY COLLEGE:
A CASE STUDY APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE ACADEMIC QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE OF A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A CASE STUDY APPROACH

This phenomenological case study assesses the Riverland Community College faculty and staff current perceptions of organizational climate. It also examines the impact of the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP) effort from 2002-2012. Employee perceptions were studied in two ways: (a) a longitudinal analysis (2002-2012) of an Institutional Climate Survey that was offered to all employees, and (b) personal interviews with seventeen of the employees: ten faculty and seven staff. Consistent interview questions were related to perceptions of current climate, discussions of related survey items from previous climate surveys (2002-2012), and perceptions of AQIP during the same ten-year period. Results from the qualitative and quantitative data analysis indicated radically different staff and faculty subclimates, as well as concerns related to organizational structure, administration, decision-making, communication, planning, and budget. Internal restructuring and reorganizations were problematic. AQIP efforts were not as relevant as concerns about climate and organizational structure, as AQIP does not seem have been influential in altering climate. The essence of the phenomenon for this case study was the bifurcated sense of climate at Riverland Community College. Two distinct subclimates were defined in this study: a toxic, fearful, and demoralizing environment experienced by some staff, including workplace bullying, and a non-threatening, supportive, and positive

environment experienced by most faculty. There were many distinctive differences noted between the staff and faculty subclimates regarding climate perceptions, perspectives on organizational structure and its players, and AQIP.

Key Words: AQIP, organizational climate, workplace bullying, subclimates

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DEDICATION

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Chapter One: Introduction

BACKGROUND/OVERVIEW

The last decade in higher education has been a time of pressure for accelerated change in most institutions. Burgeoning technology, decreasing budgets, and public as well as legislative demands for accountability, have placed increasing pressure on colleges and universities and their faculty and staff. The students, the public, and the funding agencies want efficiency, efficacy, and more of it, as well as documentation of student learning. Colleges have been responding to these demands in a variety of ways. Many colleges looked to business and industry for models, and so began to adapt and adopt the Total Quality Management (TQM)/Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) methodologies popularized by industry. For instance, in 1994 the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education mandated that each of the fourteen universities in its system adopt a CQI program. Dan S. Benson (2000), in his research into the perceptions of the effect of CQI within the Pennsylvania system, states:

Higher education has been facing a number of problems in recent years. These have included increased competition, decreased funding, lack of support from key constituencies, dealing with changed technology, and increased calls for accountability. One of the responses that a number of universities have made is to turn to an emphasis on quality. (p. 38)

Tatro (2007) noted that in 1992, Baker had described the “complex environment of American community colleges – an environment characterized by alarming student attrition, shrinking economic resources, increasingly under-prepared students and encroaching control by state government” (p. 1). Tatro also cited Kerr’s (1995) five challenges for colleges and universities: a new clientele of life-long learners, an emerging body of part-time faculty, new

governance and finance methods, new technologies affecting learning, and new societal needs (Tatro, 2007, p .1).

Community colleges have been interested in the quality improvement initiative and in many cases, these colleges also have the advantage of close ties with business and industry advisors, expertise, and trends through their occupational and technical programs. As the quality movement gained widespread acceptance in industry, community colleges also turned to the industry models of CQI (TQM) for assistance in implementing change. For example, Cowley County Community College and Area Vocational-Technical School (CC/VTS) (Arkansas City, KS) (1999) states in its self-study accreditation report that “The desire to develop a more effective and efficient institutional system has guided the leadership to incorporate the culture of Total Quality Management or Continuous Quality Improvement into the planning process of the college” (p. 1). Today, Cowley County CC/VTS is still committed to and actively engaged in a quality improvement effort through its reaccreditation process, the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) (Cowley County CC/VTS, 2012).

TQM and CQI have been adopted by a number of technical colleges in Minnesota, including Alexandria Technical College, Northwest Technical College, and Riverland Technical College (which no longer exists as a separate entity since merger legislation), as well as many others nationally (Dew & Nearing, 2004; Hoffman & Julius, 1995; Trites, 1996). Other early adopters in the Midwest include Western Technical College (WTC) (City, WI), Fox Valley Technical College (City, WI), and Wisconsin Lakeshore Technical College (LTC). The Eastern Iowa Community College District (EICCD) (City, IA) initially developed their own consortium and process in 1992 known as the Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQIN), (Dew & Nearing, 2004). All of these schools are currently still actively engaged in and committed to the

quality improvement process known as the AQIP reaccreditation/ quality improvement program (Eastern Iowa Community College, 2010; Fox Valley Technical College, 2010; Lakeshore Technical College, 2010; Western Technical College, 2010).

The names that arise repeatedly when examining the origins of the quality improvement initiatives are the quality giants W. Edwards Deming, Joseph M. Juran, and Philip B. Crosby. According to Dew and Nearing (2004) Deming's work was implemented in Japan before gaining widespread respect and acceptance in the United States, and is based on the early foundation established by Walter Shewhart (p. 1). Shewhart's work in quality began with Western Electric at the end of World War I. Overall, CQI, and specifically, TQM were organizational quality improvement processes based on the research, writings, and recommendations of these quality pioneers.

The implementation of these theories ultimately spawned such process methodologies and quality award systems as the Malcolm Baldrige Award (in Manufacturing), ISO 9000, and Six Sigma. As TQM and CQI became increasingly implemented in colleges and universities, the methodologies and process models that had been utilized in business and industry were eventually adapted to higher education organizations. Today, the higher education institution that is investigating quality improvement is able to choose from several of these adaptations.

For instance, the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) and the American Society for Quality (ASQ) co-administer and manage the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Program and Award's Education Criteria for Performance Excellence. The prestigious Baldrige Award was initially developed for industry, and then Baldrige criteria were developed for education, health care, and not-for-profit organizations. CQIN, in cooperation with Datatel, Inc, administers the Trailblazer and Pacesetter Awards in Higher Education. A more recent

blueprint for CQI/TQM is the AQIP option for accreditation by the North Central Association (NCA) and Higher Learning Commission (HLC). The criteria for AQIP are modeled on the Baldrige Education Criteria. A college or university that is seeking the Baldrige, Trailblazer, or Pacesetter Awards, or is pursuing another quality improvement process can implement the AQIP criteria and requirements simultaneously or solely. The AQIP process replaces the original self-study process for renewing accreditation known as the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality (PEAQ).

Background for Case Study

Literature on quality improvement abounds, particularly in industry. There has been a concomitant following of literature on quality improvement in education, with a number of articles and dissertations devoted to exploring the implementation and effects of the adoption and adaptation of quality improvement processes such as TQM and CQI in colleges and universities. For instance, aspects of CQI/TQM implemented in the community colleges in New York State, the state universities in Pennsylvania, community colleges in Texas A & M University, the North Carolina Community College System, Maricopa Community College, and the University of Maryland are but a few examples of research studies in higher education (Assad & Olian, 1995; Assar, 1993; Benson, 2000; Casolaro, 1996; Grider, 1996; McCathern, 1999; Paris, 1996).

More recent studies include quality perceptions and indicators, the role of accreditation related to QI efforts, and the impact of CQI/TQM (especially those formulated for re-accreditation efforts) on organizational climate and/or learning (Beard, 2005; Bishop, 2004; Brua-Behrens, 2003; Brunson, 2010; Marcus, 2003; Pemberton, 2005; Snyder, 2006; Stewart, 2006; Sykes, 2003; Tatro, 2007). Studies have also looked at perceptions of leadership in regard

to the effectiveness and impact of CQI/TQM efforts, the role of CQI in planning, and various aspects of the implementation of AQIP (Beard, 2005; Bishop, 2004; Pemberton, 2005; Riccardi, 2009; Winn, 2002). The role of employee consensus and the initial decision-making process in an organization to embark on a QI effort have also been studied, as well as the perceived and actual costs of implementing and maintaining a quality improvement (QI) or continuous improvement (CI) effort (Larson, 2004; Lee, 2002; Rozumalski, 2002).

Technical colleges in Minnesota have also been involved in implementing and researching CQI/TQM since the early 1990's (Lee, 2002). Until July 1, 1996, all public community colleges in Minnesota were incorporated into the Minnesota Community College System that consisted of community colleges offering primarily Associate of Arts degrees, and little occupational or technical education (other than Associate of Science degree nursing programs). Technical colleges were built, funded, and administered as separate entities that had been removed from the K-12 system into a loosely-organized group of technical colleges. A legislative mandate established a state system known as the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system that has oversight responsibility for "stand-alone" technical colleges (sometimes combining two or more former technical colleges), "stand-alone" community colleges, and newly-merged comprehensive colleges, which combine the two former entities in various constellations.

The newly merged comprehensive colleges, in particular, had an early period of uncertainty, change, and culture shock. Repeated reorganizations and redefinitions of the role and mission of MnSCU, administrative attrition and reorganizations, the merging of two faculty unions to form one (the Minnesota Community College Faculty Association and United Technical College Educators combined to form Minnesota State College Faculty), a prolonged

statewide and legislative debate over mission delineation, budget restrictions, and other forces added to the atmosphere of change. At the time of this dissertation, there is a lack of research regarding the comprehensive colleges created in Minnesota, and a deficiency of published research regarding the effects of QI efforts in these colleges.

One of these comprehensive colleges, Riverland Community College, was the result of the combination of a branch of the former Riverland Technical College (Austin, MN), a branch of the former South Central Technical College (Albert Lea, MN) and the previous stand-alone Austin Community College (Austin, MN), with three disparate cultures, faculty contracts, and administrative structures. Austin Community College, formerly Austin Junior College, first opened its doors to college students on September 3, 1940. At that time the college was accredited by the State Department of Education and the University of Minnesota. The first president of the newly-merged Riverland Community College had been involved in the TQM initiative in the former technical college, but involvement in any quality initiative was rapidly subsumed by the demands of the merger. The college leadership was in continual change for the first several years after the merger, and saw four college presidents between 1995-2003, and four academic vice presidents during roughly the same period.

The current President of Riverland Community College has been in place since 2003, and the executive vice president in place since 2005, lending stability to planning and improvement processes. The new leadership established a stated goal of reorganizing the institution around AQIP principles, mission, vision, and strategic planning as well as action projects. Previous re-accreditation visits and follow-up reports, as well as institutional climate surveys and the first AQIP portfolio, identified concerns to be addressed in the areas of: assessment of student learning outcomes, planning, linking planning to budgeting, and the use of data to drive decision-

making. This study explores the impact of the CI effort on the organizational culture and climate of the College.

Purpose of This Study

The present study will be a qualitative study, specifically an observational and instrumental case study, which will provide additional information about the implementation and effects of a quality improvement effort at a comprehensive community college in Minnesota. The purpose of this study is to explore the last ten years of the quality effort at RCC with an emphasis on examining the impact of the quality initiative on the college organizational climate and culture. This study will examine the history of the AQIP effort at Riverland and the data that relate to organizational culture and climate measures, including personal interviews with non-administrative College employees regarding their perceptions of organizational climate. It will then explore whether identified changes can be linked to involvement in AQIP.

The primary instruments used to measure the change in organizational climate and culture will be the results of six Institutional Climate Surveys, administered every two years, beginning in 2002. Documentation of the AQIP effort at the College to be examined includes AQIP Surveys, the reports of Action Projects undertaken by the College, the two institutional AQIP Portfolio Appraisal Reports, and any additional sources that may be relevant.

A brief survey of the history of the MnSCU system is also provided, as well as a brief history and overview of Riverland Community College (RCC), the subject of the instrumental case study. The history and accreditation status of the three colleges/campus sites that were merged to form Riverland Community College will also be discussed, including an overview of the steps and strategies that RCC has employed in its effort to meet the requirements of AQIP.

The literature survey in the next chapter provides a brief synopsis of the literature on the history of the QI movement, its adoption and adaptation for use in higher education, and the role of accreditation in general and AQIP in particular in promoting QI. The next chapter also examines the impact of quality improvements on organizational culture and climate, as well as the types of research instruments and surveys that are typically used to measure or assess organizational or institutional climate.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Research questions include the following:

1. What are the impetus for, and the history and evolution of, CQI/TQM at RCC, and how are they related to current institutional process?
2. How is quality improvement incorporated into institutional life and processes?
3. Is there evidence or documentation of how involvement in CI impacted teaching and learning at RCC?
4. Has there been any measurable impact of AQIP on the 'quality measures or indicators' such as employee perceptions and organizational climate?
5. What expectations do the various constituency groups (faculty, staff, etc.) have of CQI (primarily known as AQIP)? How do they actively (or not) support it?
6. How effective is the CQI/AQIP effort as perceived by the various constituency groups? What are the perceptions of the constituency groups related to cost effectiveness?

DELIMITATIONS

This study is delimited to the participant sample (faculty and staff) at Riverland Community College only, and the results are not intended to extend to any unrepresented individuals or groups at RCC, nor any other colleges, universities, organizations, or populations.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study adds to the general knowledge about the implementation and effects of CQI and AQIP in higher education. It adds to the knowledge about CQI and AQIP in a newly-created comprehensive college and to the knowledge about the implementation and effects of CQI and AQIP in a merged, comprehensive college in Minnesota. In particular, it will contribute a qualitative case study regarding the implementation of a quality improvement effort, linked with re-accreditation through the Higher Learning Commission/North Central Association's AQIP process.

The literature regarding the impact and effect of a quality improvement effort on a community college using a case study consists largely of dissertations and journal articles that survey or measure the perceptions of employees in regard to organizational culture, or cost and cost effectiveness (Babione, 1995; Beard, 2005; Larson, 2004; Tatro, 2007; Trites, 1996). There are also other studies that survey the perceptions of administrators or the leadership of community colleges in regards to QI (Riccardi, 2009).

This study differs in approach by examining longitudinal data regarding the questions of employee climate surveys that can serve as quality indicators of institutional climate and producing a summary of the trends and findings in those indicators. Interviews were conducted to present a summary of the findings relevant to the data to a selected cross-section of the College faculty and staff in order to solicit responses and perceptions regarding the Climate Survey data and quality improvement efforts. Administrators have often been the focus of studies related to the effectiveness of QI efforts but this study is intended to give voice to the perceptions of faculty and staff in an institution engaged in the AQIP effort.

RESEARCHER'S PERSPECTIVE

In examining the role of the researcher in this study, the maxims of Robert Yin (2009) for case study researchers comes to mind:

A case study researcher should be able to ask good questions and interpret the answers, be a good listener and not be trapped by her own ideologies or preconceptions, be adaptive and flexible, have a firm grasp of the issue being studied (to reduce relevant events and information to manageable proportions) and be unbiased by preconceived notions, as well as sensitive and responsive to contradictory evidence. (p. 69)

I have been involved in direct instruction in colleges and universities for over 25 years, and am currently teaching in the community college, Riverland Community College, where I have been employed for 25 years. I served as Vice President of Academic Affairs for three years at Riverland before resigning from that position in Fall 2001 to return to teaching. Both my administrative and teaching experiences have sparked an interest in CQI and its application in the community college. I am certified as a CQIN Quality Examiner, assisted in the original application to have our college participate in AQIP, and have assisted in the development of parts of our institutional AQIP portfolio and updates over the last ten years. I currently am the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Coordinator as well as a full-time unlimited (continuing contract) instructor in Biology and Ethics at Riverland.

I have also served over 15 years in faculty leadership, as chair of the Faculty Development and Personnel Committee, Contract Representative, Vice President, and President of the Faculty Association. These roles and experiences, along with my interest in examining longitudinal data in QI, have generated an interest in assessing the overall meaning and impact of QI in a college environment and its relationship to transformative change. I believe that the various positions and roles I have held and the access I have had to a variety of points of view and responsibilities within the institution should serve the study well. However, it is also

important to note that there will be a greatly heightened awareness of the need to maintain rigor, especially in regards to any potential bias. Stake (2010) poses and answers the question of whether a person can study his or her own organization by stating: “It is quite appropriate for researchers to study their own places” (p. 163). However, Stake (2010) also cautions that more triangulation, review, and checking may be necessary for those who do, especially where evaluation and judgment are part of the conclusions generated by the researcher.

Stake (2010) goes on to discuss the problem of bias and how it can be inherent in any study, anytime, anywhere. He also points out that it may “mean formalizing the process of comparing measured performance with explicit standards,” and then continues to support a lack of explication or standardization where not appropriate (Stake, 2010, p. 166). Creswell notes that “the qualitative investigator admits the value-laden nature of the study and actively reports his or her values and biases, as the value nature of the information gathered from the field” (Creswell, 1994, p. 6).

In this study’s design, much of the data examined have already been generated and analyzed by outside agencies and independent research processes. However, the data have not been linked in any kind of longitudinal or holistic way or examined for evidence of the impact of the QI effort at the college. Hence, the role of the researcher in this dissertation is to holistically examine the possible relationship of those data to evaluate their relevance to the research questions and study at hand, and to determine if they can be linked to the College’s QI effort.

Potential biases which I can currently identify include the following: I am a product of my generation, class, race, and gender, and must strive to identify and eliminate bias in regard to those acculturated aspects of my work. I am studying an institution where I have been and currently am employed. The various roles I am or have been in (i.e., faculty, Vice President of

Academic Affairs, Contract Representative, Assessment Coordinator) may both give me insight and perspective, but also lead to additional, unidentified biases.

I am independently conducting this study and have been given total access to any data which I might determine to be useful, and have received permission to conduct interviews with any voluntarily consenting individuals associated with the College. Although I believe that I began with no preconceived ideas as to what the data or conclusions would contain, it is possible and even likely that other researchers might formulate different questions to answer and reach different conclusions than I would. I am limited by what I know, what I experience, and what I observe, and it is also likely that I will experience and observe differently than another researcher would.

Since I know many of the persons in a potential interview pool well, I will take care to arrange purposeful sampling to ensure that individuals who have the information needed to answer the questions are invited to be participants for interviews. Insofar as possible, I will not allow any personal relationship or impressions to influence my selection. It is important to note that because my selection could be biased in a way I have not identified, another way to reduce bias is to ensure that my list of questions for each will be the same and formulated to eliminate identifying responses and/or avoid types of answers that might be tailored to any relationship I might have with an interview participant.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Continuous quality improvement (CQI) has become a watchword in industry, health care, and higher education. It goes by many names such as Total Quality Management (TQM), Quality Improvement (QI), Continuous Improvement (CI), Six Sigma, and others, but the basic premise regardless of the name or acronym is imbedded in the idea of improving the quality of an organization, a process, or a product. Organizational culture and climate and organizational effectiveness are often a focus of a quality improvement effort, especially in higher education, regardless of the type of institution or organization that is engaged in the quality improvement effort.

In this chapter I discuss literature on the following topics related to this dissertation: (1) the historical genesis and evolution of the quality improvement movement; (2) the adoption and adaptation of CQI/TQM to the higher education environment; (3) the purpose and definition of accreditation in higher education and its relationship to quality improvement; (4) the evolution of the Baldrige Award Criteria for Education in the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) that is sponsored by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), a commission of the accrediting North Central Association of Colleges and Schools; (5) a comparison of PEAQ (Program to Evaluate and Assess Quality) to AQIP; and (6) the concepts of higher education organizational culture and measures of improvement/quality indicators in organizational effectiveness, climate and culture.

It should be noted that wherever relevant and possible, literature was chosen from studies which align with a focus on community colleges. The chosen sources will be derived from

books, journal articles, dissertations, and Internet sources. There is a wealth of literature on quality improvement in general, but I progressively narrow the focus to quality improvement in higher education. The focus then shifts to the AQIP accreditation process and its impact on organizational climate, culture, and outcomes in U.S. community colleges. The groundwork is then laid for the case study approach discussed in Chapter Three.

THE HISTORICAL GENESIS AND EVOLUTION OF THE CONTINUOUS QUALITY IMPROVEMENT MOVEMENT

History of the Continuous Quality Improvement Movement in Business and Industry

The quality movement has had many descriptors over its years of influence and the term CI is currently the most widely-used acronym. However, whether the terms used are classically or currently popular, e.g., CI, CQI, TQM, Six Sigma, Lean Six Sigma, Lean Management, Kaizan, or others, the focus and direction of change is similar. Dew and Nearing (2004) have provided one definition of CI that states, “The CI movement refers to a body of knowledge, developed both inside and outside of the academic arena over the past 75 years, that focuses on learning how a system functions and on improving the performance of the system” (p. 1). An example of an early application of this definition would be the building of the Egyptian pyramids utilizing standardized measurements. Each succeeding generation of pyramids shows a greater use of engineering and mathematical principles, improved materials and construction, and a more efficient use of labor (Haire, 1997).

The genesis of the CQI movement in modern American life has been attributed to Walter Shewhart, who was both a faculty member at the Stevens Institute of Technology and an engineer at Western Electric (Haire, 1997; Lee, 2002). Recognizing that the source of error in

product could be traced to variation from the standard, Shewhart's work in QI was aimed at producing fewer faulty products by "reducing the variation in manufactured items" (Dew & Nearing, 2004, p. 2). Shewhart invented a method of charting a statistical analysis of the variation that could be shared with management in order to identify and control variation as much as possible. He also created the Plan, Do, Check, Act (PDCA) model for implementing process. Shewhart advocated for a quality culture to promote the survival of the organization and was an early proponent of the customer as the judge of quality as well as the idea that faulty process was usually to blame for faulty product, rather than faulty workers (Lee, 2002; Schultz, 1994). Shewhart's CQI work dates back to 1931 and was critical in advancing the industrial-military progress prior to and once the U.S. entered into World War II (Seymour, 1992).

The CQI body of knowledge soon incorporated other statistical concepts, such as sampling and developing more sophisticated methods of statistical product control (SPC). It later expanded to include the work of such quality "giants" as W. Edwards Deming, Joseph M. Juran, and Philip B. Crosby, whose names arise repeatedly when examining the origins of early QI initiatives. Additionally, although not as often credited, Armand Feigenbaum also contributed significantly to the early CQI movement (Dale, et al., 2007).

Ironically, although CQI is sometimes credited as coming from Japan, it actually had an early debut in the United States, with Statistical Process Control (SPC) playing an important part in the factories and munitions plants in World War II. The country, recovering from the tight money supply of the Great Depression, invested in a massive effort to gear up production to help supply the growing European war, and then was required to fight the war on several fronts. Quality product was important from a financial standpoint, as well as the all-important work of saving the lives of our soldiers engaged in the war. As the engineers and workers trained in CQI

began to retire after the war, a lack of organizational succession planning meant that knowledge of the importance and use of CQI retired with them. CQI became less important, and after the war the emphasis shifted from quality to low-cost product.

Japanese leaders, however, recovering from the war and the great physical damage to their workforce and their country, sought Deming's expertise to maximize their financial investment. Deming implemented his work in Japan with major success and brought his work to widespread respect and acceptance in the United States. Haire (1997) notes "Deming's work was applied primarily in Japan until 1980 when a documentary featuring him was broadcast on network television in the United States: If Japan Can...Why Can't We?" (p. 3). Crawford-Mason (1980) described the documentary as the turning point for TQM in the United States, and American quality erosion began to reverse. The broadcast galvanized several of America's corporate giants including Ford Motor Company, American Express, IBM, Xerox, and Motorola (Crawford-Mason, 1980, p. 3). By 1987, the U.S. Congress had created the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, which has been awarded annually after extensive on-site evaluations (Chaffee & Sherr, 1992).

The work by the later quality giants of Deming, Juran, and others is based on the early foundation established by Walter Shewhart. Deming focused on a highly statistical approach (SPC) with the goal of reducing variation, and was focused on the contribution of workers and the importance of teams. He also emphasized the PDCA cycle, which he termed "Shewhart's cycle." Deming modified Shewhart's model to PDSA (Plan, Do, Study, Act) with customer satisfaction as the central focus of the cycle. Dobyns and Crawford-Mason (1980) note, "There are stories of remarkable change in industry, education, health care, the U.S. Navy (which

converted Total Quality Management to Total Quality Leadership), all after adopting Deming's philosophy" (p. 135).

Although even Deming himself has resisted characterizing his work as CQI, Deming's 14 Points (or Principles) of Management are widely used as foundational principles in CQI (Riccardi, 2009). The 14 Points as interpreted by Chambers (1998) are:

1. Create constancy of purpose toward improvement of product and services, with the aim to become competitive and to stay in business, and to provide jobs.
2. Adopt the new philosophy. We are in a new economic age. Western management must awaken to the challenge, must learn the responsibilities, and take on leadership for change.
3. Cease dependence on inspection to achieve quality. Eliminate the need for inspection on a mass basis by building quality into the product in the first place.
4. End the practice of awarding business on the basis of a price tag. Instead, minimize total cost. Move toward a single supplier for any one item, on a long-term relationship of loyalty and trust.
5. Improve constantly and forever the system of production and service, to improve quality and [productivity, and] thus constantly decrease costs.
6. Institute training on the job.
7. Institute leadership. The aim of supervision should be to help people and machines and gadgets to do a better job. Supervision of management is in need of overhaul, as well as supervision of production workers.
8. Drive out fear, so that everyone may work effectively for the company.
9. Break down barriers between departments. People in research, design, sales, and production must work as a team, to foresee problems of production and in use that may be encountered with the product or service.
10. Eliminate slogans, exhortations, and targets for the work force asking for zero defects and new levels of productivity. Such exhortations only create adversarial relationships, as the bulk of the causes of low quality and low productivity belong to the system and thus lie beyond the power of the work force.
- 11a. Eliminate work standards (quotas) on the factory floor. Substitute Leadership.
- 11b. Eliminate management by objective. Eliminate management by numbers, numerical goals. Substitute leadership.
- 12a. Remove barriers that rob the hourly worker of his right to pride of workmanship. The responsibility of supervisors must be changed from sheer numbers to quality.
- 12b. Remove barriers that rob people in management and in engineering of their right to pride of workmanship. This means, *inter alia*, abolishment of the annual or merit rating and of management by objective.
13. Institute a vigorous program of education and self-improvement.

14. Put everybody in the company to work to accomplish the transformation. “The transformation is everybody’s job”. (Chambers, 1998, p. 9).

These 14 Points have been widely adopted and practiced as the CQI/TQM efforts, practices, and processes spread globally through business and industry, the military, health care, and education. As pointed out by Dobyns and Crawford-Mason (1980):

The 14 Points represent a way to use Profound Knowledge, the four parts of which – systems, variation, knowledge, and psychology – are the framework of the Deming philosophy. The 14 Points are designed to let you apply that philosophy in specific situations. (p. 147)

Deming also identified the “seven deadly diseases” related to poor quality:

Lack of consistency of purpose; emphasis on short-term profits; evaluation of performance, merit-rating, or annual review; mobility of management; running a company on visible figures alone; excessive medical costs; and excessive cost of liability. Deming used the analysis of these diseases to criticize Western management and organizational practices. (Dale, van der Wiele, & van Iwaarden, 2007, p. 61)

Joseph Juran (1995) followed a similar path as Deming’s. Although Juran focused more on quality management within the organization, whereas Deming focused more on workers and statistical process control, the two worked independently on different aspects of quality improvement. Juran considered his book *Managerial Breakthrough* (1964) to be one of his most influential works. Juran graduated with an engineering degree from the University of Minnesota, and like Shewhart, had formative work experience at Western Electric and was placed in its Hawthorne Works division during its fertile time of cooperation with Bell Labs (Lee, 2002).

Although he started out as a Complaint Manager, Juran was trained with the other Hawthorne Works employees in statistical sampling and control and was placed into the Statistical Inspection Department which launched his career in examining processes for quality planning, quality control, and quality improvement. Juran referred to these three processes as the Quality Trinity (Haire, 1997). He also was influential in helping improve manufacturing

processes during World War II and resigned from Western Electric and his government post at the end of the war to become a consultant. Before long, his work came to the attention of the Japanese Union of Scientists and Engineers (JUSE) through the first edition of his book, *Quality Control Handbook* (Juran, 1951). He was invited to Japan in 1952 and visited for the first time in 1954 (Dale et al., 2007).

While Deming created the 14 Points, Juran created the Ten Steps of the Quality Improvement Process. According to Landesberg (1999), these ask managers to:

1. Build awareness of the need and opportunity for improvement.
2. Set goals for improvement.
3. Organize to reach the goals.
4. Provide training throughout the organization.
5. Carry out projects to solve problems.
6. Report progress.
7. Give recognition.
8. Communicate results.
9. Keep score.
10. Maintain momentum by making annual improvement part of the regular systems and processes of the company. (p. 60)

In one of his most recently-published books (an update to *Managerial Quality*) before his death, Juran also noted the signs of “unquality” in an organization which may evolve into a vicious cycle: process time increases, number of inspections increases, experienced workers leave, numbers of meetings increases, blaming flourishes, customer complaints increase, micromanagement ensues, quality decreases which leads back to process time increases, etc. (Juran, 1995). Juran, ever-teachable regarding quality improvement, was introduced to the Japanese-developed Quality Circles and served as an ambassador for bringing Quality Circles to the West, as well as matching Japanese and Western companies that had common interests. He also served as a pro-bono consultant for the former Soviet bloc countries of Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Russia, Poland, and Yugoslavia as they struggled to develop their industrial

bases after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. He is widely regarded as the most influential and prolific writer of quality manuals.

Progressing from the historical perspective on quality improvement in business to its application to higher education, the ideas of Juran (1995) remain relevant as he addressed the idea of quality improvement in non-manufacturing and service industries, particularly sales.

Juran notes:

The key issues facing managers in sales are no different than those faced by managers in other disciplines. Sales managers say they face problems such as “It takes us too long ... we need to reduce the error rate.” They want to know, “How do customers perceive us?” These issues are no different than those facing managers trying to improve in other fields. The systematic approaches to improvement are identical.... There should be no reason our familiar principles of quality and process engineering would not work in the sales process. (p. 57)

Juran is credited with emphasizing the problems with human relations in organizations and the impact of not paying attention to that in terms of quality results (Juran, 1995). He also coined the term “cultural resistance” which refers to the resistance to change within an organization that he viewed as the key problem in quality issues, and for which he credits Margaret Mead’s book *Cultural Patterns and Technical Change* (Juran, 1964). Juran’s thinking and works are echoed throughout the iterations of quality improvement which have evolved since he began his work.

Philip Crosby, while not having theory development credited to him, is placed with Deming and Juran in terms of the delivery of an early message in the United States regarding quality and in terms of helping to advance the mission of quality improvement. He is sometimes referred to as “the fun uncle” of quality improvement (Skymark, 2011). He coined the extensively-used DIRFT mantra (Do It Right the First Time) and had a 14-step program similar to Deming’s. He is best known for writing about quality in an accessible and readable way in his

books *Quality Without Tears* (1984) and *Quality is Free* (1979). Crosby is also recognized for his emphasis on Zero Defects, which is mirrored by Six Sigma more recently, and the Four

Absolutes of Quality Management:

1. Quality is defined as conformance to requirements, not as 'goodness' or 'elegance'.
2. The system for causing quality is prevention, not appraisal.
3. The performance standard must be Zero Defects, not "that's close enough".
4. The measurement of quality is the Price of Nonconformance, not indices. (SkyMark, 2010)

Crosby was adamant that Zero Defects begins with management, and management attitudes and willingness to change and involve workers in improving quality. (SkyMark, 2011). He is also credited with the premise that quality is cheap (or free), compared to error, waste, and mistakes, which become very costly in many ways (Crosby, 1967). Crosby stressed that quality is not goodness per se, but is conformance to requirements. He stressed that the price of conformance (POC), or doing things right, should always be less than the price of nonconformance (PONC) or doing things wrong. Much of Crosby's writing was directed to managers, and he also developed "Crosby's 14-Step Quality Improvement Program" outlined in Dale, et al. (2007):

1. Management commitment
2. Quality improvement team
3. Quality measurement
4. Cost of quality evaluation
5. Quality awareness
6. Corrective action
7. Establish an ad hoc committee for the zero defects programme
8. Establish Supervisor training
9. Zero defects day
10. Goal-setting
11. Error cause removal
12. Recognition
13. Quality councils
14. Do it over again (p. 59)

Although not as widely known as Deming, Juran, and Crosby, Armand Feigenbaum coined the term “total quality control” and defined it as:

An effective system for integrating the quality development, quality maintenance, and quality improvement efforts of the various groups in an organization so as to enable marketing, engineering, production, and service at the most economical levels which allow for full customer satisfaction. (Dale, et al., 2007, p. 62)

Feigenbaum is often mentioned in the same context as Shewhart, Deming, Juran, and Crosby. His focus was to assist a company or business to design its own system of quality control, as opposed to imposing a formulaic method of improving quality.

A discussion of the history of the CI movement is not complete without paying tribute to the contributions and enhancement provided by the Japanese quality gurus. The next wave of quality improvement thinking and models developed in Japan after Deming and Juran introduced their thinking and methods there. In turn, there have been several Japanese quality leaders who have influenced both Japanese and Western quality movements. The best-known Japanese contributors are Masaaki Imai, Kaoru Ishikawa, Shigeo Shingo, and Genichi Taguchi (Dale, et al., 2007).

Masaaki Imai is “the person credited with bringing together the various management philosophies, theories, techniques, and tools which have assisted Japanese companies over the last four or so decades to improve their efficiency” (Dale, et al., 2007, p. 66). This integration of CI is known as Kaizen. Kaizen is associated with a focused and intense project, and in some cases employees are reassigned from their primary jobs to project completion. Kaizen involves the components of DMAIC (Define, Measure, Analyze, Improve, Control). “Kaizen is a method for accelerating the pace of process improvement in any setting. It evolved in the application of Lean Six Sigma in manufacturing settings, but has since been adapted to the broader DMAIC” (George, et. al., 2005, p. 20). According to Dale, et al. (2007):

Kaizen is the process of incremental, systematic, gradual, orderly, and continuous improvement that uses the best of all techniques, tools, systems, and concepts (e.g., quality circles and the PDCA cycle). From this, it is clear that Kaizen is generic in its application. (p. 66)

Imai emphasizes the importance of a gradual, long-term, systematic approach to CI. One of the key ideas of this long-term approach is the *gemba*, which is true change in the people of the organization, especially in how they view the organization and their role in it. *Gemba* also encompasses the idea that the place in the organization where change takes place is the place to be, and that change is continual and is to be embraced when it results in improvement.

These concepts of Kaizen have parallels to organizational culture and climate which are explored later in this chapter. The goals of Kaizen are a continuous focus on improvement, total involvement by everyone in the company, a goal of delighting the customer, and a framework of considering everything from a total systems perspective (Dale, et al., 2007). It also emphasizes: adaptability of people and equipment, use of existing technology to optimize capacity, creative involvement of all employees, and a “make it a little better each day” attitude (Dale, et al., 2007, p. 67).

Kaoru Ishikawa has also made major contributions to both Eastern and Western quality improvement efforts. He is noted for “the simplification and widespread use of the seven basic quality tools, the company-wide quality movement, and quality circles” (Dale, et al., 2007, p. 67). A thread woven through all of Ishikawa’s work was the idea that “people at all levels of the organization should use simple methods and work together to solve problems, thereby removing barriers to improvement, cooperation and education and developing a culture which is conducive to continuous improvement” (Dale, et al., 2007, p. 67). He also developed the widely-used “fishbone diagram” to show cause and effect for problems and quality issues (George, et al., 2005). Ishikawa was instrumental in developing and promoting quality circles worldwide. In

fact, he is known in Japan as the father of quality circles and has said that quality circles can “solve 30-35 % of an organization’s problem” (Dale, et al., 2007, p. 68).

Shigeo Shingo was proud to be called “Dr. Improvement” and is widely known for contributing to quality improvement in manufacturing processes (Dale, et al., p. 70). He was instrumental in developing the “poka-yoke” defect prevention system, and is most famous for assisting in the development of the Toyota Production System and his writings which present all of these accomplishments (Dale, et al., 2007).

Genichi Taguchi is recognized for his work in electronics and the Japanese telephone system. He promoted the concept of designing in quality as a way of minimizing loss, and related the principle of variance to low quality that results in economic losses as well as other losses, including customer dissatisfaction and loss of reputation. According to Dale, et al. (2007), “The attention given to what are commonly termed ‘Taguchi methods’ has been largely responsible for organizations examining the usefulness of experimental design in making improvements” (p. 70-71).

The Japanese quality movement has been instrumental in affecting the quality improvement movement both in Japan and other countries. This movement is often referred to in the West as Japanese-style TQM, and is known in Japan as Total Quality Control (TQC), or more popularly, Company-Wide Quality Control (CWQC). TQM is defined by the Deming Prize Committee (2012) as “a set of systematic activities carried out by the entire organization to effectively and efficiently achieve company objectives and provide products and services within a level of quality that satisfies customers, at the appropriate time and place” (Deming Prize Committee, 2012). The emphasis is on teamwork throughout the organization (i.e., quality

circles), and quality is every employee's job. Progress is defined as continuous improvement with the goal of perfection and delighting the customer.

While Shewhart, Deming, Juran, Crosby, and Feigenbaum laid the foundation for quality improvement in manufacturing and business in Japan and the United States, the CQI movement (later widely associated with TQM) itself changed and improved over time in the United States as well. Currently-popular adaptations of TQM are rooted in the work of these quality giants, as well as the contributions of the Japanese gurus. These include benchmarking, Quality Circles, Six Sigma, Balanced Scorecard, Lean Management, as well as quality improvement movements adapted for the military (such as the Army Improvement Performance Criteria, and the Navy Total Quality Leadership System), education (such as the Academic Quality Improvement Project), and health care, among others. Another development was the creation of quality improvement awards, such as the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award, which are intended to give an incentive for improvement and provide a process and criteria for measuring and defining that progress. I briefly discuss the highlights of each of these as they are pertinent to the discussion regarding continuous improvement in higher education in the next section.

Total Quality Management

Total Quality Management is now considered an essential, not an add-on, for doing business in the manufacturing sector, as well as other areas of business and industry. As noted by Feigenbaum and Feigenbaum (1999):

Total Quality is a major factor in the business quality revolution that has proven itself to be one of the 20th century's most powerful creators of sale and revenue, growth, genuinely good new jobs, and soundly based and sustainable business expansion. (as cited in Dale, et al., 2007, p. 90)

Much of the TQM literature is highly technical in nature and specific to reducing variances in manufacturing processes and products as a means of quality assurance. However, there are many aspects of TQM that can be applied to almost any type of business or workplace, and I focus on those aspects of TQM on in this chapter. Understanding TQM is essential to understanding CQI in higher education, so an explanation of what TQM really is and does within the organization will be explored in detail.

Implementing Total Quality Management in the organization.

For organizations wishing to organize for TQM, there are 13 key actions to take, according to Dale, et al. (2007):

1. Formulate a clear, long-term strategy for TQM and integrate it into the key strategies, policies, and objectives for the organization.
2. A common organizational definition for TQM, quality, and other terms used as part of the CQI effort should be developed in discussion, agreed upon, and communicated.
3. The approach to TQM should be decided.
4. Organizations and people (internal and external) who can be resources for a CQI approach should be identified.
5. Stages of the CQI process should be identified at the beginning, and be tailored to the starting point, motivation for CQI, and available tools and techniques.
6. The visible, real commitment and support of executives leading the effort should be available and is crucial throughout the process.
7. Vision and mission statements should be developed, publicized, and communicated in “company-unique” language.
8. Ensure that everyone in an organization can identify with an organizations’ vision and mission statements, and can explain their relevance to their role and work in the organization.
9. Communication is vital to the implementation of TQM and must place a primary emphasis on communication strategies and issues relating to TQM and the improvements made.
10. The organization and management must participate in formal training and education in CQI.
11. Develop a training matrix for CQI.
12. Establish organization infrastructure facilitating local ownership of CQI.
13. The organization must commit, to, establish, and operate teamwork as a framework for CQI and achieving organizational goals. (p. 91-94)

Tools and techniques.

Whichever TQM system is selected, organizations then choose from an array of tools and techniques to assist with implementing an approach of continuous improvement. According to Dale, et al. (2007):

A planned approach for the application of tools and techniques is necessary. The temptation to single out one tool or technique for special attention should be resisted, and to get maximum benefit from the use of tools and techniques they should be used in combination. It should be recognized that tools and techniques play different roles, and management and staff should be fully aware of the main purpose and use of the tools and techniques they are considering applying in the organization; if this is not the case they could be well disappointed if a tool or technique fails to live up to the expectations. It is also important to understand the limitations of how and when tools and techniques can best be used. (p. 379)

Implementing Total Quality Management systems.

After identifying the appropriate tools and techniques for each stage of the CQI effort, appropriate training for the appropriate people should begin. Training should include the tools, techniques, and systems approaches as well as where and how to apply them. A formal CQI system should be considered for adoption. Other systems or standard which are required by law, appropriate for the organization, or are needed to be effective should be identified and implemented. The ongoing improvement effort should always include an analysis of process improvement and identifying the next steps in the cycle of improvement (Dale, et al., 2007).

Changing the culture in Total Quality Management.

1. An assessment, from both management and employee perspectives, of the current status of the organizational culture should be undertaken before firm plans for change are developed.
2. Culture change must be recognized as ongoing, rather than as a prerequisite to the introduction of TQM.
3. Change should be planned and take place in a consistent and incremental manner.
4. The role of people within the organization should be recognized.

5. Teamwork is an important facilitator in change culture, but organizations must ensure that the organizational infrastructure can adapt to the changes which teamwork will bring.
6. The interrelationship of all activities in the organization, and the way in which they contribute to the overall quality of service and product provided, should be identified, so that conflict is minimized and TQM becomes part of the way in which the business is run.
7. Factors which indicate that TQM has started to change culture should be identified.
8. In planning for change thought needs to be given to the culture of a country and its people. (p. 101-105)

Sustaining Total Quality Management.

According to Dale, et al. (2007), there are five categories of analysis needed in sustaining the institutional effort for TQM:

1. Category One: Internal and External Environment – the focus is on analysis of these environments by using the SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) analysis. Opportunities and threats are viewed as external variables. According to Wheelan and Hunger (1988), “The *external environment* consists of variables (opportunities and threats) that exist outside the organization and are not typically within the short-term control of top management” (as cited in Dale, et al., 2007, p. 131). Strengths and weaknesses are part of the internal environment. The *internal environment* of a corporation consists of variables (strengths and weaknesses) within the organization itself that are also not usually within the short-term control of top management.
 - a. External environment: defined as competitors and employer resourcing, development, and retention
 - b. Internal environment: defined as customer focus, investment, the “fear factor,” industrial relationships, and management-worker relationships
2. Category Two: Management Style
3. Category Three: Policies – the focus is on those inconsistent with TQM.
 - a. Human Resources Management (HRM) policies
 - b. Financial policies
 - c. Maintenance policies
 - d. Manufacturing policies
4. Category Four: Organizational Structure – the focus is on how the quality improvement structure is positioned within the organization.
 - a. Communications strategies enhancing the effort
 - b. Departmental and functional boundaries within the organization
 - c. Job flexibility and coverage
 - d. Supervisory structure
5. Category Five: Process of Change
 - a. Improvement infrastructure
 - b. Education and training

- c. Teams and teamwork
- d. Procedures
- e. Quality management systems
- f. Quality management tools and techniques
- g. Confidence in management (p. 131)

As TQM evolved and changed over the years, it spawned other quality management systems that shared history and common ground with TQM but were adapted to other environments or featured innovations on TQM. A brief discussion of these innovations is included in order to better understand the changes in the quality movement that influenced the development of CI in higher education. It should be noted that Kaizen and quality circles were discussed previously in conjunction with information on the Japanese Total Quality effort.

According to Dale, et al. (2007), there are five modern improvement approaches that dominate the CI movement in business and industry currently: (a) TQM, (b) Total Productive Maintenance (TPM), (c) Business Process Re-engineering (BPR), (d) Six Sigma, and (e) Lean Management (p. 559). Lean Six Sigma (LSS), a combination of Six Sigma and Lean Management, is also currently popular. For the purposes of this dissertation, TQM, Six Sigma, Lean Management, and LSS are the management approaches most relevant to the adaptations in higher education. TQM has been discussed at length, and a brief discussion of Six Sigma, Lean Management, and LSS follows.

Six Sigma

Motorola is credited with the development of Six Sigma, although the concepts that underlie Six Sigma originate in TQM and can be traced as far back as Deming's work (Riccardi, 2010, p. 36). Although Six Sigma represents a return to statistical process control and quality improvement in manufacturing (a sigma represents a standard deviance variation from a set

standard related to “opportunities for defects” in manufacturing), this CI method also encompasses customer orientation and focus, education and training, management systems, and teamwork. It takes the involvement of all employees to increase quality and decrease defects.

Six Sigma is generally associated with a more mature quality effort in an organization and should not be emphasized to the exclusion of more long-term, comprehensive quality efforts. The impact of Six Sigma from the previous standard of three sigma is quite significant: it means that the Defects Per Million Opportunities (DPMO) rate decreases from 66,807 to 3.4 (Dale, et al., 2007). As van der Wiele, et al. (2007) note, “Six Sigma makes use of quality engineering methods within a defined problem-solving structure to identify and eliminate process defects and solve problems and in this improve yield, productivity, operating effectiveness, customer satisfaction, etc.” (p. 467).

Another interesting aspect of Six Sigma is that companies such as Allied Signal and General Electric have used their involvement in Six Sigma, with its track record of success in many major corporations, to convince financial analysts to raise the stock price based on the increased profitability/decreased loss due to quality improvement (Dale, et al, 2007 p. 470).

Although there are different approaches to Six Sigma, common or core elements of Six Sigma include:

1. Focus on the customer
2. Data - and fact-driven management
3. Specific training
4. Structured problem-solving approach
5. Quality engineering
6. A focus on process, control, and improvements
7. Pro-active management
8. Teamwork collaboration without hierarchical boundaries
9. Drive for perfection
10. Cost savings for each project
11. Short-term improvement projects (van der Wiele, et al., p.473 - 474)

In examining the list above, it appears that while higher education does not produce “widgets” or have a Six Sigma standard for such due to its nature, the systems focus of Six Sigma could be incorporated into a CI approach. Specifically, the focus on the customer, making data-driven decisions, emphasizing quality control and improvement in processes, having a structured problem-solving approach, emphasis on teamwork, a pro-active management team, developing short-term improvement projects, and incorporating cost savings can all be considered relevant to the TQM or CQI efforts in higher education today. All of these, it should be noted as well, echo the historical roots and emphases of the TQM approach.

Lean Manufacturing

The Lean Enterprise Institute describes a five-step thought process for guiding the implementation of lean manufacturing techniques (see Figure 2.1) as follows:

1. Specify value from the standpoint of the end customer by product family.
2. Identify all the steps in the value stream for each product family, eliminating whenever possible those steps that do not create value.
3. Make the value-creating steps occur in tight sequence so the product will flow smoothly toward the customer.
4. As flow is introduced, let customers pull value from the next upstream activity. As value is specified, value streams are identified, wasted steps are removed, and flow and pull are introduced, begin the process again and continue it until a state of perfection is reached in which perfect value is created with no waste.
5. Seek perfection! (Lean Enterprise Institute, 2009)



Figure 2.1. Flow chart demonstrating the five-step process for guiding the implementation of Lean Manufacturing techniques. Reprinted from “Principles of Lean” by Lean Enterprise Institute, 2009, <http://www.lean.org/whatslean/principles.cfm>. Copyright 2009 by Lean Enterprise Institute, Inc.

Lean Six Sigma

Some Six Sigma practitioners have in recent years combined Six Sigma ideas with Lean Manufacturing to invent a new methodology. This new methodology is called Lean Six Sigma (LSS) (Six Sigma Tutorial, 2010). A currently popular version of Lean Six Sigma is referred to as the TOC (Theory of Constraints) LSS, where the emphasis is more on identifying a problem statement and the organization's bottleneck than following a two-step process of identifying and exploiting the constraint.

At that point, the following four LM steps would be employed (see diagram above): (a) identifying the value, (b) map the value stream, (c) create flow without interruptions, and (d) have the customer establish the pull from the producer. All of the "lean" CI theories emphasize reducing waste and loss in the process in order to delight the customer (Kaizen), seek perfection (Lean Manufacturing), and maximize profit for the company and its shareholders. Lean Six Sigma principles are then modified to fit the particular business or organization.

Practitioners and experts are now looking at all these management approaches as having common ground historically and theoretically. Dale, et al. (2007) have suggested an Interconnection Pyramid approach to any CI system that considers concepts as giving rise to approaches that spawn systems that are implemented by tools and techniques. Tools and techniques are the route through which the CI system is expressed and measured.

A single tool can be defined as a device that has a clear role and a defined application, has a narrow focus, and can be used in a stand-alone way.

Examples of tools are:

- Cause-and-Effect Diagram
- Pareto Analysis
- Relationship Diagram
- Control Chart

- Histogram
- Flowchart (p. 561)

A technique can be thought of as a collection of tools, or a wider application or use for a tool. For example, Dale, et al. (2007) states:

Statistical Process Control employs a variety of tools such as graphs, charts, histograms, and capability studies, as well as other statistical methods, all of which are necessary for the effective use of the technique. The use of a technique may lead to the need for a tool to be identified. (p. 562)

Examples of techniques in Dale, et al. (2007) are:

- Statistical Process Control
- Benchmarking
- Quality Function Deployment
- Failure Mode and Effects Analysis
- Design of Experiments
- Self-assessment (p. 562)

This idea of the Interconnection Pyramid is a useful way of considering CI approaches adapted to areas such as the military, health care, and higher education. Another common linkage that should be considered in this context is benchmarking, and the creation of and quest for quality awards as the criteria for these awards have resulted in related CI approaches.

Benchmarking

Although many organizations that are not involved in a systematic continuous improvement effort may say they are benchmarking, benchmarking in the quality improvement context has a different meaning. The traditional way of benchmarking is to compare how you are doing with similar or comparable organizations in terms of product or accomplishments. Embarking on a benchmarking process may be stimulated by work for a quality award, an institutional self-assessment, strategic planning, or a variety of other triggers.

In continuous improvement, particularly in higher education, benchmarking emphasizes process (or services) rather than product. The focus is on improving the process as much as possible (Dale, et al., 2007). Benchmarking became a formal CI process in the late 1980s, when the Xerox Corporation became aware that their Japanese competitors were selling comparable machines at the price of production for Xerox. In exploring how that was possible, the CI strategy of benchmarking was developed when their Japanese counterparts suggested that Xerox examine the Japanese process (Camp, 1989). Dale, et al. (2007) discusses how Camp documented that strategy and three types of CI benchmarking for business and industry:

1. Internal benchmarking - between parts of a business or companies within a larger corporate structure.
2. Competitive benchmarking – comparison of process, products or services with direct competitors.
3. Functional/generic benchmarking – comparison of processes with the ‘best in class’ in a comparable organization, such as Rank Xerox evaluated its process against the Japanese process. “Functional benchmarking relates to the functional similarities of organizations, while generic benchmarking looks at the broader similarity of businesses, usually in disparate operations.” (p. 481)

Dew and Nearing (2004) have adapted the benchmarking strategies of Camp (1989) to higher education as follows:

1. Internal benchmarking utilizes a comparative study of data or processes within an institution such as comparing process and performance of student service centers among several campuses of the same institution.
2. Competitive benchmarking promotes the comparison of information about processes between institutions such as the University of Delaware’s (Udel) comparative study of academic programs.
3. Functional benchmarking compares process and subsequent performance in different or diverse contexts or settings such as the food service in a university to a food court in a mall.
4. Best in Class benchmarking identifies an institution with exceptional performance in a particular process or service, a study of their methods, and adopting and adapting as much of their process as possible. (p. 101)

Dew and Nearing (2004) have identified six steps for engaging in a systematic benchmarking project: determining what to benchmark, organizing a benchmarking team,

determining whom to benchmark, collecting and analyzing the data from other organizations, implementing improvements, and recalibrating the institution.

Continuous Improvement in military organizations.

The Army Performance Improvement System (APIC) was instituted in 2006. According to Riccardi (2009) this is primarily based on the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Program (MBQNA) criteria. The Army invested heavily in this program. This Army initiative was followed by a U. S. Department of Defense (DoD) (2008) directive on May 15, 2008 that ordered all DoD units to institute the DoD-Wide Continuous Process Improvement (CPI)/Lean Six Sigma (LSS) Program. The directive (2008) states:

This Directive applies to OSD, the Military Departments, the Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff, the Combatant Commands, the Office of the Inspector General of the Department of Defense, the Defense Agencies, the DoD Field Activities, and all other organizational entities in the Department of Defense (hereafter referred to collectively as the “DoD Components”). (p. 1)

It establishes the directive for the following as DoD policy:

- a. The objective of the DoD CPI/LSS program is to strengthen joint operational Combatant Command and Military Department capabilities including making improvements in:
 1. Productivity.
 2. Performance against mission (availability, reliability, cycle time, investment, and operating costs).
 3. Safety.
 4. Flexibility to meet DoD mission needs.
 5. Energy efficiency.
- b. CPI/LSS concepts and tools should be applied to benefit the full range of DoD organizations. These include combat, industrial, service, and office environments of headquarters, field, and operational organizations. The DoD Components should participate in defining, implementing, and sustaining CPI/LSS efforts. Each DoD Component should use CPI/LSS concepts and tools to improve the full range of processes and activities that comprise their operations, including decision-making processes and appropriate engagement with industrial base suppliers.

- c. CPI/LSS programs shall be used to help meet organizational objectives. CPI/LSS methods, terminology, training plans, and other program elements may be adapted as required. Given diverse operational requirements, the DoD Components shall have full flexibility to identify CPI/LSS focus areas and training plans and may adapt other CPI/LSS program elements for their use.
- d. Resource benefits resulting from CPI/LSS improvements in overall operating effectiveness may be retained by the DoD Components that generate them (Deputy Secretary of Defense Memorandum (Reference c.). Effective management oversight should lead to reinvestment in additional CPI/LSS efforts, recapitalization, and further strengthening of operational capability. (DoD, 2008)

This clearly demonstrates the commitment of the Department of Defense to incorporating the principles of Lean Six Sigma to its entire operation.

Continuous Improvement and the Quest for Quality Awards

The inception and history of quality awards.

Interest in quality awards has soared since the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) was developed as part of the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Program. The program and its associated award were established by the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Improvement Act of 1987 (S. Res. 100, 1987). Malcolm Baldrige was the U.S. Secretary of Commerce during Ronald Reagan's presidency and died in 1987. This award is bestowed by the current President of the United States on an annual basis. Up to 18 Awards may be given annually, but the average range since the first award was bestowed in 1988 is two to five a year. The combination of a national award that is administered by a public-private partnership and bestowed by the President, along with the national recognition that follows, has made it a prestigious and coveted award. The award is based on the organization's demonstration of its application of the Criteria for Performance Excellence.

Currently, there are three sets of Criteria for Performance Excellence: those designed for use by business, education, and health care. There are currently six types of workplaces which are eligible to apply for the MBNQA: manufacturing, service, small business, the non-profit sector, educational systems or institutions (either K-12 or higher education), and health care systems or institutions. The MBNQA also has some relationship to an earlier award established by the Japanese government called the Deming Application Prize. It has produced many local, regional, and international “spin-offs,” including the now-prestigious European Quality Award (EQA) which is managed by the European Foundation for Quality Management.

According to the government-sponsored MBNQA website:

Baldrige applicants know that the journey is not about receiving a Presidential Award, although that’s a nice goal. It’s about getting expert feedback on where they are and where they need to be. It’s about having the tools to examine all parts of their management model and improve processes while keeping the whole organization in mind. The Baldrige journey is about learning how to achieve effectiveness, sustainability, innovation, world-class results, integrated processes, organizational learning, and acquiring a national network to support and sustain your organization. (NIST, 2010).

Dale, et al. (2007) have noted that studies have shown winning an MBNQA has garnered large returns for companies in terms of stock prices, customer interest and satisfaction, and even employee satisfaction. These studies of gains for business companies and organizations earning the MBNQA have, in turn, led to a proliferation of state and local awards, and have also sparked some of the interest in CI that has resulted in adapting and applying the Criteria for Performance Excellence to education and health care.

The Baldrige Award provides a management approach to the following areas: leadership; strategic planning; customer focus; measurement, analysis, and knowledge management; workforce focus; process management; and results. As Dobyms and Crawford-Mason (1994) note, “... the Deming method produces quality, and ... quality produces the Baldrige Award” (p.

23). The Baldrige website also prominently features the slogan “Excellence is a journey, not a destination” (NIST, 2010).

The range of MBNQA winners through 2009 includes large Fortune 500 companies (e.g., Boeing Aerospace Support, The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Caterpillar Financial, and Motorola CGISS); small businesses (e.g., Pro-Tec Coating Company, MESA Products, Inc., and Branch-Smith); large hospitals and hospital systems (e.g., Poudre Valley Health System and SSM Health Care) and single hospitals like Bronson Methodist Hospital; large and small schools/school systems and colleges (e.g., the University of Wisconsin – Stout (UWS), Iredell-Statesville Schools, Chugach School District, Richland College, and Pearl River School District); and nonprofits and government entities (e.g., the City of Coral Springs and U.S. Army ARDEC).

Because winning an MBNQA includes the expectation to share your process and results, other organizations can access these award-winning applications and Criteria for modeling. It is estimated that over 30,000 organizations have accessed the website and criteria, and so many organizations may use the Criteria for self-assessment and/or CI efforts but do not formally apply for the award. Many organizations have structured their CI efforts around the MBNQA Criteria. (NIST, 2010).

Just as the MBNQA has counterparts in business and industry, such as the EQA in Europe and the Deming Application Prize in Japan, there are also “spin-off” award programs in higher education. The most applicable of these for community and technical colleges is the PACESETTER Award administered by the Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQIN) for community and technical colleges. The Trailblazer Guide was developed as an adjunct to the PACESETTER Award to give colleges a shorter self-assessment process with rapid feedback.

These were established in the late 1990s and are modeled on MBNQA but are more specifically tailored to two-year colleges (Dew & Nearing, 2004). The MBNQA has figured very prominently in the CI movement in education, so a discussion of how it is structured is pertinent here.

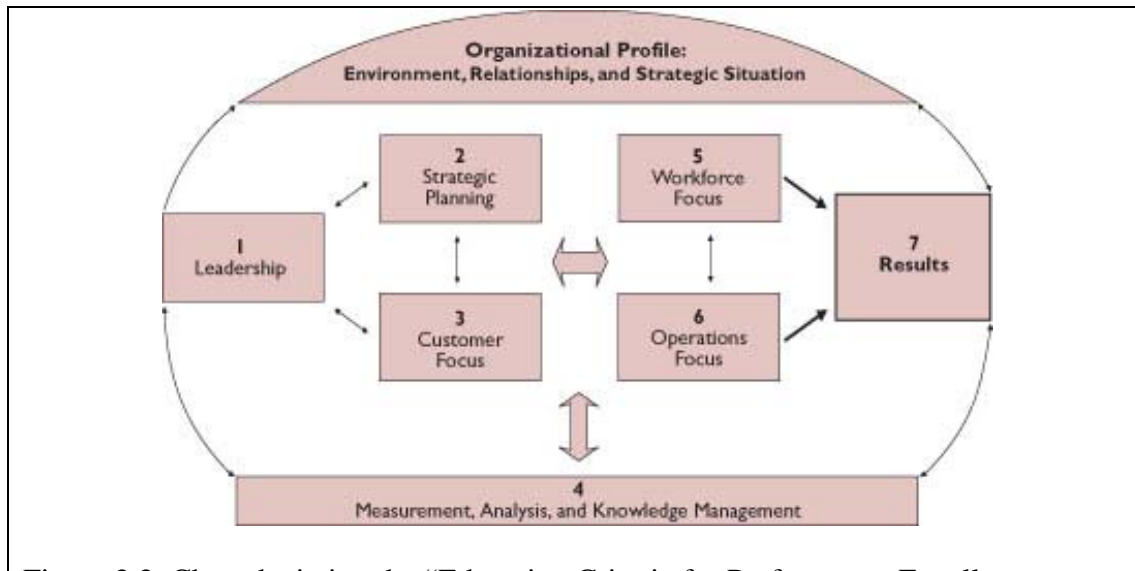


Figure 2.2. Chart depicting the “Education Criteria for Performance Excellence Framework” which “reflect validated, leading-edge management practices against which an organization can measure itself” (National Institute of Standards and Technology, 2009). Reprinted from “Education Criteria for Performance Excellence” by the NIST, 2009, http://www.nist.gov/baldrige/publications/education_criteria.cfm. Copyright 2009 by the NIST.

Baldrige education criteria for performance excellence.

As the National Institute of Standards and Technology (2010) states, and as figure 2.1 indicates, the MBNQA Criteria for Performance Excellence in education is structured to “... help education organizations achieve and sustain the highest national levels of student learning outcomes, customer satisfaction and engagement, product and service outcomes, process efficiency, workforce satisfaction and engagement, budgetary, financial, and market results, and social responsibility. (NIST, 2010)

The application for the Award includes information on the organization's profile, system operation, and system foundation, and includes these requirements of the Education Criteria for Performance Excellence that are embodied in seven Categories, updated bi-annually, and includes, as follows:

1. Leadership
2. Strategic Planning
3. Customer Focus
4. Measurement, Analysis, and Knowledge Management
5. Workforce Focus
6. Process Management
7. Results

Of the 84 Baldrige Awards given since the inception of the program, seven were awarded to educational organizations, and three to an Institution of Higher Education (IHE), and all in education were awarded between 2001-2008. These Awards were given to, in temporal order: the UWS, the Pearl River School District in New York City, NY, the Chugach School River District in Anchorage, AK, the Community Consolidated School District 15 in Palantine, IL, the Kenneth W. Monfort School of Business in Greeley, CO, Jenks Public Schools Oklahoma, Richland College in Dallas, TX, and Iredell-Statesville Schools in South Carolina (NIST, 2010).

Common ground: Role of self-assessment.

Organizational self-assessment is a process that typically uses one of the award models discussed in the previous section (MBNQA, EQA, etc.). Although each award model varies in its approach to self-assessment, the underlying premise is similar: the organization or institution uses cross-functional teams drawn from all levels to perform a SWOT-type analysis (Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) that serves as the basis for identifying improvement targets and foci. In this way, the self-assessment provides an underpinning for the entire

continuous improvement effort. After the decision is made to seek a quality award or begin a quality improvement program, the self-assessment often initiates the process. As Dale, et al.

(2007) point out:

Self-assessment is a comprehensive, systematic and regular review of an organization's activities and results referenced against the ... excellence model. The self-assessment process allows the organization to discern clearly its strengths and areas in which improvements can be made and culminates in planned improvement actions that are then monitored for progress. (p. 531)

Although Dale is referencing the EFQM, this statement is also descriptive of the self-assessment process used for the Baldrige, Pacesetter, Trailblazer, EQA, and Deming Application Prize (Japan).

Whether or not an organization is interested in applying for a quality award, the self-assessment process provides a number of benefits independent of the awards process, according to Dale et al (2007):

Immediate benefits include: facilitating benchmarking, fosters continuous improvement organization-wide, encouraging employee involvement and ownership, raising an understanding and awareness of quality-related issues, developing a common approach to improvement across the company, and producing people-friendly business plans.

Long-term benefits include: containing costs, improving planning approaches, developing a holistic attitude to quality across the organization, and increasing the ability to delight the customer, focusing on process and not only on end product, and encouraging improvement in performance. (p. 533)

Part of preparing for a self-assessment should be a commitment to leadership as well as educating and training the cross-functional teams. According to Dew and Nearing (2004) and Dale et al. (2007), self-assessment should also include a gap analysis (comparing where the organization is against where it wants to be), and an action plan to remedy the identified gaps through a quality improvement program.

In a self-assessment process designed to model the MBNQA Criteria in education, the self-assessment process is also part of the PACESETTER Award and its abbreviated version, the Trailblazer Guide. Both the PACESETTER Award and the Trailblazer Guide were developed by CQIN specifically for community and technical colleges. As Dew and Nearing (2004) note:

Schools using the PACESETTER award can start by conducting a shorter self-assessment using CQIN's Trailblazer Guide, which permits schools to become familiar with the PACESETTER Award criteria, but does not require a lengthy application procedure. Schools can conduct a self-assessment using the Trailblazer Guide in two to four weeks and will receive feedback from CQIN's examiners. Schools that desire a more in-depth self-assessment can complete the full PACESETTER Award self-assessment and can have examiners visit their campus and provide full feedback. The PACESETTER Award process seeks examiners who have already been trained to conduct evaluations using state-level Baldrige programs. (p. 23)

Dale, et al. (2007) and Dew and Nearing (2004) provide strong support for the idea that self-assessments are valuable in and of themselves, and critical to a quality improvement effort, whether or not the organization has an intention to apply for a quality award. Relative to higher education, Dew and Nearing (2004) note:

Self-assessments are a key ingredient in achieving and maintaining excellence in any educational setting. As a mechanism for stimulating a constructive critical analysis of an institution, self-assessments enable organizations to realistically acknowledge their strengths and weaknesses and set the stage for continuous improvement. (p. 53)

Likewise, Dale, et al. (2007) point out that:

Self-assessment uses one of the models underpinning an award to pinpoint improvement opportunities and identify new ways in which to encourage the organization down the road of organizational excellence ... and can prove extremely useful in assisting it to improve business performance. (p. 553-555)

On the other hand, Ritchie and Dale (2000) point out that difficulties can be experienced in self-assessment and warn that it should not be undertaken without full commitment from management, educating every level of the organization before the process is initiated, and being

prepared for the extra time, effort, and cost of embarking on this and other quality efforts. Pemberton (2005) notes that the self-assessment required for participating in the Higher Learning Commission's Academic Quality Improvement Project "causes the institution to appraise its strengths and weaknesses, and assures the Higher Learning Commission that the institution has no accreditation concerns" (p. 31). Self-assessment as part of the quality efforts in higher education, and, in particular in community and technical colleges, are discussed in conjunction with IHE reaccreditation processes in the next section.

ADOPTION AND ADAPTATION OF QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Ironically, although there is a widespread belief that CI originated in business and industry and was finally adopted in academia after proven success in business, Dew and Nearing (2004) point out:

One of the myths concerning continuous improvement is that the concepts originated within the business community and carry cultural connotations that are inappropriate for the academy. The body of knowledge for continuous improvement evolved over many decades through the collaboration of academics and their students who sought to apply these concepts in business and industry.... Early pioneers in continuous improvement often divided their careers between the university and applied research centers with companies such as Bell Laboratories. (p. 2-3)

However, this collaboration between business and academia in producing CI models for business did not result in a widespread, organized effort on the part of higher education to incorporate an organized approach to quality improvement until the 1980s and 1990s. By then, quality improvement was a way of life in most major corporations and businesses, and its adoption and adaptation from business to education, government, and health care was accelerating. More than ten years ago, Gardiner (1998) warned higher education:

For well over a decade, we have been warned that if we do not put our academic house in order, others, who pay for our services, will step in to do so. They have begun to do this. We must act quickly. We owe this to our students, our sponsors, and ourselves. (p.81)

He was especially concerned that:

Tenured faculty were turning a blind eye to the quality of our educational processes and results. The busyness of daily routine and the seeming rightness of the familiar obscure the need to change. Yet the task is urgent. We need to begin immediately to assess, evaluate, and improve the quality of our work. (Gardiner, 1998, p. 71)

Although there could be many possible approaches to such a mission, the reaction of the higher educational community to the calls for accountability have primarily originated in either an independent institutional effort aimed at quality improvement, or more commonly, quality improvement that is part of the overall accreditation effort. The former typically comes from adapting a business quality model and/or making the changes requisite in seeking a quality award such as the Baldrige Award, while the latter is modeled on the MBNQA type of standards. For this reason, a discussion of higher education accreditation and the adaptation and adoption of business-like quality approaches is discussed next.

Historical Development of Quality Improvement in Higher Education

As noted in Section I of this chapter, the MBNQA excited much interest in QI in the United States in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In addition to business and industry, business centers within universities and colleges became interested in embedding QI/CI in higher education. Simultaneously, higher education was responding to the market and cultural forces that included decreased funding, funding linked to measurable results, and/or calls to accountability, such as that cited in Gardiner (1998).

As a result of this intersection of common interests and pressures, colleges and universities of all sizes and types began experimenting with the principles of quality

improvement. Although different perspectives might construct the record a little differently, a brief summary of the history of the early efforts in IHE in QI follows and is organized by type of institution.

Quality Improvement in community colleges.

Western Technical College (WTC) was an early adopter of Deming's principles with extensive campus-wide quality improvement efforts in 1988 and also was an early adopter of the NCA's alternative accreditation process, known as AQIP. Fox Valley Technical College in Wisconsin was also an early innovator using the principles and tools of CI to identify and launch new academic programs. Both community colleges used improvement teams, as was suggested by Deming and Juran, as a primary tool. Wisconsin developed the Wisconsin Forward quality award for which these colleges and others have applied. As previously noted in the section on quality awards, because these types of awards have criteria, benchmarking, and self-assessment incorporated into them, the application process is generally reflected in the QI effort by the organization applying (Dew & Nearing, 2004).

Eastern Iowa Community College District began a QI effort on its three campuses in the early 1990s, and later helped establish a more comprehensive quality review process known as the Continuous Quality Improvement Network (CQIN)(Dew & Nearing, 2004). Other community colleges soon followed the examples of these early leaders, including many of the technical colleges in Minnesota. The most notable were Alexandria Technical College and Riverland Technical College. By the late 1990s, community colleges in many locales and many states had formed their own quality improvement networks, often partnering with the American Society for Quality (ASQ) and using common techniques and tools. Community colleges often

partner with workforce development, provide customized training for local business and industry, participate in community outreach, and create business centers, which in turn, create a natural progression for those colleges to adopt the principles, tools, and techniques of CQI.

Quality Improvement in private colleges.

One of the earliest recorded quality improvement efforts at a private college may have been the result of the president of Belmont College (Tennessee) attending a seminar with Dr. Deming in 1989. In turn, Belmont College helped develop the MBNQA Criteria for Education and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) re-accreditation process. This in turn influenced the development of the AQIP criteria by the North Central Association in their re-accreditation model, and in other regions of the country.

Also in 1990, Samford University (Birmingham, AL) initiated the Students First Quality Quest which is a QI process in academic programs and administrative leadership. Dew and Nearing (2004) note that:

Dr. John Harris and Dr. Mark Baggett collaborated with the faculty at Samford, Belmont, and the University of Alabama to produce the first broad account of a quality improvement methodology for a campus, *Quality Quest in the Academic Process*, published in 1992. (p. 5)

In 1992, Babson College incorporated a systematic assessment of their administration and management system in addition to using QI teams. Villanova University (Pennsylvania) launched a CI initiative in 1993, and developed a model QI process working in many initiatives.

Quality Improvement in public universities, university systems and regional public universities.

The CI effort in public universities parallels the development of the CI movement in community colleges and private colleges. It emerged in the late 1980's as well, sparked by the national interest in the MBNQA, and included such early adopters as Pennsylvania State University, the University of Wisconsin – Madison, Oregon State University, Rutgers University and Purdue University. The early university efforts were largely linked to ties with business and industry, and benefited from contact with quality gurus such as Deming, Crosby, and Juran. In addition, some had corporate support e.g., Motorola giving financial, mentorship, and leadership assistance to Purdue University.

The University of Wisconsin – Madison also tapped into the interest in quality improvement in the local area. For instance, the Hunter Conference, an annual gathering of quality experts from around the world is held in Madison, WI every year, and Joiner's nationally-recognized quality improvement consulting firm is based in Madison, WI. The Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities was Juran's alma mater, and received many of his manuscripts and writings on quality (Dew & Nearing, 2004).

In the mid 1990s, the University of California – Berkeley, mentored by the University of Wisconsin – Madison, developed a four-tier approach to continuous quality improvement, as noted by Dew and Nearing (2004):

1. Strategic leadership and vision
2. Organizational assessment
3. Process improvement
4. Staff engagement (p. 8)

According to Dew and Nearing (2004), this approach “has led to a wide variety of academic and administrative improvement initiatives” (p. 7). Binghamton University, the

University of Alabama, the University of Michigan, and other major public universities soon followed suit. The University of Florida (Miami, FL) began a QI effort in the Financial Affairs division and have “developed one of the best sets of permanent measures for financial and support processes in the country” (Dew & Nearing, 2004, p. 5).

In Minnesota, colleges seeking reaccreditation using the AQIP process allied themselves with the CQI effort, sponsored by MnSCU and associated with AQIP, and called the organization the Minnesota Quality Improvement Project (MnQIP). California University Systems initiated quality improvement efforts on its campuses, as well.

The first public university to win the coveted MBNQA was the UWS in 2001, an example of a regional public university. Dew and Nearing (2004) point out that, because of their missions and smaller sizes, private colleges and regional public universities may be able to change culture and mission more readily to embrace CI principles. The winning approach at UWS included developing a “comprehensive management system for its campus that fully embraces the continuous improvement concepts” (Dew & Nearing, 2004, p. 7).

Summary of the impact of the early efforts in Quality Improvement on higher education institutions.

Many colleges and universities have not embarked on a formal CI process, and for those that have, it has not been an unqualified success in every case. Although many colleges and universities house and/or sponsor quality centers that provide consulting services for CI to business and industry, not all are associated with helping to foster CI on their own campuses (Dew and Nearing, 2004p. 9). Wheatley (1999) found that turnover of leadership can result in a lack of support for, and problems with, continuing improvement efforts. Bonvillian and Dennis

(Dew & Nearing, 2004) also documented problems with CI on campuses where the “core processes” of teaching, learning, and research were not addressed or included in the process (p. 8). Waters documented problems on campuses where a systematic effort is not made to include all employees in training or in empowering them to act on teams (Dew & Nearing, 2004).

On the other hand, success stories for connecting quality centers with a university include the Center for Organizational Development and Leadership at Rutgers University, which provides internal and external consulting services for CI, and has been instrumental in the QI effort for the University. Dr. Brent Ruben was instrumental in the development and leadership of the Center, and was responsible for the creation of the National Consortium for Continuous Improvement in Higher Education (NCCI). The NCCI now has a large membership of colleges and universities, as well as an annual conference on CI in higher education (NCCI, 2010).

Another example of providing support for internal and external CI efforts is the Juran Center for Leadership in the Carlson School of Management of the University of Minnesota – Twin Cities. The Juran Center provides expertise to a variety of organizations, as well as its parent institution (Dew & Nearing, 2004).

Some corporations have also encouraged and supported IHE quality efforts. For instance, corporations that win the Baldrige Award agree to share their QI process with other applicants.

Some examples of this corporate support were noted by Dew and Nearing (2004) and include:

1. In 1988, the Total Quality Forum was formed to provide support for integrating “quality concepts into the undergraduate curriculum.” IBM, in 1991, offered \$1 million in cash or \$3 million in equipment to the winners of a TQM competition it created. Penn State and UWS were two of the winners, and the quality legacy in those cases is apparent.
2. The TQM University Challenge was funded by several corporations (including several Baldrige winners) and provided grants to universities that would pilot TQM along with integrating quality into the curriculum.
3. MBNQA winners, including Milliken, Motorola, Boeing, Fed Ex, and Ritz Carlton, continue to assist IHE with their CI efforts. (p. 10)

Non-profit organizations including the American Association of Higher Education, the Education Division of ASQ, and the National Association of College and University Business Officers, have also provided support and encouragement to IHE for their quality improvement initiatives (Dew and Nearing, 2004).

Institutions of higher education and the quest for a Malcolm Baldrige

Award.

As noted earlier, TQM/CQI has been adopted by many IHE, and many of those institutions have in turn worked toward national quality improvement awards, such as the Malcolm Baldrige and PACESETTER awards. National examples include Fox Valley Community College and Delaware Community Colleges. In Minnesota, one of the institutions working toward the MBNQA is Rochester Community and Technical College (RCTC). RCTC is a neighboring college whose technical programs were once part of the Riverland Technical College. The technical programs were also engaged in a TQM effort prior to the merger of the community and technical campuses in Rochester.

QUALITY IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS IN INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND LINKS TO ACCREDITATION

As was noted earlier in this chapter, IHE became increasingly interested in applying CI to their organizations, and in some cases, even began working on applying for quality awards such as the PACESETTER or MBNQA. As this interest mounted, and public pressure and calls for accountability in higher education increased, higher education accrediting agencies also began investigating in and initiating quality improvement standards for their member colleges.

According to Dew and Nearing (2004), all six regional accreditation bodies have moved to incorporate some type of CQI into their accrediting processes and standards. First SACS, then the Middle State Commission on Higher Education, and now the North Central Association have required evidence of quality improvement involvement and efforts for all accreditation/reaccreditation efforts. Meanwhile, Dew and Nearing (2004) note:

North Central Association of Colleges and Schools initiated the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP) that developed a set of assessment criteria similar to the Baldrige Award criteria, but more tailored for higher education. Under the AQIP model, schools conduct a self-assessment and develop an improvement plan based on the needs they have identified. The schools work on their improvement plan and then reassess themselves to develop new improvement goals. When the association sees evidence that this cycle of continuous improvement is in place, it will grant reaccreditation to the institution. (p. 62)

Accreditation in Higher Education: The Higher Learning Commission, North Central Association, and the Program to Evaluate and Assess Quality

The mission statement of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) is “serving the common good by assuring and advancing the quality of higher learning” (HLC, 2010). The HLC (2010) explains its role in accreditation as:

In the United States, schools and colleges voluntarily seek accreditation from nongovernmental bodies. There are two types of educational accreditation: institutional and specialized. Institutional accreditation is provided by regional and national associations of schools and colleges. There are six regional associations, each named after the region in which it operates (Middle States, New England, North Central, Northwest, Southern, Western). The regional associations are independent of one another, but they cooperate extensively and acknowledge one another’s accreditation.... It accredits the organization as a whole. Besides assessing formal educational activities, it evaluates such things as governance and administration, financial stability, admissions and student services, institutional resources, student learning, institutional effectiveness, and relationships with internal and external constituencies.

The core values of HLC are stated as quality, integrity, innovation, diversity, inclusiveness, services, collaboration, and learning. The four strategic priorities of the HLC are

all focused in one way or another on quality assurance and quality improvement. The HLC's (2010) five criteria for accreditation are:

1. Criterion One: Mission and Integrity - the organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, the administration, faculty, staff and students.
2. Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future – the organizations' allocation of resources and its process for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.
3. Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching –the organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates that it is fulfilling its educational mission.
4. Criterion Four: Acquisition, Discovery, and Application of Knowledge –the organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.
5. Criterion Five: Engagement and Service – as called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

Comparison of the Academic Quality Improvement Project to the Program to Evaluate and Advance Quality

Relative to seeking reaccreditation through AQIP, the HLC (2011) states:

In AQIP, the formal procedure culminating in Reaffirmation of Accreditation occurs every seven years. In the Reaffirmation procedure, an AQIP Review Panel on Reaffirmation reviews each institution's assembled, cumulative record of activity and judges whether it has documented that it meets the Higher Learning Commission's five Criteria for Accreditation. The Panel also recommends whether the institution should be permitted to continue participating in AQIP.... Reaffirmation in AQIP cannot be viewed as a separate, stand alone procedure. Rather, AQIP's Reaffirmation procedure is the culmination of all of the other AQIP procedures, Strategy Forums, Action Projects, Annual Updates, Systems Appraisals, and Quality Checkup Visits. Reaffirmation is best conceptualized as the apex of a pyramid, supported by all of the other AQIP procedures: Strategy Forums, Action Projects, Annual Updates, Systems Appraisals, and Quality Checkup Visits, drawing from them and building on their results. In this way, it operates similar to the review by two Accreditation Review Council readers of all the materials related to a comprehensive onsite evaluation review in the PEAQ accreditation process. However, AQIP Reaffirmation comprises review of a much broader array of evidence about the institution gathered over a longer period.

The AQIP process was thus developed around the central core of Strategy Forums, Action Projects, Annual Updates, Systems Appraisals, and Quality Checkup Visits. By 2000, according to Rozumalski (2002), the core structure for the AQIP process was in place. However, although a self-assessment was required, no specific format or survey was required. Instead, the HLC suggested using one of the existing self-assessment processes for quality award programs. Rozumalski (2002) undertook the process of developing a specific tool for self-assessment for AQIP, referred to as Vital Focus, and piloted it with 13 institutions.

In the Strategy Forums, teams from institutions adopting AQIP collaborate to identify and address critical issues. Once these issues have been agreed upon by the team or organization, an Action Project is designed to address the critical issue. The issues are identified with the assistance of a self-assessment survey process such as Vital Focus or other available self-assessment tool, peer review and feedback, and by engaging in the Strategy Forums. Another new facet of AQIP that is not found in the more traditional PEAQ model is that each institution must report annually regarding their progress on these projects in Annual Update Reviews.

AQIP institutions also perform a self-analysis of their institution, its effectiveness, its processes, and its leadership. The guide to this self-analysis is found in the nine AQIP Categories for the AQIP Systems Portfolio. Each of the nine Categories is structured with a series of questions for self-assessment, and these questions are organized around Process, Results, and Improvement. As noted by Dew and Nearing (2004), these nine categories are:

1. Category 1: Helping Students Learn includes self-assessment on internal process for the development and review of academic programs, instructional delivery, and assessing student mastery of learning outcomes.
2. Category 2: Accomplishing Other Distinctive Objectives includes self-assessment on the institution's management of financial resources, research, community outreach, and auxiliary activities such as athletics.

3. Category 3: Understanding Students' and Other Stakeholders' Needs includes self-assessment on how the institution identifies the need of students and other stakeholders and goes about meeting them; how performance targets are developed for students, and how the institution identifies and works with a variety of other stakeholder groups i.e. communities, parents, alumni, governments, employers, etc.
4. Category 4: Valuing People includes self-assessment on how the organization develops capabilities for its faculty, staff, and administrators; how it designs and evaluates systems for recruiting, training, developing, recognizing, and listening to faculty and staff; and demonstrates how valuing faculty and staff contributes to student learning.
5. Category 5: Leading and Communicating includes self-assessment on the institutions leadership system, how strategic directions are set, how decisions are made, and how the institution communicates value, direction, and expectation.
6. Category 6: Supporting Institutional Operations includes self-assessment on the examination of institutional support processes that serve students, including financial aid, library, classroom support, registration, and work-study as well as procurement, capital campaigns and administrative services, and how support processes are evaluated and improved.
7. Category 7: Measuring Effectiveness includes identifying if the institution has a systems approach to collecting and using data, a self-assessment on the systems for collecting and using data for effective decision-making, and how data is used to identify opportunities for continuing improvement.
8. Category 8: Planning Continuous Improvement includes self-assessment on how the institution compares its actual performance to mission and stated goals, how the institution evaluates itself, and how it goes about the process of continually identifying and initiating activities that lead to further improvement.
9. Category 9: Building Collaborative Relationships includes self-assessment on how the institution encourages internal collaboration among faculty and academic departments; how it encourages collaboration with the schools that provides its students; how it collaborates with the organizations that hires its graduates, and how it collaborates with community organizations and national educational bodies. (p. 70-71)

Teams or workgroups from the institution then prepare a comprehensive written description of their current practices and levels of performance in this AQIP Systems Portfolio.

In another departure from the PEAQ periodic self-assessment, institutions are charged with keeping this portfolio current with continual revision. According to the HLC (2011):

AQIP institutions revise their Systems Portfolio to incorporate the results of Action Projects completed as well as to update performance results. Once every four years, AQIP assigns a peer reviewer team to review, rigorously and formally the Systems Portfolio Appraisal, an institution's current self-description in order to assure acceptable practices are being followed, and in order to provide the institution with actionable

feedback on its next priorities for improvement (in a System Appraisal Feedback Report). A Quality Checkup Visit to each institution examines both the seriousness with which an institution is working on its highest priorities and the evidence that it meets all accrediting requirements, focusing particularly on unsettled issues and any gaps in the evidentiary record identified by the Systems Appraisal.

In general, the HLC stresses that reaffirmation through AQIP is founded upon a cumulative body of evidence. The burden is on the institution to provide the data, information, and analysis required by the AQIP process. Although the HLC is careful to point out the differences between a PEAQ process and making a commitment to AQIP, there is a cross-walk provided that makes comparisons between the PEAQ Five Criterion and the AQIP's Nine Categories. Although providing the entire matrix is not germane to the topic at hand, it should be noted that Beard (2005) developed a matrix that demonstrates the relationships between the Baldrige Award criteria and the nine AQIP categories.

PEAQ Criteria for Accreditation and AQIP Category Correlation

Although there is not direct overlap between the categories in the PEAQ criteria for reaccreditation and the AQIP Categories, there is a strong correlation as they both address similar areas important in maintaining accreditation. The HLC (2011) also notes that, "Collectively, AQIP's procedures encompass the same ends as traditional PEAQ self-study processes and site visits. However there is no easy one-to-one equivalence between AQIP's array of procedures and PEAQ's self-study and onsite evaluation."

In Reaffirmation of Accreditation, a group of peer reviewers examines the findings and evidence from the entire AQIP process to determine the institution's compliance with accreditation requirements. While not a complete accreditation review of the institution, Reaffirmation of Accreditation is a comprehensive examination of questions and conclusions

raised by the AQIP procedures. In this process, if there are concerns with compliance with the five Criteria for Accreditation, there are identified processes and procedures to address them.

According to HLC (2011):

At the end of AQIP's Reaffirmation process, the AQIP Review Panel on Reaffirmation can recommend to the Higher Learning Commission's Institutional Actions Council (IAC) any of the following actions:

- The institution fully meets the Criteria for Accreditation and the requirements of AQIP without issue, and that it continue in AQIP with its accreditation reaffirmed for another seven years;
- The institution meets the Criteria for Accreditation and the requirements of AQIP, but that “specific monitoring on a progress or improvement issue take place through the Actions Project cycle or other means”;
- The institution meets the Criteria for Accreditation without issue, but that it “should return to PEAQ and be scheduled for a comprehensive evaluation in five years or fewer...In addition, the Panel may recommend specific monitoring (reports, focused visits) to be applied in the PEAQ process”;
- The institution presents “such a serious issue of potential non-compliance with the Criteria for Accreditation that the Commission should consider taking immediate action.

MEASURES AND INDICATORS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND CLIMATE

Organizational Culture and Climate

Although the terms “organizational culture” and “organizational climate” are often used in tandem or even interchangeably, there are discrete differences between the two terms when examined more closely and in light of the current literature. The construct of “organizational culture” actually originated in anthropology, with researchers such as Detert, Schroeder, and Mauriel (2000), as well as Giese (1995), and Sackmann (1992). Kluckhohn (1962) gives the following definition of culture:

Culture consists of patterns, symbols, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiment in artifacts; the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e. historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values; culture

systems may, on one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning influences of further action. (p. 72)

Pettigrew (1979) combines the anthropological study of culture (as defined above) with the study of organizational theory (Detert, Schroeder, & Mauriel, 2000). This combination draws the parameters for the impact of culture within an organization. Pettigrew (1979) notes:

In the pursuit of our everyday tasks and objectives, it is all too easy to forget the less rational and instrumental, the more expressive social tissue around us that gives those tasks meaning. Yet in order for people to function within any given setting, they must have a continuing sense of what that reality is all about in order to be acted upon. Culture is the system of such publicly and collectively accepted meaning operating for a given group at a given time. This system of terms, forms, categories, and images interprets a people's own situation to themselves. (p. 2)

Pacosky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983) support this belief on the "integrated nature of culture by contending that organizational culture is a dynamic social construction that is undergoing continual reconstruction – the puzzle, not just a piece of it" (Tatro, 2007, p. 14).

Tatro (2007) supports this definition of organizational culture and further develops it by presenting the argument that culture can be considered a characteristic of an organization, or that organizations can be understood as a culture (Smircich, 1983). In other words, when one considers the literature and history of the study of organizational culture, the question comes down to whether "culture is something an organization *has* or something an organization *is*" (Tatro, 2007, p. 21). In support of the idea that organizations *are* cultures, Bates (1994) says:

In strategic terms we need to think about organizations as being cultures rather than having cultures.... The important point, therefore is not *what* we study, but the different way we look at the organization: the task for the culture strategist is not to think *about* culture but to think *culturally*. (p. 17)

Ott (1989) reinforced this view of culture:

The first step toward understanding the essence of *organizational culture* is to appreciate that it is a concept rather than a thing. This distinction is crucial. A thing can be discovered and truths established about it, for example, through empirical research.

Unlike a thing, however, a concept is created in peoples' minds – that is, it must be conjured up, defined, and refined. (p. 50)

Tatro (2007) claims that it is theoretically impossible to divide the system into independent parts for study because the behavior of the part depends on the whole (Senge, 1990). Systemic properties are destroyed when the system is dissected (Hubiak, 1995). Tatro (2007) concludes that organizational culture can best be viewed as a social construct, and that the organization is the culture. While it is useful to be aware of the debate regarding the concepts of organizational cultures, for the purposes of this dissertation, I chose to adopt Tatro's view of the organization as a culture and a social construct (Tatro, 2007).

Working from Tatro's (2007) concept of culture, the elements of organizational culture were well defined by Schein (1985) and reiterated by Tatro (2007):

1. Observed behavioral regularities of organizational interaction i.e. rituals, common language, etc.
2. Norms that evolve in working groups
3. Dominant values that are presented as representative of the organization
4. Philosophy that is the basis for organizational policy toward internal and external stakeholders
5. Rules for surviving and succeeding in the organization
6. Feeling or climate of an organization that is experienced in the physical and emotional environment, as well as in stakeholder interactions (p. 24)

Chaffee and Tierney (1988) espoused three cultural components: structure, environment, and values that echo Schein's elements: structure is the relationship among individuals and units within the organization; environment is the unique setting that an organization finds itself in (e.g., its customers, community, and constituents); and values are the beliefs that determine organizational priorities.

Galpin (1996) viewed the components of organizational culture as a complex mosaic of regulations and policies, goals and measurements, customs and norms, ceremonies and events, management behaviors, rewards and recognition, communication, the physical environment, and

the organizational structure. This is a view that elaborates on the elements of culture proposed by Schein, as well as Chaffee and Tierney.

Schein (2004) later updated his description of organizational culture with the addition of these elements of culture: embedded skills; habits of thinking, mental models, and linguistic paradigms; shared meanings; integrating symbols; and formal rituals and celebrations. He also notes that as organizations grow and diversify over time, they develop subcultures that may have different structures, different responsibilities, and different ways to achieve the same mission. This diversity in subcultures can result in organizations not having a single culture, but rather a combination of subcultures (Schein, 2004). From an assessment perspective, it would then be important for leadership to be aware of and define these subcultures, to align mission, vision, and values among them, and to be certain that measures and indicators accurately reflect the organization as a whole.

Given the preceding definitions and elements of organizational culture, research has established that culture both influences the individual and collective consciousness of culture and understanding of the organization, as well as influences both individual and collective organizational behavior. This is supported by Kluckhohn (1962) and his view of organizational values becoming embedded in an organizational culture over time, and the later work of Sackmann (1992) which stressed the cognitive influence of organizational culture on behavior. Wytenburg (1999) also contends that organizations and their cultures are less of a stable, defined, concrete system, and more of a dynamic, complex, ever-evolving system that reacts and re-forms to an ever-changing variety of stimuli.

If organizational culture is a social construct with the characteristics given above, what would the definition of organizational climate be? McMurray (2003) states that organizational

culture is the environment which persists over time, while organizational climate is that which reflects the condition of the organization at a given time. In distinguishing between organizational climate and culture, Bauer (1998) holds that organizational culture is based on “deeply shared values, assumptions, beliefs, or ideologies of members” while organizational climate is based on “common member perceptions of attitudes toward and feelings about organizational life” (p. 3). Another excellent description of organizational climate comes from Wardlow and Swanson (1991):

Climate is the product of the interactions of persons within a system as they attempt to accomplish the system’s mission. Climate indicates the way persons within the system feel about themselves and their working relationships within that system. Climate reflects the attitudes, beliefs, and norms (social structure) which are foundational to the particular school. (p. 27)

Al-Shammari (1992) and others see organizational climate as being reflected in the perception of the organizations’ members. Pemberton (2005) defines organizational climate as “the *characteristics of the work environment perceived by an organization’s members*, rather than evaluative of the underlying qualitative values, beliefs, philosophies, and customs of an organization that explain human functioning and govern behavior” (p. 50).

Given these contrasting and somewhat confusing definitions, one might wonder why we should try to study organizational climate and culture at all. Tierney (1990) and Pemberton (2005) hold that the study of an organization’s climate and culture gives insight into “motivations of the people and characteristics of underlying structures at work in the institution.... Studying climate and culture is to understand how decisions and actions are influenced, and to utilize this information to make organizations more effective” (p. 4).

In her work characterizing the organizational climate of AQIP institutions, Pemberton (2005) relied on the work of Schein (2004) and Bauer (1998) to define organizational culture.

For the purposes of her study, Pemberton (2005) compared definitions of organizational culture and organizational climate as follows:

In this research, organizational culture refers to the underlying assumptions, beliefs, norms, and values that are shared in an institution, and which determine what actions are taken for the institution to be successful. Organizational climate represents the perceptions and attitudes of the organization and its members, and the interactions that are actually practiced. Thus, in this research, *organizational climate is regarded as an indication of an organization's culture as perceived by the institution's members.* (p. 3)

Measures and Indicators of Organizational Culture and Climate

Measures or indicators for assessing organizational culture and climate vary. Schein (2004) and Al-Shammari (1992) state that assessing a particular organizational culture requires the use of detailed interviews, while the use of surveys and similar questionnaire types of tools are useful in assessing organizational climate. The use of organizational climate surveys is widespread in IHE and is well-documented as a way to determine faculty, staff, and administrator perceptions of factors related to an institution's climate.

Impact of CQI Efforts on Organizational Culture and Climate

Birnbaum (1992) and Senge (1990) claim that “decision-making strategies, organizational culture, and faculty-staff relationships all significantly influence institutional performance” (Tatro, 2007, p. 2). Alstete (2004) and Pemberton (2005) also note that organizations involved in continuous quality improvement should “be aware of both culture and climate, and changes managed by training internal participants to think in terms of processes, working in cross-institutional teams where diverse constituencies bring various perspectives, and learning new ways for improvement and daily operations” (p. 4)

There are some research studies that link organizational climate survey measures to continuous quality improvement in IHE. One approach required for participation and re-accreditation in the HLC's AQIP process is to use a self-assessment process that includes institutional climate survey-type questions in addition to questions relating to other factors. These surveys were discussed previously in this chapter and include the MBNQA, CQIN's Trailblazer and PACESETTER self-assessment surveys, and the Vital Focus self-assessment developed by Rozumalski (2002) for use in the AQIP process.

Pemberton (2005) uses a validated climate survey instrument developed by van der Post, de Coning, and Smit (1997) that measures organizational climate factors which can be cross-walked to the nine AQIP Categories and principles. These include organizational climate factors such as: goal clarity, task structure, identification with the organization, performance orientation, conflict resolution, reward orientation, employee participation, locus of authority, organization focus, culture management, customer orientation, disposition towards change, human resource management, management style, and organization integration (Pemberton, 2005).

One gap in the literature that I seek to address with this study is a lack of longitudinal, institution-wide (i.e., all employed members invited to participate) data from comprehensive community colleges that is related to climate survey measures in AQIP-affiliated institutions. Pemberton's (2005) study surveyed leadership perceptions (board members, institutional officers/administrators, and dean/department heads) from many different institutions in a one-time survey. Rozumalski (2002) developed the Vital Focus self-assessment instrument that is designed to be administered early in the process of an institution adopting the AQIP re-accreditation process. However, for an institution that is engaged in a long-term quality improvement effort, longitudinal climate survey data derived from employee perceptions of

climate would be a valuable planning tool, and the analysis and conclusions from that data analysis may be of interest to other institutions engaged in similar efforts.

Chapter Three: Methods

RESEARCH APPROACH AND RATIONALE

Many researchers, including Yin (1998), Stake (1995), Merriam (1988), and Creswell (1998), provide detailed instruction and advice on selecting and conducting case studies in education. Drawing on those sources to develop a research plan, in this chapter I will provide a rationale for the choice of this particular case, identify the measures to be used, discuss the trustworthiness of the research approach and plan, and provide an organized structure for data collection and analysis. I also discuss how data analysis will produce a rich, detailed description of the case, identify themes and issues, and provide interpretation and conclusions regarding the case.

Assumptions and Rationale for a Qualitative Research Design

In his most recent book, *Qualitative Research: Studying How Things Work*, Stake (2010) defines qualitative research as that which “relies primarily on human perception and understanding” (p. 11). Stake (2010) elaborates on the importance of qualitative thinking by summarizing and explaining the following special characteristics of qualitative study: it is *interpretive, experiential, situational, personalistic*, and is also likely to be *well-triangulated* and *well-informed*, while giving researchers *strategic choices* in what they represent, report, advocate, and emphasize (p. 15-16).

Creswell (2002) defines qualitative research as that which is “used to study research problems requiring an exploration and understanding of a central problem” (p. 50). Merriam

(2009) suggests that in basic qualitative study there is “a focus on meaning, understanding, process; a purposeful sample; data collection via interviews, observations, documents; and that data analysis is inductive and comparative, and findings are richly descriptive and presented as themes or categories” (p. 38). Creswell (1994) promotes the idea that:

A qualitative study is designed to be consistent with the assumptions of a qualitative paradigm. This study is defined as an inquiry process of understanding, a social or human problem, based on building a complex, holistic picture, formed with words, reporting detailed view of informants, and conducted in a natural setting. (p. 2)

Creswell (1994) urged that “the design ideally should convey a strong rationale for the choice of a qualitative design” (p. 14). The type of qualitative research design I selected for my study is a case study approach that used instrumental case study techniques, and my research plan was designed to be consistent with the above description. In this study, I sought understanding regarding possible impact of a quality improvement effort (AQIP) on Riverland Community College by examining quality indicators and the results of qualitative interviews.

Yin (2009) noted that:

For “how” and “why” questions the case study has a distinct advantage. Also, the less control an investigator has over a contemporary set of events, or if the variables are so embedded in the situation as to be impossible to identify ahead of time, case study is likely to be the best choice.” (p. 7-8)

Merriam (2009) also explains that “for it to be a case study, one particular program ... (a bounded system) ... would be the unit of analysis.... If the phenomenon you are interested in studying is not intrinsically bounded, it is not a case.” (p. 41). Riverland and its quality improvement effort constitute a bounded system that lends itself to the case study approach.

In considering the statement of the problem and the research questions generated by it in Chapter One, I selected a qualitative approach with an instrumental case study as the best overall research design to study the impact of AQIP on a college. In the next section, I elaborate on my

choice of the case study research design, the specific types of case study selected, and the rationale for their choice.

Rationale for a Case Study Approach

Yin (2009) states that “the distinctive need for case studies arises out of the desire to understand complex social phenomena” (p. 4). He also views a case study as a research process, and defines a case study as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009, p. 18). Likewise, according to Merriam (2009), “qualitative case studies share with other forms of qualitative research the search for meaning and understanding, the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis, an inductive investigative strategy, and the end product being richly descriptive” (p. 39). However, she also concludes that “the single most defining characteristic of case study research lies in delimiting the object of study, the case” (Merriam, 2009, p. 40). Miles and Huberman (1994) define a case study as “a phenomenon of some sort that occurs in a bounded context,” and have chosen a compelling image to represent a case study: it is a heart within a circle, the heart includes what is to be studied, and the edges of the circle represent the boundaries of the case, and what falls outside of those boundaries will not be studied (p. 25).

Merriam (2009) points out that employing case study research is a recognized form of qualitative research, and that case studies can include quantitative analyses and historical data (p. 39).

In case studies, the researcher explores a single entity or phenomenon (the case), bounded by time and activity (a program, events, process, institution, or social group), and collects detailed information by using a variety of data collection procedures during a sustained period of time.” (p. 12)

Multiple sources of information may include some combination of the following: documents, archives, interviews, observations, reports, and the like. (Creswell, 1994 and 1998). Yin (1989) recommends six types of information for a case study: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observations, and physical artifacts. Creswell later (2007) expanded on his definition of case study research as “a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a *case*) ... through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports) and reports a case *description* and case-based themes” (p. 73). This study met these criteria and employed the multiple sources of information recommended by Creswell and others.

Special features or characteristics (Merriam, 2009) of the case study also help to understand and define the case study. Case studies are *particularistic*, that is “focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon;” *descriptive*, that is provide a “rich, thick description of the phenomenon under study; and *heuristic*, that is “illuminate the readers understanding of the phenomenon under study” (Merriam, 2009, p. 43- 44).

The bounded system in this case study was Riverland employees, faculty and staff. They were represented by surveys and interviews, and these results were set against a background of historical and observational information.

According to Stake (2005), the case study can be developed as an *intrinsic, instrumental* or *collective* case study approach. I selected the instrumental case study approach, in which an issue within the case is examined in depth (Merriam, 2009). The overall proposed issue to examine in depth in this case study was the impact of the AQIP effort at Riverland Community College.

Merriam (2009) includes and defines other categories of case studies, including *historical, observational, life history, and multisite*, citing Bogden and Biklen (2007). In the observational case study “the major data-gathering technique is participant observation (supplemented with formal and informal interviews and review of documents) and the focus of the study is on a particular organization ... or some aspect of the organization,” all of which are descriptive of and consistent with my case study (Bogden and Biklen, 2007, p. 60).

Given these definitions of types of case studies, I selected aspects of the instrumental case study method as being the best “fit” to explore the problem and answer the research questions that I proposed. The research paradigm for my study employed the principles of instrumental case study research to examine whatever measures the College has targeted for improvement. It also examined the longitudinal data on employee perceptions of improvement in the following eight areas explored by the Institutional Climate Survey: organizational culture and climate, goals and management of change, policies and procedures, information and communication links, evaluation and feedback, perceptions of services to internal customers, perception of services to external customers, and diversity. Personal interviews with non-administrative (faculty and staff) employees of the College were conducted to contextualize and provide further insight into these findings.

In utilizing the case study approach, I encompassed the history of the institution, the history of the institution’s involvement in AQIP, and the historical record of accreditation and reviews related to AQIP and PEAQ accreditation mentioned above. The instrumental approach examined previously analyzed and interpreted longitudinal data for indications of the impact of the CQI (AQIP) effort on the areas of organizational climate and culture and employee satisfaction and perceptions.

The longitudinal aspects of this case study, including perceived change, will be emphasized in this dissertation. Because case study approaches rely heavily on the personal interview in seeking understanding, as well as a tool of data collection, this study also included personal interviews of a representative cross-section of the non-administrative College employees to provide context, interpretation, and evaluation of the data gathered.

Rationale for Case Study Site Selection

In the late 1990s, a major merger occurred in Minnesota. Subsequently all state universities, community colleges, and technical colleges were merged into the MnSCU system, and new colleges were formed as a result of this merger. Rochester Community College and the former Rochester, MN campus of Riverland Technical College were combined to become Rochester Community and Technical College (RCTC). The current Riverland Community College incorporated the former Austin Community College, the Austin site of Riverland Technical College, the Albert Lea Technical College, and the Owatonna Campus and University Center.

The technical college campuses in Minnesota have had a strong interest in QI since the early 1990s, and since the merger, their customized training services and community outreach centers have become part of the newly-merged entities. The institutional merger in 1996 was followed by a faculty union merger in 2000 in which the former Minnesota Community College Faculty Association and the United Technical College Educators merged to become one union, now known as Minnesota State College Faculty (MSCF). Both mergers occupied much system, institutional, and employee energy, as faculty conflicts, staff conflicts, territorial conflicts, resource allocation, and a revolving door of administrators and managers became daily concerns.

However, the remaining technical college faculty and subsequent administrators were still committed to quality improvement, and so many of the new colleges seeking reaccreditation as a newly-merged institution joined forces with the MnQIP and chose the alternative AQIP reaccreditation route.

Riverland formally applied to participate in the AQIP re-accreditation process in 2000 and embarked on the Vital Focus survey and self-assessment in the 2001-2002 academic year, along with initiating the scheduled administrations of the employee climate survey that provided the longitudinal data for this study. Using this college as a site for this case study should contribute to the identified gap in the literature regarding the possible impact of AQIP on quality indicators and perceptions of participants regarding the college QI effort.

The relatively newly-merged Riverland Community College has been involved in a structured QI effort since 2002 and has participated in an AQIP effort since then to gather and benchmark data related to quality indicators. However, the college was cited in the last AQIP Systems Portfolio Review for not demonstrating and documenting adequate data-driven decision-making, linking budgeting to strategic planning, and student learning outcome assessment efforts. The College is involved currently in effort to improve in these areas. College faculty and staff have not been interviewed relative to their opinions and perspectives on this effort, so the comprehensive Climate Survey data review and interview results provided fertile ground for this study.

PARTICIPANTS AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

Phase I: Archive and Document Review

Phase I entailed gathering all relevant and identified sources of information as listed below:

- Riverland Employees (past and present), as represented by Institutional Climate Survey data (more detail regarding these documents is found in the Measures section of this chapter).
- Documents and Reports regarding Riverland’s participation in AQIP re-accreditation process including:
 - Archives: evidence/documentation or reaccreditation reviews and of meeting accreditation concerns in cited areas.
 - Conclusions of PEAQ and AQIP reviewers/evaluators as represented by accreditation reviews and assessments.
 - Systems Appraisal Feedback Reports on the two AQIP Portfolios submitted by the College.

Phase II: Personal Interviews

Merriam (2009) referred to the type of personal interviews that I conducted as “member checking”, or “taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they are plausible” (Table 9.1, p. 229). I was given permission to independently contact and interview Riverland employees, and personal interviews were conducted with a cross-section of faculty and staff (selected using the process detailed below) who voluntarily agreed and signed a consent form for these interviews. In these interviews, I presented my findings and data from Phase I, sought input and understanding from the interviewees of what these data mean in the larger picture, and sought additional information, themes, and perspectives that they noted and/or that I may have missed. All Human Subjects guidelines and IRB requirements for both institutions (CSU and Riverland Community College)

were followed, and a log was kept noting all steps of the research process and compliance with the requirements.

My plan to establish a cross-section of Riverland employees to interview was as follows:

1. I used the directory of all current employees to generate subsets by job description, (i.e., full-time tenured faculty, part-time faculty, administrators, and staff by designated work area [e.g. Finance and Facilities, Student Affairs, Human Resources and Marketing]).
2. I selected a representative number of employees from each subset to interview.

MEASURES

Phase I: Archive and Document Review

Accreditation/AQIP efforts, reports, and ratings (document and archival data sources).

There is extensive archival data available for public review regarding Riverland's AQIP participation and re-accreditation status and reports, including letters from HLC/NCA, Institutional Portfolios (two) with Systems Appraisal Feedback Reports, Strategy Forum and Action Project plans and reports. I was also given permission by the College President to obtain any relevant documents needed for this research that were not subject to data privacy regulation. Chapter Four contains a discussion of the documents that were presented in interviews, used in quantitative data analysis, and/or in the development of conclusions.

Riverland employee perceptions from six Institutional Climate Surveys.

- Institutional Climate Surveys (ICS): 2000-2012. The survey's eight primary categories were:

- Organizational Culture (Climate) and Structure questions are an evaluation of formal roles and responsibilities, in addition to an analysis of the beliefs and attitudes of employees.
- Goals and Management of Change questions pertain to the college's mission, vision, and planning process.
- Policies and Procedures questions are an examination of formal written guidelines.
- Information and Communication Links questions pertain to computer and manual systems used to collect and process information. In addition, this section examines how the college communicates essential information.
- Evaluation and Feedback questions examine whether issues are detected and resolved in a timely and appropriate fashion.
- Perceptions of Service to Internal Customers questions pertain to the working relationships and service improvements with internal customers.
- Perceptions of Service to External Customers questions pertain to the working relationships and service improvements with external customers.
- Diversity questions pertain to an examination of whether diversity is valued interpersonally and institutionally.

Phase II: Riverland Employee Personal Interviews

I used the most recent Employee Directory to select candidates for interview requests. Of the approximately 213 Riverland employees listed in the Employee Directory, the approximate numbers and subsets were: 80 full-time, tenure or tenure-track faculty, 29 part-time/temporary/adjunct faculty, 10 administrators, and 86 full-time staff and 8 part-time staff members. The College administrators gave me permission to conduct the interviews in an alternative office location to my own. Appendix A is a copy of the Interview Request Letter that I sent to prospective interview candidates and indicates that I offered several choices of locations, including off-campus locations of their choice, where I could conduct and record the

interviews. I believed these choices were necessary in order to give prospective candidates full privacy and avoid identification of having participated in the interview process. I provided full information about the interview process (Appendices C1, C2, and C3) and the way the information would be used, and the interviews were completely voluntary. The interview process was a semi-structured interview.

I selected and interviewed the following (the ratios are representative to total numbers):

- Ten full-time, tenure or tenure-track faculty. One of these was be a non-teaching faculty member, (i.e., counselor or librarian), and the other nine were teaching faculty members, and I selected faculty representing varying levels of experience, campus assignments, unit assignment (e.g. liberal arts, career and technical education) and time working at Riverland.
- Seven staff members. I included representation from the following categories: the two primary unions for most staff, and past or present experience in different departments and categories of staff including: clerical support, Student Affairs (registration and financial aid), finance/business office, technology, human resources and marketing, Riverland Training and Development (RTD), and College lab assistants. I was not successful in recording an interview with a representative of the facilities staff (maintenance workers).

Personal interview questions.

The entire script for the Employee Interview Questions, including the data presented from the ICS, is included in Appendix C. Proposed interview questions for Phase II needed to be tailored to employees' longevity with the College, but the general questions included the following:

1. What was the college climate and organizational culture like in 2001 before AQIP was instituted? (Or, if you came later, what year did you start working here and what was the organizational culture and climate like when you came to Riverland?)
2. What do you think were the reasons that the College adopted AQIP?

3. What were the processes and results of being involved in AQIP like before the current administration? Since the current administration has been in place (approximately 2005)? Or since you have been employed here?
4. Has the College AQIP effort been an effective use of human resources, cost, and time? Is it currently? Why/why not?
5. Is AQIP a real or just a stated institutional priority? How can you tell?
6. Three of the re-accreditation concerns raised by NCA/HLC at the time of entering AQIP in 2001 were: a lack of evidence linking college strategic planning to college budget, a lack of evidence linking data to institutional decision-making, and a lack of documentation of student learning outcomes assessment. How you think the College is doing in each of those areas now (compared to then, if you were here then)?
7. What is the college climate and organizational culture like today? If it is different than 2001, do you think AQIP has had any effect or impact on making a difference? Positive or negative?
8. Do you think the College should continue with the AQIP re-accreditation effort? Why or why not?
9. Let's turn to the information regarding the employee climate surveys. I would like you to examine each of the nine statements that have been part of those surveys and tell me how you would rank it today on a scale of 1-5 (show scale ratings), and specifically why you would give it that ranking.
10. Now, let's look at the summaries of the employee climate survey with the "average" reaction to the items you just ranked. Please explain your reaction to the summaries of each category, and why, if you ranked it differently from the average, you think it might have been ranked differently by someone else working at the college.
11. Given the information and data I have shown you today on my research on quality indicators and the AQIP effort, do you think the AQIP effort at this college has had an effect on any of the results? Which results and why?
12. Do you think that working here is different for faculty and staff? If so, in what ways?
13. Do you have any additional information or insights you would like to offer regarding the College quality improvement effort and the results of its re-accreditation efforts regarding AQIP?

TRUSTWORTHINESS

Strengths and Limitations of the Case Study Approach

Merriam (2009) lists a variety of strengths associated with the case study as a qualitative research design, and avows that the “case study is the best plan for answering the research questions: its strengths outweighs its limitations” (p. 50). Merriam also presents the argument of Erickson (1986), who argued that the general can be derived from the particular as we transfer knowledge from one case to similar situations.

There are, however, also valid limitations in the usage for this design. Stake (1995) points out that the researcher decides what to include and what to omit, and so readers are limited to what is included, and not necessarily provided with all that might be relevant. Merriam (2009) and Stake (2010) also emphasizes that case studies are dependent on the sensitivity and integrity of the researcher as reporter and evaluator.

Flyvbjerg (2006) approaches the limitations of case study research in a unique way, according to Merriam (2009), he “sets up five ‘misunderstandings’ regarding case study research, in which he dismantles and substitutes a more accurate statement about the issue underlying each misunderstanding” (p. 53). Note the challenges to trustworthiness in the five statements below and how they address the most commonly cited weaknesses or limitations of case study research:

- A lack of universals or general knowledge, countered by the idea that context-dependent knowledge is more valued for application to human affairs.
- The inability to generalize from a single case, countered by the idea that a single example can be more influential than generalization (echoed by Stake, 2010 in the first part of this chapter).
- The idea that the case study is best used to generate hypotheses for the first part of a study, countered by the idea that the case study can be used in this way but is not limited to this use and can be expanded.

- The bias of the researcher's preconceived ideas, countered by the idea that researcher bias is no greater in case study research than other types.
- Problems encountered summarizing case studies to generate theories, etc., countered by the idea that this difficulty is not attributable to research method, but to the reality of what is studied. (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 219-245).

Merriam (2009) and others have referred to validity and reliability as “trustworthiness and rigor,” internal validity as “credibility,” reliability as “consistency and rigor,” and external validity as “transferability” (p. 209).

Strategies Employed for Trustworthiness

Merriam (2009) produces a graphical interpretation of qualitative strategies for promoting validity and reliability that is a fairly comprehensive summation of accepted views regarding qualitative strategies for evaluating research results. Table 3.1 presents Merriam's qualitative strategies as well as an explanation of how each will be applied in this case study.

Table 3.1. Qualitative Strategies for Promoting Validity and Reliability

Qualitative Strategy	Description	How it will be applied to this case study
Triangulation	Using multiple investigators, sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging findings.	Phase I will triangulate multiple sources of data, and Phase II will triangulate with Phase I.
Member checks	Taking data and tentative interpretations back to the people from whom they were derived and asking if they are plausible.	Phase II Interviews will be designed for this.
Adequate engagement in data collection	Adequate time spent collecting data such that the data become "saturated;" this may involve seeking <i>discrepant</i> or <i>negative</i> cases.	Phase I involves examining and analyzing extensive data and information sources.
Researcher's position or flexibility	Critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship to the study that may affect the investigation.	I will engage in this as thoroughly as possible with both Phase I and Phase II results.
Peer review/engagement	Discussions with colleagues regarding the process of study, the congruency of emerging findings with the raw data, and tentative interpretations.	The Dissertation Advisor and Committee will provide all or part of this; there may also be opportunities to do this in conjunction with Riverland or NCA colleagues.
Audit trail	A detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study.	Chapter 3 and 4 of the dissertation will give an account of this, and a complete researcher's log will be maintained during the entire study (per Yin, Stake, etc.)
Rich, thick descriptions	Providing enough description to contextualize the study such that readers will be able to determine the extent to which their situations match the research context, and hence, whether findings can be transferred.	Chapter 3 and 4 of the dissertation will give an account of this, and a complete researcher's log will be maintained during the entire study (per Yin, Stake, etc.). The resulting case study should provide the detailed descriptions characteristic of such studies.
Maximum variation	Purposefully seeking variation or diversity in sample selection to allow for a greater range of application of the findings by consumers of the research.	Phase I will involve a wide variety of archival data, and surveys that represent cross-sections of Riverland employees and students over the last ten years; Phase II will involve a cross-section of all Riverland employees.

Note: Qualitative Strategy and Descriptions adapted from “Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation,” by Merriam, S. B, 2009, p. 229.

PROCEDURE FOR DATA COLLECTION

Phase I: Document Collection

Riverland recently established a comprehensive archival data center, termed the OASIS, that is intended to warehouse paper and electronic documents of an historical nature, results of all the surveys conducted, program reviews, AQIP documents, and so forth that are listed in the previous sections on Participants and Sampling Procedures and Measures. Most of the documents that were distributed in various locations such as the President's office or College library, should be either copied and logged into an electronic OASIS database, or are stored there. I was granted complete and open access to OASIS, and was invited to request any additional documentation I might need. Some pertinent information is also on Riverland's Improvement website, its Faculty and Staff website, and the public website, all of which I could access as well. I was also sent the archives of the website that might contain useful information for the purposes of this study.

I compiled the documents, logged them, and reviewed and summarized their contents. I then reviewed each of the types of measures and quality indicators (surveys, accreditation reviews, etc.) used, and have summarized pertinent information and results in Chapter Four. In Chapter Four I also discuss my overall experience in locating pertinent data as that is related to the qualitative and quantitative results.

Phase II: Personal Interviews

The previous sections of this chapter discussed the rationale for conducting personal interviews and the procedure for choosing interview participants. The interview questions were designed to explore the answers to the research questions for this study in Chapter One, and to

identify any other emerging issues and themes relevant to the topic of this study. The interviewees were asked to read the summaries of data analysis from Phase I, then respond to the Phase II Interview Questions. All Human Subjects guidelines and IRB requirements for both institutions (CSU and Riverland) were followed, and an interview schedule and log was kept noting compliance with the requirements. Appendix D contains the interview schedule, with any data privacy or identifying information redacted. The full interview log is available to the Colorado State University IRB for review upon their request.

DATA ANALYSIS: DESCRIPTIONS, THEMES AND ASSERTIONS

Overall Strategies and Principles for Data Analysis

Yin (2009) states that “The analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed and most difficult aspects of doing case studies. Unlike statistical analysis, there are few fixed formulas or cookbook recipes to guide the novice” (p. 127). Yin (2009) suggests that to analyze case study data, one must pay careful attention to what the case itself is trying to tell you, or to begin by “playing with the data” to see what emerges, and use the case study protocol and research questions as a starting point (p. 129). I used the archival document summaries and analysis and the answers to the interview questions as data to answer the research questions.

Yin (2009) also suggests applying one or more of these four general strategies: relying on theoretical propositions, developing a case description (i.e., telling a story), using both quantitative and qualitative data, and examining rival explanations (p. 133). All of these strategies were used in this case analysis. Yin is highly supportive of strengthening conclusions with the use of both quantitative and qualitative data, and this study made extensive use of both quantitative and qualitative data, in addition to the development of a rich, thick case description,

as suggested by Stake (2010), Yin (2009), and Merriam (2009). Yin (2009) also suggests trying the following with a case to see if it applies to the data: pattern matching, explanation-building, time-series analysis, or one of the logic models. Pattern-matching and explanation-building were utilized in the data analysis to identify the essence of the phenomenon in Chapter Four.

Phase I Data Analysis

Accreditation/AQIP efforts, reports, and ratings document and archival data analysis.

- I reviewed the following documents to the topics of research for this dissertation: all documents relating to the history and implementation of the re-accreditation (PEAQ and AQIP) efforts.
- I reviewed the following and summarized where appropriate: the history of the AQIP efforts at Riverland, including the initial AQIP efforts, the efforts involved in the ongoing AQIP participation and meeting AQIP requirements, Strategy Forum planning, Action Project reports and the reviewer's responses to the two Systems Portfolios completed.
- The summaries of these documents provided the background for the issue that was initially identified as being instrumental to this case, which was the quality improvement effort at Riverland.

Riverland employee perceptions (surveys) data analysis.

- I reviewed and summarized the results of the Riverland Institutional Climate Surveys: 2000-2012, and reported on the trends/results organized by the eight categories: (a) organizational culture (climate) and structure, (b) goals and management of change, (c) policies and procedures, (d) information and communication links, (e) evaluation and

feedback, (f) perceptions of service to internal customers, (g) perceptions of service to external customers, and (h) diversity.

- I compiled the results obtained in the data analyses in the above categories of re-accreditation and quality improvement efforts as well as employee perceptions and identified overall trends and themes. I related these to the research questions and observational and instrumental aspects of the case study.

Phase II Data Analysis

I transcribed and coded the recorded interviews, and examined the results for emerging themes and trends. In order to code the transcribed data, I first created a matrix to identify open codes to determine common concepts associated with the responses to the questions, and listed common topics that arise in the data. Then, I used axial coding to group the open codes into analytical categories. I also applied selective coding to identify the essential themes discovered by axial coding.

After assembling my case notes, documents summaries for Phase I, interview results and code matrix, I then created a detailed case description, and correlated Phase I and Phase II results. I used the results and matrices developed during data analysis to answer the research questions, draw conclusions, and identify areas for further inquiry or research.

Chapter Four: Results

Riverland Community College (Riverland) is a two-year institution of higher education with campuses in the cities of Austin, Albert Lea, and Owatonna, Minnesota, as well as degrees, courses and certificates that are available online. The college was established in 1940 and is part of the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU) system.

Since 2002, Riverland has been involved in a continuing effort to improve the work environment and measure or monitor the employee climate at the college by administering a biennial employee climate survey called the Riverland Community College Institutional Climate Survey. According to Furst-Bowe and Wenth (2011), campus climate is a construct that can be defined as “current attitudes, behaviors, and practices of employees and students of an institution,” and can be measured by evaluating “personal experiences, perceptions, and institutional efforts”.

This study assesses the work-related experiences and perceptions of the employees of Riverland in two ways: (a) a longitudinal analysis of an institutional climate survey offered to all employees, and (b) personal interviews with seventeen of the employees, comprised of ten faculty and seven staff members. The College appeal to employees to participate in the climate survey states that they are part of a process for quality management and improvement at the college to ensure that it is a good place to work and pursue education.

Aspects of Riverland Community College climate have been assessed and documented by climate surveys (as noted previously). In interviewing the employee

participants, I explored areas that related to climate, and then presented them with related survey items from previous climate surveys (2002-2010). These climate survey items are located in Appendix C. The College administered six Institutional Climate Surveys that were offered to all employees and were administered every two years from 2002-2012. The results of these surveys will be discussed after the presentation of the data analysis from the personal interviews. During the interviews, participants were shown items from the Climate Survey that had been selected for follow-up and were asked to rank and discuss each item. They were then presented with the quantitative, longitudinal (2002-2010) analysis of each item for discussion. During the time of the interviews, the 2012 ICS had not been administered yet. The complete set of questions for the 2012 ICS can be found in Appendix E.

In this chapter, I introduce the participants and their voices, discuss their responses in the interviews, and then present the longitudinal climate survey results, followed by a summary of the qualitative and quantitative data and the essence of the phenomenon. Where they best correlate with the topic, I will also present responses to the open-ended questions on the 2012 Institutional Climate Survey. It should be noted that these comments are anonymous, may have overlapped with the interview participants, and that one person could write several similar answers to multiple open-ended questions.

There were 17 College employees who participated in the oral interviews: seven staff members and 10 faculty members. The staff members represented all major staff areas of College and all individual departments except Facilities. Most of the staff members who were interviewed, like many staff at Riverland, worked in other areas of the College prior to their current jobs. In their past and present Riverland positions, the areas represented include student services, customized training and support, clerical support staff, admission, finance

and financial aid, human resources, communications, reception and call center, computer support and information technology, faculty support, and student support. The result is a rich and varied background of experiences and College work areas represented in participants' discussions during the interviews.

The 10 faculty interviewed also represent a diverse background of experiences. Several of them have served in faculty leadership and service positions, including faculty association officer, contract representation, curriculum development, faculty development, student learning outcomes assessment, and student activities advisor. The faculty represent a cross-spectrum of disciplines and programs including social sciences, communication, humanities and fine arts, health careers, service careers, and other areas.

The staff and faculty interviewed also represent work and teaching experience on all Riverland campuses, including Austin East, Austin West, Albert Lea, and Owatonna. Of the staff members interviewed, Dakota and Jordan each have more than 15 years of work experience at Riverland, while Blair, Darby, Montana, Kiley, and Skylar have more than 10 years of experience. The faculty members Cameron, Parker, Bailey, and Jesse each have 20 years or more of work experience at Riverland, while Kelly, Lee, and Taylor have more than 15 years, and Drew, Tristan, and Kai have worked there more than 10 years.

The preceding descriptions are intended to portray the depth and diversity of the work and teaching experiences of the interview participants. Because of the relatively small size of the full-time staff and faculty workforce at the College, aggregate experiences and minimum work experience time was presented rather than more specific information that would identify an individual participant. In addition, pseudonyms are gender-neutral and gender-specific terms are redacted, with the use of s/he and their or themselves replacing she, he, him, and her.

FACULTY AND STAFF: A WORKPLACE APART

The first structure emerging from the data reflecting perceptions of the lived cultural experiences of community college employees is the experiential differences between faculty and staff employee groups. Ten full-time unlimited (tenured) faculty were interviewed. As previously explained, the faculty were representative of the different campuses and faculty assignments at Riverland. Seven staff members representing the diverse areas of responsibility of College staff were interviewed. Both faculty and staff participants commented on perceived differences in working conditions, treatment, and other experienced conditions, such as climate, stress, workload, and communication. An interview question regarding perceived differences between staff and faculty was added after the first two interview participants spontaneously made observations regarding their perception of the “other” employee group. It should be noted that in almost every instance when a participant refers to culture, they are actually referring to climate.

While I expected differences between faculty and staff, the marked differences, even polarization, of viewpoints and perception of working conditions carried an intensity that indicated more radically different groups than I had anticipated. Also most participants had a limited understanding of the other group's perceived environment and lived work experiences.

In this structure, I highlight the specific references that members of each group made regarding the other. In subsequent structures, I discuss the overall characteristics of the structure, and then explain each group's perspective regarding the lived experience of that structure.

Staff Perspectives of Faculty: Faculty Have More

The seven staff interviewed believed that faculty have more job security and enjoy better treatment than staff. In general, the staff describe faculty as having “more” – more institutionalized power and more influence, more protection, more compensation, more autonomy, and more importance in AQIP. This difference has been felt more keenly recently, most likely because of the feelings of a worsening climate among staff that will be explored in the next section.

More institutional power and more influence.

Darby, Montana, and Skylar were articulate in describing the different situations of faculty and staff when it comes to influence with the dominant lead administrator, job security, and either relative lack of impact or protection from the budget cuts. Darby noted that faculty have more institutional power than staff. S/he believes that the power is due to several factors i.e., that they have uniformity of mission with the work they do, strength in numbers and a single union structure:

Darby: [Faculty] seem to have more power in order to dictate how they’re being treated.... One, there seems to be strength in numbers, or cohesiveness and a mission; they’re all in the same boat, in one sense, whereas the staff are kind of divided up into different departments.

What Darby is referring to is the perceived faculty solidarity of a common mission. S/he believes that faculty all have the same work, the same rights, and the same interests to protect. Staff, meanwhile, are divided into several different departments, each of which has different work, different supervisors, and may have different union affiliations. The perception is that some of the power to determine better treatment on the part of faculty is this unified mission and a strong union contract:

Darby: Things are very strong about “this is the way it is, and this is the way it works,” and if we infringe on faculty rights, there’s someone to stand up and say, “You can’t infringe on these faculty rights like this.” There isn’t that type of strength in the staff ranks.... So, I think that [the Executive VP] is much more pushy and coercive with staff people than he is with faculty. I don’t think he goes to battle with faculty.

Darby also noted that as the noted “power” or authority figure in the College, the Executive VP has either respect for or fear of faculty, but is controlling with staff. S/he believes that the Executive VP is respectful of faculty boundaries, because he knows there will be a cost to violation of them. Darby does not think that he has similar constraints with staff due to their inability to “push back.” Darby has worked in several areas of the College, and spoke with conviction in explaining that the Executive VP does not think he needs to be respectful of or collaborative with staff.

Montana also discussed the amount of influence that the faculty have on the Executive VP, and compared that influence with that of the deans. Montana has served in a variety of staff positions, as well as taught courses as an adjunct. S/he gives an example of faculty influence s/he experienced while at a AQIP Strategy Forum:

Montana: I think [all faculty] have a good deal. And I will tell you ... I’m not saying good or bad, [but] faculty have a great deal of influence. We were at the [AQIP] strategy forum in Lyle and I had to get up and leave. Because I had to sit and listen to the deans almost beg faculty members to present an idea to [the Executive VP], so we could get it implemented.... I thought, this is a sad state that we’re in....A, that neither our president or our executive vice president was there. All the other colleges [there] had both. And we did not. And B, if our academic deans have to beg our faculty to talk to our executive VP to get an instrumental project going.... It just hit home as to where we are at.

Montana thinks that faculty have great influence with the Executive VP and influence him more than the deans do. Montana clearly was concerned that the deans, who are given authority in the institutional hierarchy to supervisor faculty, cannot influence their own supervisor. Furthermore, Montana was dismayed that the deans would have to resort to pleading

their case with faculty in order to try to convince the Executive VP to implement planning for what they perceived as a vital strategy area for the College. Montana was also concerned by the fact that the President and Executive Vice President chose not to attend while all other colleges there had both members of their executive team there. S/he was so distressed by this situation, and the lack of influence by anyone but faculty on the Strategy Forum team, that s/he needed to leave.

More protection and compensation.

Montana also thinks that in comparison to staff, faculty have been left relatively untouched by the consequences of budget cuts and other recent changes in the College's infrastructure. Montana explained that s/he has taught as an adjunct and observed that staff do not understand faculty work. Still, s/he notes his/her perception of the injustice of faculty being given stipends for committee work, while staff are expected to include committee work as part of overall job responsibilities:

Montana: I think what staff doesn't understand about faculty time is because a lot of staff just think, "Oh, you know, you teach 12 credits, you're only in class 12 hours a week." Well, they don't understand the amount of time to prep for courses and to grade.... You have 12 credits, you have 4 courses, you have 120 students. To do all the grading and create tests and grade all the tests and provide timely and you know, helpful feedback and have office hours.... Staff doesn't always understand that.... But don't bring up committees, for faculty, because you guys get paid stipends. Some get paid stipends, some don't. Which is not consistent. And if I have to be on a committee, I have to just fit it into my day. They don't give me four hours release, or let me take four hours of comp, because I have to spend four hours in a committee ... and [the rest of] my job doesn't get any smaller.

Montana thinks that most staff who have not taught do not understand how much work is involved in teaching. On the other hand, when s/he was listing faculty responsibilities, I added "service on committees," which prompted a response on the difference between faculty and staff

when it comes to committee service. S/he pointed out that some faculty are paid extra stipends to serve on committees, while a committee assignment for staff means more stress on the time limits of their jobs. This is a theme I return to in a later structure. S/he thinks that faculty have more free time to work on committees than staff do, while faculty think that staff are paid as part of their salaried time to work on committees.

Montana also pointed out that staff may not understand that faculty may have a heavy workload, however staff do know that faculty have voluntary teaching overload and compensated committee work. In contrast, staff believe that they have a heavier workload, much more stress, cannot be paid overtime, are more subject to budgetary vagaries and administrative pressure than faculty and receive lower overall compensation.

More autonomy.

Skylar wanted to be sure I understood that s/he enjoys working with faculty, but believes faculty have a greater sense of security, autonomy, and a better contract than staff do. Skylar, like many staff, has been a student but has not taught as an adjunct faculty member:

Skylar: The job market is more competitive, too.... Unemployment's higher, and I think perhaps faculty do feel a greater sense of security, especially if there's tenure involved. Of course there's more of a security in that.[Staff] definitely, we have a clear knowledge of who we answer to and who we're accountable to and I don't know if faculty have the same. I mean, obviously they're accountable, maybe they don't have the same levels involved. [Less] accountability and perhaps that lends a little bit to a sense of ... I don't want to say freedom, but a sense of just autonomy.

Skylar explained that s/he thinks that staff feel less secure in their jobs, while faculty not only have more job security, but also less accountability. S/he acknowledged that while faculty may have some accountability, it is not comparable to that of staff, and s/he thinks that less accountability results in faculty having a much greater sense of autonomy than staff do.

When I asked if s/he thought faculty had a better “deal” than staff, s/he took pains to elaborate on the idea that the work situation was “different” for faculty and staff:

Skylar: Well, I don’t know if I’d say deal.... I just feel the faculty deserve ... they’re in their position for a reason. They’ve earned their position, and I’m not saying looking at it as a deal. It’s just that that’s part of ... the package, greater responsibility. In many ways, too. And greater accountability in many ways.... I’m not trying to say they’ve got a better deal at all. It’s just that it’s just different.

In considering my question, Skylar was thinking about whether faculty were getting something that they shouldn’t have or didn’t deserve. S/he concluded that, although faculty did have more job security and autonomy, they had those as part of a “package” that included “greater responsibility and greater accountability” in a way that was “just different” than the situation for staff. Skylar chooses words very carefully, and tries hard to be positive and look for the best in people. S/he mentioned several times in the interview that s/he does not engage in gossip or back-biting, and the overall rhythm of the interview was to balance the concern of a non-optimistic or critical analysis with a more positive one. So, what seems to be a contradictory set of statements about faculty accountability, for instance, was part of that pattern of sharing a concern, and then mitigating it with a more positive outlook.

More importance in AQIP.

Although most staff and faculty views on AQIP are considered later in this chapter, in discussing differences between faculty and staff, many of the staff members took the opportunity to point out their view that faculty and staff have been treated differently in regard to their roles in AQIP. In general, they assert that academics has been the only real focus of AQIP the last few years. They feel staff have been left out and not had allowed a voice in AQIP:

Montana: We didn’t do restructuring because of what came out of AQIP. I think what came out of AQIP was the student learning outcomes. And I think that’s a positive

impact. The master course outlines ... the plans and responses.... I think academics have been given more priority in AQIP.... I think academics have been given more priority, period, than the rest of the college.

Montana acknowledged that the gain in academic-related areas that s/he attributed to AQIP were important, especially the Master Course Outline Project and the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Project. However, s/he was concerned that in AQIP, as well as in other ways, academics is always “placed ahead of the rest of the College.” As a staff member, s/he would like to see the areas that s/he works in be treated with equal value and respect. Montana does not think this is happening.

Jordan also pointed out that staff have not been included in the AQIP effort recently, and in fact, was not even sure if the institution was still involved in AQIP. Jordan is a staff member who works closely with faculty and administration:

Jordan : Yes, [AQIP] was kind of really on a roll right then and then it seems like it’s just petered out, but even then we’d have our College days and we’d all split up and work on different things, but as a staff person I remember always sitting there going, “I don’t know what this means. What do you want us to fill in here?” And so I noticed us, as staff, would kind of melt back and let faculty just discuss it. I’m like, “Okay, I hear AQIP once in a while, but what’s going on with it?”

Jordan related how s/he remembered that in the early days of work on the first portfolio and other aspects of AQIP, all College employees were involved, especially on All College Conference Days. S/he explained that even then, faculty were put in charge of it, and staff weren’t really oriented to it. Since then, staff have been so completely left out of it that s/he didn’t even know if the College was still engaged in the AQIP effort, but thought that faculty were involved if it was still being pursued.

Skylar was interested in and even volunteered to help with the AQIP effort, but was not included:

Skylar: I have not been involved for the last probably 3 or 4 years, now. I’ve offered on

a couple of occasions with different things that have come up, just like writing pieces. You know? But haven't really been asked to.... I don't know really what the projects are right now. And if they're looking for new members. I don't know that it always involves everybody. And if it should. I guess the message that I've gotten the last few years, I feel like it doesn't necessarily.

Skylar commented that s/he had offered to help write parts of the second AQIP portfolio, but was not included. In the ongoing effort to stay positive, s/he posed the question about whether AQIP really should involve everyone. Skylar thinks that the message of the last few years was that it should not. S/he also mentioned that s/he had received no information regarding AQIP and what is actually going on at the College in regards to AQIP.

Dakota also noted that s/he would like more inclusiveness in college efforts, including AQIP, and that the AQIP effort has not involved staff recently:

Dakota: I guess that's one thing as an employee here that I'd like to change is to be able to see more of what goes on with the rest of the college; if there's things going on with AQIP, it would be interesting to know that more, it'd be interesting to know that from my boss's perspective with us, stuff like that.

Dakota would like more connection with the rest of the College, and more interaction with other employees in the rest of the College. S/he would also like to have more information about AQIP and more interaction with his/her supervisor regarding AQIP. The 2012 Climate Survey results also indicated that the majority of College employees do not think that there is good interdepartmental communication or good communication with employees of other areas of the College, reinforcing Dakota's perceptions.

The feeling of staff wanting more connection with the rest of the College was a common theme in the staff interviews. It was not expressed in an angry or bitter way, but more in a wistful way, as saying "this would be great." Staff would like to be included in more collaborative work and have their departments and work treated with the same priority as instruction. They would also like to feel as valued and respected as they believe faculty to be.

This theme of connection carries over into some of the other structures as well, as it was expressed in a variety of contexts by staff members. This lack of communication may lead to a lack of understanding and contribute to the division between faculty and staff. This will also be discussed later in the quantitative data analysis section of this chapter.

Responses to the open-ended questions in the 2012 Climate Survey regarding faculty and staff support elicited more information about staff concerns related to the differential treatment of staff and faculty. For instance, one comment on the survey was: “Give staff the same respect that is given to the faculty. Provide more sessions at All College days that pertain to staff” (*Institutional Climate Survey*,” 2012, p. 94). The respondent who wrote this comment believes that faculty are given more respect than staff, and that All College days are really developed for faculty. Another survey respondent developed this idea further by stating, “All College days tend to focus on faculty needs/issues. It would be nice to have breakout sessions/speakers for staff” (*Institutional Climate Survey*,” 2012, p. 96).

Another group of responses to the open-ended questions in the Climate Survey observed that faculty are not respectful of, and do not understand, staff members. As alluded to previously, staff feel that faculty are valued more by administration than staff are. One comment was: “Faculty do not understand staff, and staff don’t understand faculty. Members of the administration only take into consideration the views of faculty” (*Institutional Climate Survey*,” 2012, p. 99). Another respondent was even more direct: “Staff are treated as second-class citizens by the faculty and the Administrative Council” (*Institutional Climate Survey*,” 2012, p. 101).

These and similar comments in the Climate Survey reveal that as the interview data suggests, staff believe faculty are more respected and have more influence. However, none of

the interview participants discussed feeling as though the faculty did not respect them or their roles in the College. These 2012 Climate Survey comments reveal a perception on the part of some staff indicating an even deeper division between staff and faculty than was evident in the interviews.

Faculty: Two Perspectives of Staff

As the interview data were analyzed, the faculty responses tended to be in one of two groups when considering their responses to questions about staff. One group is faculty members who generally do not work closely with staff. The other group is faculty members who were previously staff, currently work closely with staff, or are housed in staff areas. Cameron, Tristan, and Taylor all commented on being aware of how staff are treated differently than faculty, and that staff feel undervalued and not as important as faculty. We hear more from Kelly later regarding staff climate, as s/he discussed perceptions of that rather than comparing the treatment of staff and faculty.

Faculty do have more.

Tristan had an interesting perspective on how staff view their treatment relative to how faculty are treated:

Tristan: I think that ... in the hierarchy of things, it's ... seen as administration, faculty, and then staff. And I don't know if I sense the vibe that staff think that faculty have more rights.... I don't know. I just feel something like ... that's kind of the vibe I kind of pick up on, that [staff think] faculty think they have more rights.

When asked if s/he thought that staff see themselves as being treated like disregarded stepchildren and faculty treated as the favorites, Tristan responded:

Tristan: Yes. That's exactly it. That's a good analogy. I really think that's my

observation, just lately.... It's just the vibe that I'm just noticing. And I've never felt before, I've never felt like staff were below [us].... I think that staff are equal. But I have been just picking up on this vibe, [but] I don't think everybody thinks that.

Tristan is in a position that works with staff, non-instructional areas of the College, and faculty. Tristan explained that s/he had begun to notice that staff were treated differently than faculty by other College employees and administration. S/he thinks staff members are very aware of this differential treatment and most faculty are not. Tristan told me that s/he considers the staff equal to faculty, but perceives that administrators have a hierarchal view that places administration on top, faculty in the middle, and staff on the bottom.

Cameron also sees the great difference between faculty and staff in working conditions and discussed the perception that most faculty are largely unaware of this. Cameron has close friendships with many staff at the College and comments:

Cameron: Normandale [Community College, Minnesota] did a survey and they revealed the results to the faculty and the faculty were stunned by the difference in their agreement about happiness with support staff.... You look at two groups of people who have such radically different lives as faculty and support staff in terms of finances and workload. Of course the support staff are comparatively less happy. What's so shocking about that? What was shocking is that faculty were surprised that the support staff were not feeling as good and living as well as they were.

Cameron commented on being surprised that so many faculty at another college were unaware of the difference in working conditions between faculty and staff. S/he believes that faculty enjoy better pay, more autonomy, and better working conditions in comparison to staff, but was shocked that other faculty may not be aware of those differences.

Taylor had an interesting and alternative view of how staff experience climate. In general, s/he thinks that faculty as a group are treated better, but that how employees are treated is actually more dependent on their immediate supervisor or administrator:

Taylor: I think that they [faculty and staff] are a little different ... [but] I think it varies depending on the leader. I think that each leader ... views the different areas of the

College according to their background, I think. And I really think that that can affect the culture [climate] of the College. I wonder if my old job would've been a different level of stress [than it was before].... I understand we have budget constraints.... I understand, financially why they're on the table. But that certainly affects culture [climate] and I think that that can create sometimes some divisiveness between staff and faculty, and I think that that's really unfortunate because frankly, all of us are needed for the end product. But I think that we spend a lot of time so much in our own house and in our own room of the house that we forget that we're all necessary. And that affects the culture and the climate.

Taylor uses both terms "culture" and "climate," but is actually referring to climate.

Taylor thinks that each administrator or supervisor perceives situations and their role in the College differently, so part of a staff member's perception of climate will depend on the department they are in. Taylor has experienced staff and faculty working conditions, and is familiar with the staff climate under several presidents, as well as prior to the merger. Taylor also sees budgetary cuts and constraints as negatively affecting climate, especially in regard to staff layoffs. The divisiveness s/he is referring to is the sense among staff that faculty have not been proportionately affected by layoffs and budget cuts. Taylor has also seen the comparative isolation of both groups (staff and faculty) from each other and laments the lost opportunities and problems ensuing from that. Taylor's perceptions echo those of Montana and Darby.

Staff have more opportunities to advance.

Six of the faculty members interviewed are teaching faculty who do not have experience in a staff position, and do not work closely with staff. These faculty are more limited in discussing their perceptions of staff and the workload or stresses of staff compared to their own. Lee thought that staff were more protected from the impact of higher administrative decisions by their intermediate-level supervisors:

Lee: I think staff would [rank the climate survey items] the same.... I personally think it would be about the same. However, staff seems to be a little, and I don't know if this is

true or not, but I always think they're a little bit more insulated from administration. They have people who are directly above them and they seem to just go like a homing [pigeon] ... right to them. And I don't think they have the contact with the upper administration that faculty do.

Lee believes that staff experiences of climate would be the same as faculty, so they would express similar opinions on the Climate Survey. In this comment, Lee is referring to the Middle Management Association (MMA) supervisors. In general, each staff department has a middle-level manager (also in a union, MMA) and who, in turn, report to an administrator. Lee's view is that the staff who are in a reporting structure to the MMA supervisors are more protected from interference by administrators. The voices of staff that I interviewed suggested that is not the case, and that currently the MMA supervisors had little voice and ineffective advocacy with administration. Montana, Darby, and Blair viewed the MMA supervisors as generally having stressful responsibility, but little authority when it came to being supported by the ranking administrators. Darby also commented previously on believing that the Executive VP was much more "pushy and coercive" with staff than faculty.

Another observation by several faculty was their feeling that staff have more opportunity to advance within the organization than faculty do. Kai is one of the faculty who thinks that advancement is primarily open to staff:

Kai: From a faculty perspective, I don't know how much one can advance. For staff, yes; I think we've seen ... people who started in really low positions and worked their way up to be administration or near administration.

Kai is referring to staff members who have changed positions internally, and received promotions and advancement – some from very low classifications. S/he does not think that faculty have as much of an opportunity to advance.

Parker also thinks that staff can advance, more so than faculty, and, in some cases where it does not seem warranted:

Parker: I think a lot of people are maybe advanced that want it, that shouldn't be.... I think probably more so true with staff. But it just seems like people all of a sudden are like really big deals and they really haven't done anything to prove that, or to get there. But when you've been here so long, you get the idea that maybe you should be king. You know what I mean?... It would always kind of upset me.

Parker is referring to staff members who have changed positions internally, and received promotions and advancement. Many of these staff members completed their Associate degrees after being hired at Riverland, and went on to earn Bachelor's and even Master's degrees after that. Parker thinks that some staff members who have been promoted did so without having to meet the same criteria as others would have and did not earn or deserve the promotions.

Cameron also thinks that there were more opportunities for staff than faculty to improve their positions and truly advance:

Cameron: Well, that's kind of the problem, is that if you want to stay in the faculty, that basically there isn't any [opportunity for advancement]. So, yes, if [faculty] want to advance, it consists of going to an administrative [position] or ... it's even hard to count a department coordinating position as advancement, because it's still a faculty position, basically. So there's an area where it's not, but it could just be the nature of our not having rank or anything. I don't know much about with the support staff. There are actually openings. There seems to be adequate opportunity. I get the impression that there probably is more opportunity internally there, than there has been at other periods of time, but this is superficial information. But people do seem to move around within jobs and stay within the institution.

Cameron points out that because faculty are not ranked under our contract, and can never supervise another faculty member, there are not really opportunities to stay in faculty and advance. One could go into administration, if there were openings and a faculty member was interested. S/he notes that there have been many internal promotions among staff, and that currently it seems as though staff can advance, if they are interested and qualified, and that this is definitely truer now than it has been under previous administrations.

Drew also discussed the idea that faculty have no real means of advancement, but that there are real opportunities for advancement for staff:

Drew: I guess if you're faculty, what are you going to advance to? I mean, you can be better or you can do Continuing Ed, you can advance your degree ... but I don't know. I guess for staff there's probably more opportunity for advancement if they wanted to, again, continue their education and then move up to a higher position. When all the Student Services got rearranged I think that there was some people that kind of got bumped up, and some people that got a little bump down.

Drew does not think there are real, legitimate opportunities for faculty advancement, other than professional development. S/he does think that if staff continue their education, they could advance, and some have. S/he also comments that the Student Services restructuring seemed to promote some and demote others. Restructuring and reorganization are topics that will be addressed more in the upcoming sections of this chapter. See Appendix F for more information on what these terms are referring to at Riverland.

Jesse also notes that Community College faculty, under the Minnesota State College Faculty contract, do not have any ranking among faculty, and s/he was not sure that what others thought was advancement by staff members was legitimate promotion:

Jesse: There aren't [different] level of faculties, so if you're faculty and you want to advance, you can get into administration, you can chair committees and do anything like that as well, that would be a little bit, but it's not really an advancement. For other staff it appears to be that they advance, but I don't really know for sure. I don't know really if getting the new job titles and then having no job description and still trying to have to justify your existence is an advancement or not.

Jesse also notes that faculty do not have real options for promotion as a faculty member. S/he went on to suggest that s/he thinks staff do, but then reconsidered. S/he notes that many staff, in the restructuring, have new job titles and are on the organizational chart, but do not have job descriptions or responsibilities delineated yet. Jesse is not sure if those were promotions or advancement, or not.

Bailey comments that becoming an administrator may be an opportunity for faculty to advance, but that staff may not have the same opportunities:

Bailey: There is opportunity for advancement, but I want to be a faculty person and I think that a natural progression from faculty would be some sort of administrator and I am not interested.... You can be in a leadership role, and now we have associate dean, and dean roles open up and, you know, you could try for those if you really were interested ... and some staff might feel that they are where they are.

Bailey believes that faculty advancement consists of moving to an administrative role, but also pointed out that there are faculty leadership roles, which some might consider advancement. S/he thought that staff might feel more locked in with less room for advancement.

When asked about staff and faculty perceptions, Parker offered an idea that if someone within the organization is discontented, it may be due to a bad experience with a particular supervisor or an unwanted situation:

Parker: Yes, it'd be interesting if you [were unhappy about] something like that, it would probably be that you were directly involved with a situation that you didn't like the way it went. I think that ... all rests on the supervisors. But yet I know that other people that have other deans are really upset and frustrated with their dean. Same college, totally different response to how they're being treated.

In this way, Parker echoes Taylor's thinking that some of the staff perceptions of climate had come from their experience in their departments/units, and that some of those perceptions would be impacted by the supervisors of those areas. S/he also thinks that some faculty are frustrated with their deans and some are not.

Jesse points out that faculty, staff, and administrators would all have varying perspectives which would influence how they perceived the treatment of each of the three groups:

Jesse: I can see this because in every question you asked I'm thinking to myself, "Well, it depends on which point of view you're coming from, are you coming from the faculty point of view, from the staff point of view, or the administrative point of view?... So there's going to be a very low agreement between the three groups, and it again, it's not because any of the three groups think that they know best ... or that they're trying to get out of responsibility or not do their job or hate the College or whatever, it's just that there's a different mindset and a different way of looking at things, different protections, different vulnerabilities.

Jesse has been involved in faculty leadership in a variety of ways. Jesse's exposure to

these different ways of thinking about things has provided an ability to think that almost every question can be considered from different perspectives within the organization. S/he thinks that the three different groups of faculty, staff, and administrators will make up their own subset or group that results from their different circumstances and perceptions.

Drew also has experience in faculty leadership, and comments on realizing that at least some staff members felt less able to express their opinions:

Drew: I think that some [staff] people think that they don't have a voice or they've felt like their voice has been squashed, because I've been in different committee meetings saying, "Well, my supervisor won't let me say that," and I'll say, "Well, just say it anyway!" "Well, I can't because I'll be in trouble." And part of that I think is, maybe in the past, they've carried some baggage with them saying that, before I've had a supervisor and a got squashed down by something or whatever. I [also] think it is the inability or unwillingness to take that step to move forward and just say something, because for fear of, "I might get in trouble, or I might not be accepted, or somebody's going to be mad at me." Staff, I've seen it more in staff. I think it's maybe more of a personality difference, but I think people can definitely say things, and I haven't seen anybody get in trouble because they've said something. And I haven't heard of anybody getting disciplined because they said something, I think it's just a perception that they might.

Drew has experienced, in a committee leadership role, having staff who felt they could not speak their minds freely, and were concerned about negative consequences and reprisal if they did give an unpopular opinion. Drew does not understand this and thinks it may be a mistaken belief on the part of staff. S/he believes that since s/he hasn't seen any of these negative consequences of staff speaking out, that it might not be happening, or might have been due to "getting squashed" by a supervisor in the past.

Jesse was uncertain about whether staff would have the same protection from reprisal for reporting improprieties. S/he was responding to a climate survey item about reporting without fear of reprisal. S/he said, "Again, there's a divide here [an effective method exists for employees to report suspected improprieties without fear of reprisal]. I think there is for

faculty.... For staff, I'm unsure." Jesse believes that although faculty can report or speak out about problems or improprieties without reprisal, s/he is not sure that would be true of staff.

One of the overall themes to emerge from this group of six faculty was that these faculty did not seem to be aware of the day-to-day working conditions and stress levels of staff. Conversely, the staff interviewed (other than Montana) also did not reveal much understanding of or empathy for faculty stresses and concerns. The people who bridged that awareness of the "other" were the group of four faculty who have had close, prolonged association with staff, and Montana, who has taught as an adjunct faculty member. The polarity and lack of understanding between staff and faculty produces a tension and lack of understanding that may contribute to creating dysfunction within the organization.

Faculty view of staff importance to AQIP.

Skylar, Blair, Dakota, and Montana spoke about this in the previous section and said that they were hoping for more involvement. Their perceptions were that academics in general, and Student Learning Outcomes (SLO) assessment in particular, were the primary focus of the AQIP effort. Faculty perspectives differed in that some saw AQIP at Riverland as being inclusive of staff in this regard. Tristan, Kelly, and Bailey thought that the AQIP effort is equal across the entire College. Tristan says:

Tristan: I believe that more people have had a voice in AQIP than previously in whatever we were doing before. But I feel like as a College, everybody's had their opportunity to have input about what our priorities should or shouldn't be. I think back to faculty development days where there was all the breakouts, we went in different groups and you talked about different topics and they were brought back.... Because I feel like if people are involved and they're empowered to feel like they're part of the process, yes then I think that you're going to get better change, than if it's just a select group of people trying to make a change, or trying to improve something. I think there's got to be more stakeholders involved.

Tristan thinks that more people have had a voice in AQIP than in the previous traditional accreditation process, and that everyone has had an opportunity to help choose the priorities that are focused on in AQIP. Tristan believes that this is much better, and that having more stakeholders is the best way to go. S/he also thinks that based on their early experiences in AQIP, staff have had an equal role in the process.

Kelly also thinks that AQIP has been very inclusive and that anyone can participate in it:

Kelly: The one thing that I think AQIP does and has done is it's added layers to our re-accreditation; I think there are more people that are at different levels at the College that are more involved. So it would be staff people as well as administrators as well as faculty and so it seemed more inclusive; where before I would think the accreditation was more faculty-driven and so I do think it's opened up for staff people to be more involved in it ... [which] I think is a positive thing.

Kelly thinks that AQIP has added "layers" to re-accreditation, which means more people at different levels of the College are involved. S/he believes this includes faculty, staff, and administrators, which seems more inclusive. Kelly believes that it was more "faculty-driven" under the traditional accreditation process, and that the inclusiveness of AQIP is positive. Kelly works closely with staff and has stated many perceptions similar to staff, but may be unaware that staff may feel left out of AQIP involvement. Bailey thinks involvement with AQIP depends on the perspective. S/he says, "[AQIP is] not just for faculty, although faculty seem to think that they're more involved with the effort. And I bet you, if you talk to a staff person, they think they're just as involved with the effort." Bailey thinks that faculty seem to think they are more involved, but s/he thinks staff will say the same thing. That may have been true of some staff during the early years of AQIP, as explained in the staff section, but based on the previous staff comments, is not as likely to be true now.

Taylor views AQIP involvement from a cross-institutional perspective. S/he also has suggestions for how that could be done:

Taylor: Sometimes I think [AQIP is] seen as a faculty member's job. And it isn't. The whole institution needs to be involved. So, one thing I wish we would do more of at our duty days is to cross-section our staff and faculty and spend more time working collaboratively on paid days ... or to come up with some projects or to work together to solve some of these problems. And I think that that would help us. We do a lot, faculty-wise. We don't do as much collaboratively.... I think it would be very beneficial.

Taylor is interested in promoting faculty-staff collaborative efforts. S/he sees this as being beneficial for AQIP projects as well, and offers a suggestion to "cross-section" staff and faculty to work collaboratively on problem-solving or developing projects. Taylor suggests:

Taylor: That would help address this trust and the sense of, "We're so busy, we're so busy, we're so busy." Well, if we worked more collaboratively, then maybe we wouldn't all feel as stressed as we do. Because we're in it together. So, I think that would be very beneficial.

Taylor believes this type of collaboration would help ameliorate trust issues between faculty and staff, reduce stress levels, and lighten everyone's workload. In this last section on faculty perceptions of staff involvement in AQIP, the faculty who commented on it were genuinely interested in the staff's involvement in AQIP, believed that it is happening, and think it is positive for the College. There is a gap between the staff and faculty perceptions of AQIP involvement. Staff feel that their input was sought and their opinions valued earlier in the process, but are not now.

In the responses to the open-ended questions in the 2012 Climate Survey, there were no comments that could be identified as coming from faculty that seemed to indicate that faculty view staff disrespectfully, or disregard their contributions to the institution. There were two comments about wanting to value staff and faculty equally, with the most comprehensive one stating: "Encourage input equally of faculty and staff, use that input to make improvements, or [explain] why the input could not be used" (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 83).

This section presented views that emerged in the interview data of staff and faculty each

regarding “the other.” Staff tend to see faculty as a far more privileged group in the institution, with the sense that faculty have more institutional power and influence, more union protection, better compensation, more autonomy, and are more valued and important in the AQIP effort. Climate survey responses reinforced these ideas and gave rise to another concern: that faculty disrespect or disregard staff contributions. On the other hand, faculty seemed largely unaware of the staff concerns and working conditions, other than the four faculty who had had more contact with and more knowledge of staff. The only area related to staff that most faculty commented on was related to the Climate Survey item which asks about opportunity for advancement. Staff did not comment on faculty advancement. Faculty generally did not see real opportunity for faculty to advance, but they did think opportunities for were available for staff advancement. Faculty also seemed to value staff input into AQIP and assumed that they were still involved with the AQIP effort.

What emerges from the data are two groups who generally lack an awareness of what working life is like for the other group. However, the concerns that staff have about inequality with faculty and lack of respect from them paint a darker picture than the staff’s lack of awareness regarding faculty stresses and problems. This disparity between the perceptions of the staff and faculty groups sets the stage for the next section on climate. In the upcoming section, staff and faculty give voice to their experiences regarding their working environments, relationships with administration, and their general sense of treatment in the organization. The dichotomy between the faculty and staff groups will emerge in sharper definition in regard to climate.

PERCEPTIONS OF CLIMATE

As noted in the previous section, the interview participants were presented with the lowest-ranked Institutional Climate Survey items, all of which related to climate in some way. This combination approach to questions about climate elicited in-depth commentary from the staff employees. They provided particularly rich, detailed descriptions that illustrated their perceptions of a negative climate for staff at the College that is rife with fear (particularly of job loss), lack of trust, and resentment of administrators. When presented with the same information and questions, faculty had a generally more positive attitude about climate, about feeling valued and supported, and tended to rank climate, mutual trust, and attitudes toward administration much more positively. In this section, I present staff and faculty perspectives on climate that emerged from the data.

As the interview data was analyzed, five areas within climate emerged. These five categories were first identified in analyzing the information provided by the staff regarding their perceptions of climate, but the faculty comments also related to these general categories. Thus, both the faculty and staff perspectives in this section are organized into the following categories: (a) overall climate; (b) stress, restructuring, and workload issues; (c) sense of value and recognition; (d) sense of mutual trust; and (e) administration and climate.

Staff Perceptions of Climate

This section explores staff perceptions regarding climate at Riverland Community College around the five themes identified in the introduction above. As expressed by staff, the five categories discussed in depth are: (a) a perceived negative climate, one of genuine fear: fear of job loss or change, further budget reductions, competition, bullying, harassment, and

intimidation); (b) a perceived negative climate of increased stress, increased workloads, job changes and restructuring in several areas of the College; (c) a sense of reduced value, of not being heard or cared about, and of not being recognized; (d) a marked sense of lack of mutual trust due to many contributing factors; (e) the impact of administrative management styles on climate, including top-down decision-making, assigning responsibility without authority, and failures of communication. Because the terms “reorganization” and “restructuring” are used frequently and may have various meanings at Riverland, an explanation of these terms is provided in Appendix F.

Overall climate.

In this section, I examine the experiences of climate, the “how it feels to work here” type of perceptions, and I will introduce staff members who spoke compellingly to how staff perceive the College’s climate. The overall sense of fear is the most striking impression. Fear of job loss, fear of job changes in further reorganization, and fear of voicing resistance or concerns are expressed by many of the staff members interviewed.

Blair spoke to the idea that the recent reorganizations, layoffs, and budgetary cuts have created a negative climate overall:

Blair: I think the structural changes and reorganization have been negatively impacting ... morale and everything else.... And I think that’s maybe related to the budgetary cuts that we’ve undergone that people really don’t know if their job is safe or what’s going to happen.

Blair sees the impact of the job changes in the College due to restructuring. These have primarily affected staff and produced a very negative effect on morale. S/he explains that employees do not know if their jobs are secure when the budget is reduced again and are living with a constant sense of insecurity.

Darby notes the overall negative morale and climate of fear among staff also:

Darby: I think currently the climate here is in a negative place... Because of the people in the positions that were eliminated and the people that don't have jobs anymore, I think that there's a certain level of anxiety that people have that their position would go away... I think that there's a lot of tension campus-wide, but I think it has to do with the fact that so many people are gone, and so much more work has been put onto peoples' plates and varied types of work that they didn't have before.

Darby views the climate as being negative overall and notes that staff are still anxious that their jobs could be eliminated. S/he thinks there is a campus-wide tension that is due to the impact of the restructuring on staff. Darby believes that the new jobs created by the restructuring and their increased workload have contributed to this tension. S/he also believes that they are struggling with too much work and too many "varied types of work." Jobs like this are unmanageable, but staff are afraid to object, fearing retaliation could mean job elimination:

Darby: You know you don't really want to voice anything too strongly, because at some level everyone realizes, "Gee, I guess I'm lucky I have a job." Yes, because people that they knew don't work here anymore, and their jobs went away. I think people are afraid that that could happen to anybody, I don't know if they feel better now, because [the budget and] things are a little better than they were, the economy's a little bit better, but I just think that they're constantly worried that that's going to happen.

Darby is relaying a reluctance to "voice anything too strongly" because staff members fear job loss so greatly. No one feels immune or safe, because they all know someone who lost their job, and they think it could happen to anyone. Darby believes that this produces a sense of vulnerability and a pervasive anxiety. S/he thinks that even though the budget seems more stable now, there is still a constant sense of worry about job elimination. Blair and Darby have previously described low morale, constant anxiety about job loss, and fear of dissension.

While Dakota's responses were primarily focused on his/her department, s/he did point out some similarities between climate among staff overall and staff in his/her department:

Dakota: I think the culture [climate] hasn't really changed. But, especially with the layoffs people are still afraid of losing their jobs. I still know that [fear is] still going on,

even in my area. I almost feel as though we live in such a fearful culture [climate] of everybody trying, at least in my department, trying to outdo somebody else, or stay ahead. I don't feel there's good teamwork in my department.

Dakota describes an environment in which there is fear of job loss, even in his/her department. Dakota's perception of others' responses to that fear is to be competitive. S/he describes this climate of fear which Darby and others discuss, and says the effect is that workers are trying to "outdo" each other and to "stay ahead," presumably in the interests of greater job security. All of this adversely affects teamwork, and creates a difficult intradepartmental dynamic.

Note to the reader: Historically, there has been very little job loss at Riverland, due to increasing enrollment over several years. However, when budget cuts did necessitate staff reductions, they were unlikely to occur in the areas supervised by the Vice President of Human Relations and Employee Relations (VPHR), and the Vice President of Finance and Facilities. These Vice Presidents have had a great deal of influence on the President in terms of specific budget cuts and, up to 2009, had largely resisted personnel reductions in their areas. From 2002 to 2009, the voluntary employee reductions at Riverland originated primarily from retirements, and involuntarily were primarily from faculty layoffs, while the overall number of employees in Finance and Facilities and HR/Public Relations grew. The staff employees interviewed have all been employed during this time and are aware of how stable positions in these departments have been, compared with other areas of the college.

Table 4.1 presents the changes in numbers of full-time employees. The reduction in full-time staff positions between 2010 and 2012 can almost all be accounted for in retirements, but the part-time position reductions cannot. In terms of faculty numbers, the net loss of 24 positions between 2002 and 2012 is partially due to retirements without replacement, and partially due to closing programs and faculty layoffs. The faculty layoffs during this time were career program faculty and were due to low-enrollment programs.

Montana was also very articulate on the topic of overall staff climate. S/he discusses the prevalent fear of job loss and the feared connection between reporting undesirable results and job loss:

Montana: I'm just saying that this is the culture [climate] that we have. . . we don't have the [AQIP] culture [climate] we need to – people are afraid to set targets, because they're afraid we're going to miss them. . . I think people are afraid because a) they don't know how to do it, and b) that they are just indeed going to find out that things aren't being

done well and everybody's afraid for their jobs... We had a speaker on Friday that said something, he was talking about his children and that just by yelling at them it creates fear in the children, instead of trying to talk to them calmly. I think in a sense, there's a lot of yelling going on, which is creating a lot of fear.

Montana has been concerned that the College is not tracking and analyzing information the way an AQIP institution should. S/he believes that the lack of tracking is due to the fear that targets won't be met, and then the individuals responsible for the areas of unmet goals will lose their jobs. Montana reiterates the statements of the other staff that everyone is afraid for their jobs. S/he also comments that being "yelled at" about what isn't going well is creating more fear instead of improving the situation. Montana believes that fearful supervisors are compounding the problem by putting more pressure on their staff, who in turn become even more fearful.

Montana also discussed the increasing sense of frustration that is leading to more expression of dissatisfaction in his/her department, and uncharacteristic behaviors. For instance, people who have been silent are becoming more vocal, and vice versa:

Montana: People have been way more vocal than I've ever heard them. You have to be professional in meetings and not say how you feel, and all of a sudden, boom. People are very outspoken. And this is the way it's going to be. I think it's because they're just defensive.... It's not a positive thing. No. There's a lot of water cooler talk. The worst I've seen in 15 years and it's so sad ... a lot of mumbling going on. A lot of frustration ... when there's stuff that doesn't get addressed and people get defensive, and start to just crab at each other.... And I've seen some meetings where people just won't say anything, because as soon as they open their mouth, they get cut down. And then I see some people that go the complete opposite way and won't stop talking because they're going to get their point across no matter what anybody else thinks. Because we cannot come to a consensus, hardly at all anymore. It's ... "I think it should be this way! And I think it should be this way!" And we walk out, and we have no decision made, because nobody is willing to come to a consensus. And everybody's very defensive.

Montana is describing how the climate has worsened in his/her department, how it has degraded from silence to the type of conflict and mood in which some co-workers have become more vocal in expressing frustration, and abandoned the desire to reach a consensus in meetings or compromise to get the work done. Others have been treated harshly in that environment and

fear saying anything. Montana seems to be describing an environment in which people are so fearful and frustrated that they are turning on each other, and as a consequence of that, are feeling very defensive about the way they are being treated. All of this has resulted in a department where people who formerly worked harmoniously together now have difficulty getting along with each other. The reasons for this are explored further in the discussion of the perceptions about restructuring and how it evolved.

Kiley describes the pervasive sense of anxiety and uncertainty regarding job security and the fear of expressing concerns to upper administration:

Kiley: People are nervous and they're worried and you know, "Are we having jobs? Are we not having jobs?" I think that's a big thing. And there's certain things you see going on, and I don't think I could probably go up to the president or vice president and say, "Hey, I don't think this is right." Because I'm afraid [of] the repercussions.

Kiley has many contacts among staff after serving in a support position, and is trusted by support staff. Staff confide in Kiley about his/her fear of job loss and the sense of worry that brings. Kiley says that s/he would like to discuss concerns with upper administration, but is fearful of the consequences. This reinforces the description of fear of retaliation, and this fear has a limiting effect on communication upwards in the organizational structure, as Kiley's comment illustrates.

Skylar was introduced in the first section on faculty and staff groups, along with the desire s/he has to see the positive side to everything. Although s/he is positive about the support and environment in his/her own department, s/he initiated a discussion about negative climate overall and its possible causes:

Skylar: People are afraid for their jobs ... it just seems like everything's "With restructuring, there are no certainties"... Now we know a lot of how it has fallen out. But when we do hear about budget projections and that they're going to continue to fall. That definitely lends to the idea that perhaps the jobs will change. I mean, we already know that certain positions aren't refilled, they're left open because of the budget. So, I

think for a lot of people, that might affect their perception in other areas as well. I still believe we have a mutually supportive type of culture [climate] in my department. However, it has been stretched and thinned and we've all felt a lot more underlying stress due to the budget climate and that kind of thing. The sense of security would be different now than before. The job market is more competitive, too, and unemployment's higher. Unfortunately I do feel that, with the prospects of layoffs and the budget climate, it colors peoples' perceptions in general. And it kind of makes people just feel more guarded and it's a more uncertain time, at least from a staff member's perception.

Skylar is also explaining that there is a climate of fear in regard to jobs, and it is worsened by the projections of falling budgets to come. S/he discusses the idea that jobs could change, which people also fear, and that open positions might not be filled, leading to more work for others. Skylar believes that the sense of security felt previously by staff is affected both by the internal sense of job and budget uncertainty, and by the poor external employment market. S/he describes the "stretching and thinning" with the lack of resources, and concludes that all of those uncertainties, risks, and budget projections mentioned have led to a sense of being more guarded in general. Again, this climate being described is one of fear when it comes to expression, particularly upwards.

Blair, Darby, Montana, Dakota, Kiley, and Skylar were presented in this section with this view of the College climate as a whole. They all share the commonality of being staff members who have either held several staff positions or have a staff position that requires campus-wide contact with other staff. They all play key non-supervisory roles in the organization, and are looked to in their areas as non-positional leaders. This gives them an opportunity to connect with, observe and comment on the staff climate overall.

Jordan also describes a negative and fearful climate, but in this case, it is an intradepartmental climate that is producing the "toxic" atmosphere:

Jordan: I think culture [climate] as a whole is good, but I would be really, really afraid [for a new person] coming here because of the internal atmosphere. The climate of [this department] is extremely bad. There are articles coming out about bullying [and]

incivility in [this area] and so on ... and it is individuals, [and] it gets down to agendas, that kind of thing, who think that they should be in control, and if they're not then they make it hell. Literally nobody wants to work with each other. I always felt that I could pretty much walk a neutral line because I said, "I've got to work with all of you"... then all of a sudden I got put under attack because I said no to something. And I literally do ask myself, "Why do I stay?"... [Before], they got mad at each other, but they just yelled at each other and it wasn't this undermining, insidious kind of stuff going on behind the back, just stirring the pot kind of stuff. None of that was going on. They just full-fledged just fought to-the-point.... No, [now] this is way more mean-spirited. This is real toxic. What we had back then could be worked out.

Jordan talked extensively about problems in his/her department. S/he described a department where no one wants to work together, and where some individuals bully others to gain control. Jordan is fearful of being attacked again and wonders why s/he stays in the position. It is an interesting question that s/he talked about in the interview because s/he does think s/he has a range of employment choices, which was not true of all the staff interviewed. Jordan is most concerned about a worsening environment in their department, where s/he and others are vulnerable to mean-spirited co-workers choosing to create a toxic environment that the others feel powerless to address. The dynamic that Jordan describes has different origins than the other staff members discussed. Jordan does not associate its cause as administrative actions. Nonetheless, Jordan is experiencing a climate of fear and feeling bullied in the workplace. S/he feels s/he has received support from his/her direct supervisor, but that supervisor has not been empowered to intervene. So now Jordan sees no recourse, as s/he also attempted to address it through the prescribed human resource channels. S/he believes that the complaint was not taken seriously, and now feels more susceptible to retaliation. Jordan also believes that all supervisory levels above know about the bullying, and have chosen not to address it.

These concerns were reflected in a comment on the 2012 Climate Survey. One comment was:

Communication is still poor. Decisions have been made in the last three years that have

harmed the College immensely. People are afraid to speak up for fear of retaliation. Inequity is high. You have some employees that have taken on added responsibility and received reclassification which means higher salary and then others that did not get reclassified, received nothing except the additional work. You have several managers that supervise three or less employees, in one case a supervisor that doesn't supervise anyone and then other have five, even 10 employees and are expected to keep up. In the last year, two upper cabinet employees have left. Why? Very valued, smart, motivated women. (*Institutional Climate Survey, 2012, p. 99*)

The concerns expressed here mirror those expressed in this section, and add the dimension of “inequity,” as well as questions about gender equality.

Stress, restructuring, and workload issues.

The second aspect of the negative climate reported by most staff was the increased stress due to increased workload. This stress was initially attributed to budget cuts which, in turn, led to layoffs, attrition, and restructuring due to those cuts. In the later section on trust, I discuss the perception that budget is the excuse given for the cuts, not the real reason. All seven staff members interviewed reported feeling increased stress and increased pressure to complete more work than could realistically be done within their jobs. In the last section, Darby referred to this as “more work...and varied types of work.” Dakota provided an example of this in his/her own department.

Dakota discusses the results of eliminating the supervisory position for his/her department, and then not having support for the increased workload that resulted:

Dakota: You don't eliminate one full [supervisory] position and not let it affect the rest of us. When we're on the bottom, you can't. So there you go, stretching more, stretching more, getting more work, less support, absolutely no kind of mentoring, and I will say we really lack any kind of mentoring.

Dakota is feeling more and more “stretched,” like Skylar in the previous section, and unhappy about not receiving support or mentoring. S/he points out that the increased stress and

workload, decreased teamwork, and picking up parts of the management position, have all contributed to the fearful, competitive climate discussed in the previous section. Because of this, Dakota feels very burned out, not appreciated or rewarded, and articulates how that leads to a lack of caring and resentment of others:

Dakota: I still know that [fear of job loss] is still going on, even in my area, but I've changed. I'm not afraid of it, I'm not afraid of being laid off, in fact I think that's what a burn-out position puts you in. You just reach a point where you come in and do your work on automatic pilot. I feel as though I don't even have the energy to get to my job description up-to-date to find another job, because it's like being in an abusive relationship, and I shouldn't laugh when I say that, but it's burned out, and it's really, really hard when you see other people around you making more money.... It's like that behavior is rewarded, they get trained, and they get paid more money. We reward behavior around here that I don't feel should be rewarded. I don't think we have good leadership in our ... department, I don't think we have any at all. It's a fear-based, bullying almost, type of leadership.

Dakota talks about the climate of fear that still exists for others, then explains how feeling so stressed and burned out has resulted in coming in and not caring about job insecurity, or seeking another job; s/he simply doesn't have the energy. S/he describes this as being on "automatic pilot," and how that and the bullying s/he described earlier feels like being in an abusive relationship. Dakota also describes how s/he keenly feels the lack of assistance or training and wishes that support were available:

Dakota: I don't really feel as though I've ever had assistance, helping me with my job. Right up until right now, what's happening. No, I really don't. I think that's one thing that I've lacked in my job is mentorship, leadership ... appropriate training ... perhaps a lot of that has to do with the kind of person I am, too. I have a tendency to just jump right out there and find it wherever I can, the training I need, and if that means making calls to MnSCU or whatever, I will do that.

Dakota acknowledges that s/he has learned to take the initiative on training, but has never really been offered any help, mentoring, or training. When the department was restructured to absorb the loss of the supervisor mentioned previously in this section, that kind of support for the newly-created jobs for existing workers would have been even more crucial. So Dakota has a

number of concerns about the staff in his/her department: they are being asked to do work they don't know how to do, and while mentoring or training is not provided, they will still be evaluated on it, all in an environment with the constant anxiety of job elimination. This adds a significant burden to everyone in the department along with the extra workload, and it is a demoralizing combination. Dakota has articulated what the long-term effect of this is: a feeling of burn-out, lack of energy, and surviving day-to-day in a department where negative bullying and competition are part of everyday life.

Montana also discussed how the restructuring impacted the staff in his/her department. Montana explains that because restructuring was completed so quickly, it was not determined whether the work was redistributed appropriately and what the needs of the staff in the new jobs would be:

Montana: It is the most stressful that I have seen since I've been here. Truthfully. The whole ... restructuring at the time that we made all of the cuts has been extremely stressful. Because we didn't really have time to even deal with the cuts and then we got re-structured and I think we're finding out that we don't have enough people to do all of the positions.

Montana articulates how stressful the sudden changes were for staff, and how the budget cuts, the restructuring, and job changes happened very quickly. As a result no one really had a chance to ascertain if the restructured jobs were even manageable, so the intensive stress Montana is describing is now due to the workload created by these restructured jobs.

Montana was very affected by the restructuring in his/her department. S/he and Kelly, a faculty member, discussed the restructuring in their departments at length and had thoughtful observations to share. Kelly's sense of the effect of this restructuring on climate is brought into this structure later in the faculty climate discussion. Montana's and Kelly's accounts dovetailed in discussing the climate of fear, the sense of stress, the unworkable positions being created and

enforced, and the discouragement as a result of that. Montana talks about how his/her job has too much work in it, and how s/he dreads the amount of work there is to do every day:

Montana: Well, it's not like I wake up dreading coming to work every day, but I dread the work every day. Does that make sense? I would love to stay here. My goal is to retire here. But I have looked for other positions.... It's not a bad job, and I'm not saying I don't enjoy working with the students, because the only satisfaction I get out of my job now is when a student walks away and says, "Thank you..." The problem is, on paper, it adds up to a hundred percent, but in reality, I would not have designed it this way. No. It's too much on many, many people's plates. It's just too much work.

Montana explained how all the new positions in his/her area have 50% of this, 50% of that, 75% of this, and so on. S/he explained how all the "new" jobs under restructuring weren't "bad" jobs, but were totally unworkable due to increased workload, the diversity of duties involved, and the sheer number of responsibilities that had to be completed in a 40 hour work week. So the only remaining job satisfaction is helping students, but even that is limited by having so much on their plates:

Montana: It is hard just because we are so busy. We're either working with students ... or I'm going to spend a matter of an hour at my desk today. Then, when you get back, you're so busy to get through all the voicemail, you just can't do it. One day Fall semester, I was supposed to leave and I had 69 voicemails. You just don't have time to go through and call all those people back every single day. And it's terrible ... service. I hate going home knowing that I didn't call somebody back. Nor can you work an 80-hour-a-week job. They won't pay us overtime.... So when it's time for me to go home at 4:30, I'm going home. That's the one thing I have control over.

Montana is describing a work situation in which the amount of work to be accomplished is so overwhelming, the only locus of control s/he has is to not work uncompensated time. S/he, and the others in his/her department, find this very stressful and frustrating. Montana describes how his/her department staff are responding to the crushing workload:

Montana: Because we'll sit in a meeting and they'll say, "Well, [this department] can do it. [This department] can't do it." Or, "Why doesn't a faculty member do that?" Or "Why can't it be the administrative assistants that do it?" People are being more vocal as to [saying] "This is not fair." It's a fairness thing. That's what it's starting to boil down to. I think it's felt by everybody. Everybody says they have too much work to do and the

reality is almost everybody does have too much work to do. And the stress level has just gone through the roof. It does sound dismal. That's terrible.

The entire division, having absorbed two other departments' work with a net loss in number of positions, is struggling with how to get the work done. Montana describes how they do not think that other College employees are in the same boat. These comments illustrate what is not working about the current structuring of this department. Montana and others describe in this section (and Kelly in the corresponding faculty section) how they have sought redress and tried to make their concerns about the problems with restructuring known to supervisors and administration. The lack of administrative attention to what seems to be a systemic or root cause issue for the combination of stressed and unhappy employees and unaccomplished work is troubling. Montana is also relaying an important message that this situation is resulting in a negative College-wide impact on students and other College staff as well.

Earlier in this structure, Montana described how unmanageable and discordant their department meetings have become. This quote further illustrates this, as well as the sense that they are desperate for relief. Montana concludes:

Montana: And there's so much work to be done that we can't even concentrate and pick a project to work on. I mean, we can't even get our hands around the amount of work. Which means we're getting less done because we just can't [figure out where to start] and to be able to even get into a project and be able to finish – it's not going to happen.

Montana expresses his/her frustration with the lack of a cohesive and manageable job, the overwhelming amount of work, and the stress this is causing in his/her department. S/he describes the sense of having so much to get done, and so many time demands, that s/he can't even figure out how to get started, let alone complete assigned projects. One respondent from the 2012 Climate Survey also spoke to this, saying, "Stop expecting more with less and provide sufficient staff and funding necessary to complete the work" (*Institutional Climate Survey, 2012,*

p. 95). This comment also summarizes the concerns of staff in this section.

Sense of value and recognition.

In this section, I discuss how the staff, who are already feeling fearful and frustrated with work overload, also feel as if no one is listening to them. Of course, feeling as if they aren't heard in their concerns compounds the sense of stress and frustration. This section of the climate structure presents the voices of the staff members who feel that they have no voice and have no ability to influence decisions or have their concerns heard. There are also those who think no one in authority cares about them or their work.

Blair is in an integral role in the college and has been a lead worker in the past. His/her division and department, along with most others in the College, were restructured and his/her department was placed into a different reporting structure and under an inexperienced supervisor. This combination has resulted in a hierarchal communication structure that doesn't allow Blair to directly access the administrators with whom s/he used to work. S/he believes this is denying his/her the access needed to administration to best serve faculty and students:

Blair: I see a lot of pieces sitting out there, which is a nice part of my job. The bad part of my job is that I may see things I have no voice to [address].... There was a time in the college when I had a voice and I could say, "Hey! Look, we're seeing this. Is this something you want to look at?" The department has been moved from an integral part of decision making over to a complete support role.

Blair is describing having information that s/he thinks administrators would find helpful, but is not able to gain the access to communicate with them. Like Kiley earlier, Blair thinks that administrators should be privy to this information, but Blair is trying to communicate and is not being heard. S/he goes on to describe the sense of a preordained conclusion when s/he does connect with administration and laments his/her loss of the ability to be heard and make

decisions:

Blair: And I think sometimes, it's perceived that the administration shows up with a pre-conceived notion of what they're going to do and do not listen to the pieces that there's other contractual obligations that trump suggestions from line workers. And whether that's related to the tough financial times, and the need to make decisions, I can't get a grip on because I'm not involved in those conversations. And, again, since I'm not involved and nobody tells you anything, how would you know? Again, no voice. I have no voice. I've lost the voice and the ability to make a decision and the ability to be heard in the college.

Blair has experienced the frustration and loss from being an influential and integral part of the organization, then "restructured" into a support role with no voice at the administrative level, and little influence at that same decision-making level. His/her statement "nobody tells you anything" is pointing out that in addition to not being heard, s/he is not informed or kept apprised of critical information either. This is a powerful description of what Blair sees as a total lack of influence: s/he is not given an opportunity to be involved, nobody tells his/her anything, and Blair is deprived of a voice and the ability to be heard in the College. Blair is left with a sense of being completely devalued and muted.

Blair further explains the need to hear both positive and negative feedback in order to have employees who are fully invested in the institution:

Blair: And it has to be both positive and negative. You just can't send back the negative stuff and say, "Oh, by the way, you screwed up.".... People work well with a carrot [and] stick sort of thing. You want them to take the carrot, yes we want to improve, and you need that transparency to understand what the organization is doing. If not, people come in, they do their assigned job, and they go home. If you don't allow your people to take ownership of their positions, whatever position it is, then you have somebody who comes in and says, "Oh, okay. My supervisor's given me this work to do, and when I finish that, I'm done for the day."

Blair is describing what happens when s/he doesn't receive the information and feedback required to fully participate in and understand the organization. S/he points out that hearing only the negative feedback, or not giving the opportunity for full exchange of information, will lead to

the type of employee performance that is just punching the time clock. Doing this robs the employee and the College of the opportunities inherent in full partnership. Blair has become increasingly frustrated and demoralized by this situation.

Dakota, like other staff members, is tired of the extra work and comments on being frustrated by the lack of any kind of reward for it:

Dakota: I'm burned out, more work, and more responsibility without authority, which is a horrible form of management, and not having any kind of payback for it. There's no positive reinforcement, there's no, "You did a good job." If it's not bad news, there's no news at all. There's no pay increase [for front line workers]. Where's the motivation? I used to take pride in doing the job itself, but when you're talking about an economy that has fallen ... gas has soared, food has soared, I'm trying to raise a family, medical stuff has soared, I've been piled on at work here.

Dakota sees himself/herself as being "piled on" from every direction at work, with no positive reward in return. His/her poignant statement "if it's not bad news, there's no news at all" is telling of the lack of praise or positive reinforcement from supervisors for a job well done. S/he is enduring all of this with a stagnant salary and increased workload and stress. Dakota is relaying how s/he is struggling to stay afloat, both at work and financially. The phrase "responsibility without authority" is one of the keys to his/her work frustration. I return to this key issue in the last topic in this section, when I discuss the impact of administrative styles on climate.

Skylar, who works so hard to stay positive, echoes the feelings of not being valued or cared about, similar to Blair and Dakota:

Skylar: So much of this is ... perception. It's so subjective. From my perception, yes, I felt a little ... decrease in morale, overall. But it's job security or budget oriented. But it maybe just was the sense of "We're doing our job, we're working really hard, but does anyone even know or care?"... So maybe people feel like that a little bit more.

While acknowledging that s/he is operating on perception, Skylar also asks if anyone even notices or cares about how hard they are working, or how difficult their work environment

has become. Skylar has a new supervisor from the restructuring who had no previous experience and no familiarity with his/her area. For him/her to make this statement speaks of an environment in which management is too overwhelmed or busy to notice and reinforce good work on the part of their staff.

Montana also conveys the frustration of not being listened to when they have tried for redress on the restructuring concerns. This level of frustration and feeling not valued or listened to is also indicative of a negative and highly-stressed climate. Montana explained how the staff in his/her department were not listened to when giving feedback on the new structure in their area:

Montana: It is a good model. But the way that we put it together is not working. It's not staffed so it can work. Right [We are not listened to when say it isn't working] other than to say "you're wrong", or, "wait", or, "give it some time, and it'll work out."

Like Blair, Montana described how s/he and co-workers tried to approach administration with their concerns. Kelly describes a similar effort in the next section. The results have been similar: no ability to be heard, or to influence a better job structure or outcomes. This coupled with increased stress and workload from the restructuring, lead to feelings of not being valued or cared about, as Skylar so eloquently expressed.

In the next section, I convey the concerns about trust and their impact on climate. Again, it is important to remember that as in the aspects of climate previously discussed, lack of trust intertwines with fear of job loss, low morale, budget cuts, increased stress and workloads, the impact of restructuring, a sense of not feeling valued or cared about, and having no voice. Since these all impact climate in a profound way, they are often discussed in tandem with each other.

Sense of mutual trust.

Experiencing mutual trust in the work environment was an area of climate addressed on the biennial climate survey. It has had consistently lower rankings than most other items on the survey over time, but did go up somewhat (from 2002 levels) in 2004 and 2006. It has declined in each of the three surveys since, which is interesting in light of the fact that the College has had stable upper administration during that time. This was one of the climate survey items that was asked about during the employee interviews, and there was a uniformly negative response on the part of staff and the faculty who work closely with staff. Most staff interviewed were eager to discuss their perceptions of mutual trust. These perceptions fall into six categories: a) flat assertions about a general lack of trust, such as between employee groups; b) a lack of trust about information from administration; c) a lack of trust regarding open communication to administration; d) a lack of trust that the cited budget restrictions really were the reasons behind restructuring and employee layoffs; e) a lack of trust about how issues have been or will be addressed by administration; f) a lack of trust regarding supervisory motives and trustworthiness toward individual employees.

Blair discussed the idea of mutual trust. S/he does not believe mutual trust exists on a College-wide basis, and links this lack of trust to budget cuts, reorganization, and lack of communication:

Blair: I think that there is not [an atmosphere of mutual trust that exists at the college]. And I think that's maybe related to the budgetary cuts that we've undergone that people really don't know if their job is safe or what's going to happen. We've had a lot of change in the college, a lot of reorganization. People moved around and [there was] redefining of jobs and I think that most people don't trust what's going on because of that lack of up and down communication.

Blair believes that the combination of budget reductions and reorganization/restructuring, along with redefining role descriptions, has led to lowered trust. S/he is particularly sensitive to

lowered trust due to the lack of communication between administration and the other employees. As s/he said earlier, s/he is experiencing particular problems with communication upwards in the organization, and also feels that no one tells him/her anything, either. This lack of communication with the addition of financial shortages and the uncertainties of reorganization leads to an overall sense of distrust.

Skylar works or has contact with employees college-wide, and s/he enjoys and trusts the people with whom s/he works. However, Skylar thinks that it is different for the East and West campuses of Austin:

Skylar: [Staff] people have worked together and know one another quite well and trust has had time to be established. Now, maybe from one building to the next, maybe that goes down a little bit.... Not to me, because I work in both buildings and I've worked with people in all areas, but I've heard that sentiment being said, that maybe they feel if they work in the West building, they feel maybe not quite as comfortable in the East building. That kind of thing.

Skylar has noticed that the employees who work in the West building do not feel as comfortable or have the same level of trust for the employees in the East building as they do with each other, and vice versa. Because the reorganization/restructuring took place in several departments and across divisions, this necessitated some office relocations. This is stressful for the employees who did not have a choice about the relocation, and as Skylar has noted, has led to some of the sense of distrust. Jordan, Dakota, and Montana discussed the intradepartmental conflicts they were experiencing, and so a newcomer in some of these office areas might also be experiencing lower trust levels due to this factor.

Note to the reader: Some of this lower comfort level that Skylar mentions also is historical. These were two separate colleges until 1996. The East houses most of the Liberal Arts faculty (except for Biology and Chemistry and those assigned to the Owatonna campus), and some staff. The West houses primarily technical programs, many staff members, and Biology and Chemistry. I have had offices in both buildings, and concur with Skylar's assessment of this sense of lack of comfort or trust between the staff members in the different buildings. Faculty are generally assigned to teach in all

locations and spend much less time in their offices than staff, so it is not surprising that s/he didn't mention that kind of effect in faculty.

Darby also commented on the feeling of a lack of trust, and how s/he does not think most employees feel comfortable reporting problems in the current climate:

Darby: I would give [the lowest] rating to an atmosphere of mutual trust. What I'm thinking is...if I was the employee, what would I do? How would I report impropriety or something like that? And I may be able to do that without fear, just because of relationships that I have, but would they? Would any employee be able to do that? I don't think so.

Darby believes if s/he had something that required reporting, s/he could figure out how to do it safely. However, s/he does not think most employees would be able to report sensitive information without fear of reprisal or retaliation and fear of job loss.

All of these comments were made relative to whether or not mutual trust exists or is widespread at the College. Another important aspect of trust was brought up by Darby in his/her discussion of trust. S/he talked about whether information is considered truthful if it is disseminated by administration:

Darby: Because of the people in the positions that were eliminated and the people that don't have jobs anymore, I think that there's a certain level of anxiety that people have that their position would go away, and there seems to be a level of – they don't trust the information that's there, they think that perhaps there's a hidden agenda...There's real information that they're not getting. I think that they think that there's information that they're all getting but that it's actually ultimately that the decision's made by one person or two people, and they don't have an effect over that.

Darby is saying that because of all the restructuring and eliminated positions, people are anxious about the validity of any information they receive from administration. Because of the way that was handled, they think that there is information that everyone is getting that is not the real information, and that the real information is a hidden agenda known only to a few. The perception is that there are only one or two people who make the decisions. This is a powerful statement and is also reflective of comments other staff made to this effect. This sense of

“double-speak” has led to a profound lack of trust in the veracity and trustworthiness of administration/management.

Kiley spoke to the idea that while s/he and other people understood that some information had to be kept confidential, more information earlier in the process of restructuring might have helped a little with the administration’s trust account:

Kiley: But the trust or that sort of a thing. Where, I guess I understand this administration didn’t talk much ... when they were talking about programs being cut or layoffs. But you can understand why they can’t until a decision has been made, so you do have to look at it that way, too. But I know there’s been people [saying] “Why can’t they tell us? You’re going to sit here and make us wonder and worry?” We’ll spend hours and hours thinking about, gossiping about it. Whereas, if we knew, we could be more productive.... So I think that probably had some effect on those [climate survey rankings about mutual trust].

Kiley believes that although confidentiality was important to some of the process, the lack of information prior to the decisions about layoffs was damaging. Then the lack of communication when they were made contributed to staff thinking that administration was not being forthcoming with what people wanted to know. As a result, the anxiety from that time has also fueled a lowering of trust in addition to the restructurings themselves. Kiley, Skylar, Montana, and Blair all mentioned that information about restructuring was top-down and was abruptly announced just prior to changes being made. The impact of this without any discussion of appeal or redress further enhances the lack of trust and sense of future security among the employees affected.

A third aspect of the lowered trust levels of staff is the thinking that although budget was given as a reason for eliminating positions, layoffs, and restructuring, it was actually a “straw man” or just the voiced reason. Darby and Montana discussed that the widespread perception among employees is that the real reason was to eliminate particular people without having to engage the union process for terminations. Darby and Montana who retained employment, but

whose own jobs changed dramatically, spoke to this belief:

Darby: It is a similar time of tension but for different reasons now: lead administration and budget.... I think that people sometimes don't have their jobs anymore as a disciplinary action, but that's not how it was given to them. I think sometimes that people [who] they [lead administration] would rather not have work here, their jobs go away. But I don't think it's because they're disciplined; I think that they're maneuvered. It [eliminating a position] is a way that they get rid of people they don't want to deal with [because of] their behavior or their lack of productivity or whatever. Yes, things happen that way as opposed to, "You're not cutting it," and this is calling it restructuring or layoff. I think people are afraid that they might not have their job and they feel this is what is being said, but they feel that maybe other discussions are happening somewhere else. I know this happens. I've had people say to me, "I think they're going to...." People are afraid there's a huge, elaborate conspiracy about their job going on.

Darby has cross-functional work and contacts College-wide, and other staff have shared with him/her their belief that the restructuring had more to do with whether or not lead administrators wanted them to have jobs or certain jobs than with the budget. This belief illuminates the ongoing fear of job loss and why so many feel they are still vulnerable, regardless of the state of the budget. Again, it also speaks to the belief that there is real information that they are not getting, and what they are being told is not true. Darby refers to this perceived strategy of eliminating people as "maneuvering" them out of jobs. When staff think that administration is always evaluating workers and positions for the next round of restructuring, this contributes to the climate of fear and lack of trust.

Note to the reader: All College employees, except "excluded administrators" (deans, vice presidents, and the president) are in one of six employee unions. The processes differ, but in each case there are significant and time-intensive processes for a termination; from an administrative process and time perspective, it is much easier to eliminate a position than the person in that position, and easier to layoff than terminate. The employees who believe that the restructuring was not about budget cuts are cognizant of this.

Montana also spoke to this idea or perception that there was a hidden agenda or different real reason than that given by administration for the restructuring and layoffs. S/he believes that the restructuring was stimulated by a problem with supervisors not functioning well in their

positions. Instead of addressing that issue appropriately, the positions were eliminated, the work was reorganized, and the supervisors were reassigned. Montana observes:

Montana: Instead of fixing [a problem], we just remove it, instead of really getting to the source of what the issues are and dealing with the source.... We don't solve the problem. Instead of dealing with the incompetence or the weaknesses of the person in charge, with one of the supervisors making all these suggestions and saying, "We've got to do something," [administration says] "Well, let's just eliminate that position and put it all under one supervisor," and so that, to me is where it stems the whole restructuring.

Montana is asserting that instead of analyzing and solving problems when there is something not working, the administrative action tends to be to eliminate what is perceived as the source of the problem. When that is a key area or work role, that necessitates reassigning those functions somewhere else. Montana explains his/her perception that there were supervisors who were not doing their jobs well. The restructuring started there, by taking them out of those positions, creating new positions for them, and reallocating their work and work in their departments to others. Montana also says:

Montana: There was two glaring issues at the College, with positions and the people that were running the departments and in those positions. And there was an obvious issue. So, what they did was they removed those ... people, and created [and gave them] these [new] positions.

When asked about that further, Montana explained that in order to fix concerns with the supervisors, the restructuring created new positions for them. Departments were also eliminated, and then the work of all the eliminated positions were put back onto existing workers in "new" jobs. Montana, like Darby, also said that budget was just the "straw man" or rationale, but not the real reason, for doing this:

Montana: Budget was the [named] driver. I think they tied it under the budget umbrella and it was a way to deal with the issues, and all of a sudden, "Ooh, this will take care of all of our problems at once." Except it's not working. [One supervisor] had to take on five more people, a whole other department worth of work, and a brand new structure and they just ... took a hat and went, "Okay let's do without this job, this job, this job." It just doesn't make sense. That's what the difficult part is. So then, what they

essentially told us they did is they eliminated a supervisor's position and put it under another supervisor. It's too much on many, many people's plates. It's just too much work.

This perception helps also to explain at least some of the anger and resentment that has surfaced College-wide in regard to the restructuring and that is discussed in these interviews. Montana believes that two low-functioning supervisors were given alternate assignments in order to protect their employment status and so in order to balance the budget and cover the new positions, other changes had to be made. Then other employees' jobs were eliminated, and workers doing their jobs well were then placed into "restructured" jobs, being given even more work. The sense of injustice and lack of trust regarding these decisions and the real reasons for them is evident in what Darby and Montana are discussing.

Montana goes on to explain how the "official" version of the restructuring is said to have originated:

Montana: The funny thing is, there was a big task force that was grouped together; it was probably a year and a half ago, we started. And we had to read a book ... and then report on each chapter and, I'm sorry, it made no sense to me at all. And then all of a sudden, we are restructuring.... That task force, at some point in time, is supposed to be responsible for the restructure. I was on the task force, and I don't know how or when it even morphed from start to finish. It was very, very strange.

Montana was one of the people on this task force, and did not understand how the ultimate restructuring is related to the work of this task force. So it would make sense that others would be very distrustful of explanations given by administration as to how the decisions were made and what the rationale was for those decisions. When I clarified the meaning to the statements above, Montana added the following to reinforce those ideas, and explained his/her perception of how the unworkable jobs came to be created:

Montana: They put [restructuring under] the umbrella of budgets. I don't think it's budgets. I think if there is a big strategic structural change, that we just don't want to lay any more people off, and so we're just reassigning and creating positions that we think

we need. Without getting into specifics, I think that everything needs to be mapped out strategically, and I think we're just piecemealing things together. We're piecemealed together, because [in our jobs now] it's like we have all of these duties, we restructured, and then we're realizing, "Oh! Somebody needs to do this." And so they just throw it onto somebody. And "Oh! Somebody else needs to do this." And they just throw it onto somebody. So we go about making not logical positions that [do not] make the duties the most effective that they can be. And there's many duties that aren't being done up to par, because there's no time. And you have such vast differences of jobs all meshed together, that none of them gel together.

Montana expanded on his/her concerns, quoted previously, that the changes in restructuring were not due to budgetary restrictions as claimed by upper administration.

Montana has a passion for organizational structure and planning work, and is also concerned that the "new" jobs weren't constructed from feedback, a participative planning process, or any kind of logical organizational structure map. In addition to his/her concerns about an unmanageable job, Montana is worried about the burdens on the others left in his/her department. S/he is also very anxious about the work that isn't getting done, so this is a theme that re-occurred throughout the interview.

Another concern that arose regarding mutual trust is that of the risks associated with communicating with or to administrators. Kiley and Blair have concerns about what it really means and what happens when you go to them with issues. Kiley says that s/he was trying to respond to his/her supervisor and help the supervisor understand the concerns from Kiley's point of view, when the supervisor became angry with him/her:

Kiley: I do not feel open and honest, even going to my supervisor and saying anything. There was a point when I did [go to] my direct supervisor. There was a point where I did feel like I could be open and honest in fact.... It would be three, four months ago. I was open and honest and I was just chewed [out], big time. Yelled at. Made me cry. And that's so hard to do, too. It was bad. And it's like, okay, I'm not going to ever express my opinion to you anymore, ever.... He was calling all of us in because of the bad culture [climate] and atmosphere going on and I [raised a question], and ... he didn't even let me finish. [He said] "That's the type of talk I'm talking about! That's gotta' stop!" And ... I just asked [a] question to [him], not to anybody else. So now I can't even raise the questions anymore with them.

Kiley feels as though s/he was trying to be “open and honest” as requested, and was reprimanded for even trying. It is interesting to hear that the supervisor was inviting them to discuss the reasons for “bad culture” (meaning climate) and how to make it better, and then was not ready to hear what Kiley had to say. S/he feels hurt and frustrated, and would not take that risk again. S/he is especially worried about angering a supervisor during a time of job loss and restructuring. Kiley is keenly aware of that risk and discussed that fear previously. As is common throughout this section, Kiley is referring to “culture” when “climate” is the more accurate term.

Blair also comments on the idea that there is talk of a culture of inquiry, but the reality of feedback is only top-down, not bottom-up:

Blair: The script that’s been used is, “We wish to create a culture of inquiry.” And the culture of inquiry I think exists within the college, but it’s a downward culture of inquiry. There’s not an upward culture of inquiry. I don’t feel you have an option to go back and ask the question back the other way. You are supposed to deal with the issues that are dealing with your department, and my department works across a number of departments and organizations.

Blair’s experience is that upper administration is not willing to be questioned or provide rationale. S/he thinks they are not only hierarchal in a top-down kind of way with communication, but also want to keep information siloed in departments. This does not work well in a department that works in all areas of the College, and presumably would not serve anyone else well either. Blair finds this frustrating and believes that it keeps him/her from doing his/her job well.

Another concern regarding trust is concern about how issues that do come to the attention of administration are handled. Montana comments about a year when s/he was given increased responsibility and opportunity to work in an undeveloped area of the college, and then what happened when the restructuring took place:

Montana: For a good year, I got to travel...and pull all this stuff together. What is the most frustrating part is that I spent a year doing these [projects] because I was directed to do so, and I did and I loved them, and then I have to meet in a room with other people and turn over everything that I have.

Montana is discussing how s/he was assigned to work on major projects that s/he really enjoyed and in which s/he was invested. When Montana's job was restructured to include other areas, s/he was told to relinquish all of the project work to supervisors who were in the newly-created supervisor positions. S/he was required to provide support for those supervisors on the project but was not allowed to continue his/her previous work. At the same time, s/he was expected to orient himself/herself to the new, stressful, "three-jobs-in-one" workload acquired after restructuring. S/he finds all this very demoralizing. Montana notes that this has been a common experience for others in his/her department staff after restructuring, and it is easy to see how this would lead to a climate of a lack of trust in administration and a decline in morale.

Dakota has had a similar experience in his/her area of the College and found himself/herself at the mercy of a different administrator, the Vice President of Human Resources. That position has been combined with that of Chief Student Officer (CSO), the Vice President of Employee and Student Affairs (VPESA). Dakota comments:

Dakota: I don't think the hierarchy sees it from the way I see it down here, when there's somebody that's rewarded for not doing their job, [and] I could talk for a couple of hours about that in itself. I think we have a really unhealthy HR department [head], who's selective and who is a bully, and who will do anything she can to save her position. I would say considering that [the HR director is also CSO], and considering that personality, I can't say it's going to help our College mission statement any.

Dakota feels isolated and unnoticed in the "hierarchy," but his/her primary concern here is that the Human Resources Director (HRD) is also now the CSO. S/he says that this person plays favorites and bullies others, and Dakota does not think this person serves the College mission well. While Montana has told me that s/he admires and respects his/her own immediate

supervisor and has had concerns about the upper administration's role in restructuring, Dakota reported being the victim of bullying by a clique in his/her building. Dakota perceives that this bullying has been occurring with the cooperation of the VPESA and another supervisor. Dakota says:

Dakota: I believe it is bullying [and harassment] and I have no place to go with it. I can tell you another long story too, but there's a clique of people here, I think that our Human Resources department definitely has her favorites, and most people know that and they're like a little clique/group. It is so wrong ... that I don't even feel as though I can go into our [own HR] department.... This is all [based] on stuff that has happened in the past. I can give examples of bullying and humiliation because of this group, but I'm not going to.... I'm tired of it. I sat with my door shut for a year, crying almost every day in there, not wanting to come into my office because of that stuff, but it doesn't matter. It's there, and it's not going to go away until somebody changes our HR department, but that isn't going to happen, so. That's my perspective, though. But so often through the years, I've almost felt like I've been set up to fail over and over again.

Dakota talked at length regarding the bullying and harassment s/he has felt by others in his/her office area, and the lack of protection by his/her own supervisor who is not willing to defend Dakota. Although Dakota has documentation, s/he would need the support of Human Resources and the supervisor to address it effectively, since all complaints of that kind are approved by the VPESA for investigation. What Dakota perceives as the alliance between the supervisors, and the repercussions s/he saw with others who tried to change this dynamic, has convinced him/her it is hopeless. Because the perception is that harassment complaints can be dismissed by the VPESA, Dakota feels s/he has no recourse. His/her experience is an example of the sixth area of this trust and climate dynamic: a lack of trust regarding supervisory motives and trustworthiness toward individual employees. It seems significant that both Montana and Jordan like and trust their immediate supervisors, so an inability to work with their own supervisor is not their concern. Jordan discussed the feeling of no recourse and vulnerability when his/her concerns about his/her treatment by other supervisors were not acted upon by

higher administration.

Another person in this division almost gave an interview on-the-record, but feared his/her job and insurance were at stake if the interview was recorded. The employee was afraid that their supervisor or administration would figure it out, and would retaliate by eliminating his/her job. The employee gave me permission to use information from our off-the-record conversation, but refused to record the interview. We talked at length, and s/he talked about the clique in this division.

The employee said that the ones who are not part of the clique who feed the information to the supervisors are then retaliated against by that clique and the supervisors. This was an independent and strikingly similar observation to Dakota's. This lends strength to Dakota's experience and lack of trust in the supervisors in these departments, which is particularly troubling when one considers the responsibilities in Human Resources. Dakota feels betrayed by his/her supervisor's lack of intervention, and retaliated against by the other supervisors. S/he also describes a climate where if you are not part of the clique, you are a target for payback. This is a toxic climate.

The allegations of bullying in this section are particularly concerning, as there are strong MnSCU policies forbidding this type of behavior. However, the problem noted by Dakota and others is that it would have to be reported to a Human Resources department that is perceived to either be part of the problem or at least not willing to act on these concerns. There is verification of these issues in the 2012 Climate Survey comments. For instance, one comment in response to the open-ended question regarding "Faculty/Staff Support" was simply, "Eliminate bullying in the workplace" (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 95). Another interesting, and more enigmatic comment was, "Some supervisors should not be supervising other people," which is

similar to Dakota's comments (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 94). Another respondent noted, "Communication and trust have not improved. Restructuring, downsizing, budget cuts, salary freezes, and bullying personalities have all affected morale. People are afraid to speak up" (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 100). These comments reveal a climate where bullying is suffered in silence, and is part of the larger picture of the stressful workplace climate experienced by these staff members.

Another troubling aspect of this situation is the fear that retaliation will occur if these concerns are brought to light. A frequent comment in the 2012 Climate Survey is regarding this fear of retaliation or reprisal. For instance, one respondent to an open-ended question says, "Improve communication and a safe environment," while another says:

I believe administration truly tries to make changes based on input.... I don't know that the changes ever get a chance to take hold because some are afraid of putting their true opinions or thoughts out in the open for fear of retaliation or revenge. I'm not sure whether it's retaliation or revenge from co-workers or supervisors. (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 98)

Sadly, based on the interview data, the fear may be due to both. Jordan fears retaliation from co-workers, and Dakota feels bullied by supervisors in other departments. Darby and others commented on staff feeling bullied by an administrator and most of the staff spoke of the fears associated with retaliation and job loss. The climate of fear affects many aspects of the work environment for staff.

Administration and climate.

In this section, I examine the organizational structure of the College and its overall impact on other structures. However, administration, administrators and their impact on climate were mentioned very frequently under the topic of climate and culture in the interviews. Thus, it

is important to include a discussion of that in this climate structure, as well.

Darby has the perception that there is a struggle over leadership in the College, and that at this point, the Executive VP holds the reins:

Darby: I think currently the climate here is in a negative place because I think that there's a struggle for leadership of the College. And [with] the head leader, there's perhaps concerns about his ability to lead. And then you have kind of an over-leader with the Executive Vice President ... a common thing that I keep hearing is that he's the one the running the College ... and nothing really gets decided unless he puts his final stamp on it, yea or nay, and I think that is discouraging to people. I feel like people don't feel that they have authority to get the work done that they would like to get done because it does get in a bottleneck, because of this authority, the rubberstamp that has to be put on it.... And there's a feeling of [anxiety] that they are [held accountable], to a certain point, but to a certain point they can't be, because they're only limited in what they're allowed to do.

Darby refers to the Executive VP as “an over-leader,” whose authority and influence overpowers that of the other administrators, including the President, and thus the President's ability to lead is in question. Darby hears frequently and has experienced personally that the only way to get a decision is through the Executive VP. Darby also has another important observation about the outcomes of having the Executive VP control so many aspects of the College. S/he observes that it has an effect on an individual worker's sense of autonomy and adds to a climate of frustration and fear or anxiety. Darby also notes that employees may be given responsibilities without the authority to fulfill them, which of course, slows work progress considerably.

Darby developed this idea further in response to a question about whether s/he was referring to micromanagement:

Darby: I remember in the old climate, we had this whole thing about micromanagement and that there was this level of [a previous President] ... telling you how you had to do whatever, and I don't think it's micromanagement in that same way. It's a different [way]. I do think it's the vision of what the Executive Vice President has, [and] it's very clear that “This is what I want, now you figure out how to give me what I want,” and yet sometimes what he wants changes or you don't have the authority to do it in order to give

him what he wants. I don't think that its micromanagement as far as, "This is how I want you to do this," but "this is how [and what] I want the end result to be" and it's not possible to give it to them, because you don't have the authority to make the decisions that you need to. And as always, there's always a difference in how faculty are managed versus how other employees are managed, and I'd only have it from the [staff] employees' standpoint.

Darby is referring to the time of a previous President and his style of management as micromanagement, and explaining that the Executive VP is not managing in the same way. Instead, the Executive VP tries to direct staff to fulfill the vision he has of how something should work, yet does not delegate the authority or grant the autonomy necessary to get the job done. After the work is completed, he may also change it and negate the work that has been done. This combination of responsibility without authority is very frustrating for the staff, stymies their efforts to get the job done, and creates a climate of frustration and resentment toward administration. It is also frightening for staff in the current climate because they know they will still be evaluated on their work. So they may suffer a poor evaluation by being assigned responsibility while lacking the concomitant delegation of authority to complete the work. Darby also notes that "as always" the faculty are managed differently, yet s/he would only be perceiving this from the staff point of view.

Kiley also discussed his/her view of how the Executive VP is managing the College.

S/he is frustrated by a type of concern similar to Darby's:

Kiley: The last few years, I've seen a couple of different Presidents come and go, and the Vice Presidents change and things like that. So you can see the different styles that we've had. I think the last few years, since we've gotten our Vice President that we currently have now, it's been a little bit limiting. I see a lot of micromanaging going on, things that we should be able to take care of, a Dean or department-level type thing, isn't being done at that level, it's going [up] to the other level [of the Executive VP].

Kiley is describing a situation in which the Executive VP has refused to authorize delegation of authority to a dean on a minor issue, but also won't do what is necessary to resolve the problem. However, Kiley is still expected to complete the process without clear delegation

of decision-making authority or direction. The staff who are involved feel responsible for the work but do not have the authority to complete it, and are frustrated by this. Kiley has mentioned before being fearful of telling administrators about concerns. S/he was intimidated by what happened when s/he tried, and now feels s/he is at a dead end.

Kiley goes on to be even more explicit about the impact of the current administrative structure on climate:

Kiley: I can name someone that has ... the biggest impact on climate. I think it's administration. I think the Executive VP level, right there, that it's all run by the one person. Don't get me wrong, he's done a lot of good for our College, a lot of good. He's gotten us out of a good slump. He's just got to have his fingers in all of it, and doesn't understand it and makes the decisions very, very quickly without being strategic about it. I don't think he's a strategic thinker. I think he's more of an off-the-cuff-and-do-it [person]. [But] there just needs to be some kind of strategic planning within that, and I don't see the strategy stuff coming from him.

Kiley's description of the Executive VP wanting to have "his fingers in all of it" and be the only decision-making authority echoes what Darby was saying. Darby and Kiley also both acknowledge that the Executive VP has made valuable contributions to the College, and his vision is not necessarily wrong for what should be done. However, they are very frustrated with the lack of autonomy and lack of delegated authority. Again, this creates a climate of frustration among staff, and produces a paralysis that prevents the necessary decisions from being made in order to complete the assigned work.

Dakota also has concerns about responsibility without authority in his/her department. S/he did not want to be specific about the lack of authority and who should be the decision-maker, but is concerned that it further increases the injustice of the workload. Dakota says, "I'm burned out, more work and more responsibility without authority, which is a horrible form of management, and not having any kind of payback for it." The phrase "responsibility without authority" is one of the keys to the work frustration. Being held responsible for work that you

are not given the authority to complete or make decisions about is an increased source of stress, and as Dakota says, it is “a horrible form of management.” Dakota points out that s/he is also not compensated for the additional responsibilities.

Blair also has key responsibilities College-wide, and is frequently tapped for committees and presentations to the Administrative Council. During these presentations, s/he makes action and project recommendations. Blair says:

Blair: It takes a lot of time to prepare [the presentations]. It has a lot of impact, but I don't get to see whether or not any feedback comes back to me. I normally get that piece, which is a great presentation, but I never get that downstream stuff that tells me, “Blair, your presentation provided some insight. Your presentation, we thought it was half-right, half-wrong. Blair, we thought your presentation was totally out to lunch. We can't believe that you thought that.” I don't know anything. So when I do these presentations, I really don't get any sense of where I am. So as a result, you sort of always feel like you're swinging in the dark at something. You're not given a context, and I live within a context.... When nobody gives me a context, I really struggle with, “What are we [doing]? Where are we going?”

Blair is frustrated by not being given information and feedback that will help him/her do the job better. S/he has described trying to communicate with administration or give them what s/he thinks they are asking for as “swinging in the dark at something.” S/he feels very frustrated by the lack of context for what s/he is asked to do and by the lack of support from his/her supervisors.

The pattern emerging from the discussion of climate and how it links to administration is that the administrative structure is characterized by top-down decision-making, lack of authority coupled by too much responsibility, and a lack of communication. These problems are all contributing to the climate of frustration these staff members are experiencing and hearing about from others. Given this pattern and the prevalent fear about job security and retaliation discussed previously, it seems unlikely that administration will hear how their actions and styles are affecting staff, even if they ask.

For example, consider Blair's experience with trying to get feedback and not receiving it, Kiley's experience of being asked for feedback and reprimanded for giving it, Dakota's experience of feeling bullied, and the 2012 Climate Survey comments on this issue. They seem to add up to a climate of fear and frustration and feelings of impotence described by these staff members. Dakota's conclusions sum this up well:

Dakota: There's bullying in the adult world ... it happens when you're adults, too.... There's such a thing as being assertive, working as a team, saying what you want to say and somebody else doesn't want to hear. But then there's just outright playing head games and bullying, and I've seen a lot of that around here. It really works on you mentally when that's happening, when you see how much control a select group of people have been given, or have, and how that has to affect everybody, the whole mission of the College when something like that is going on. I can't believe it wouldn't.

Dakota is asserting that the root cause of these problems is too much control by a select top group. Because they have complete authority and autonomy in their supervisory spheres, it is possible for abuses to occur that are difficult, if not impossible, to address and stay employed in a reasonably safe emotional environment and climate. This is powerful food for thought, and is returned to in the next section of this structure and the structures to follow.

This section on staff perceptions of climate at Riverland revolved around five themes laid out in the introduction. These categories were articulated by staff, and reveal a negative climate of fear in many areas: fear of job loss, budget reductions, bullying, harassment, and intimidation. Staff also perceived a negative climate of increased stress and workloads, a reduced sense of value, and a sense of not being heard, cared about, or recognized. They cited many factors that contributed to a mutual lack of trust between employees and supervisors, and vice versa. Staff also noted problems stemming from administrative management styles and their negative impact on workplace climate, such as "top-down" decision-making, delegating responsibility without providing authority, and failing to communicate. Communication will also be addressed more

thoroughly in subsequent parts of this chapter.

All of these concerns add up to an extremely stressful and toxic environment for many staff. Some of the 2012 Climate Survey comments reinforced this negative climate and the concerns discussed by staff in the interviews. As noted earlier, several comments alluded to bullying and fears of retaliation and reprisal. A response in answer to an open-ended question on the Climate Survey referred to the erosion of climate for staff in the last two years by stating, “Things have gotten much worse at this College in the last two years. Trust is almost non-existent.... There are repercussions to deal with if you speak up” (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 99).

Other survey respondents echoed the lack of trust discussed by the staff in this section. There were also several survey comments on the 2012 Climate Survey regarding the restructuring and reorganizing, especially in Student Services. For instance, one comment explains the erosion in climate by stating, “I believe I’m working in a less-friendly work environment; more hostile than in previous years. I don’t believe, however, that it’s related to surveys, but to restructuring, budget cuts, and a general expectation that employees do more with less” (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 99). Another respondent adds, “The new Student Services structure has resulted in a hostile environment in that area” (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 101).

These survey responses refer to the climate of fear and hostile work environment that Dakota, Montana, Blair, Darby, Jordan, Skylar, and Kiley have all described in various ways.

Another survey comment that summarizes the decline in climate noted by staff says:

Communication has been an issue at Riverland – always. I have not witnessed any direct efforts at improving the communication within the College. There are insiders and outsiders. Some people know what’s going on, others have no idea. There is no fun. Some people are horrendously overworked with responsibilities upon responsibilities

being added on, without extra compensation or understanding. These people work beyond what they should need to and they do it because they want to do a good job – and they also are afraid of retribution if they don't get their work done. (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 99)

This respondent is describing cliques, bullying, unequal distribution of work, and fear of retribution. These descriptions present the staff climate as a dark and dismal situation, and one that is being experienced as a toxic environment. The multiple comments about bullying, retaliation, and fear of reprisal should be of grave concern, especially because of the perception that attempts to address it at the College level have not only not helped, but have also increased the vulnerability of the complainant.

Faculty Perceptions of Climate

When examining an overall view of climate, the staff responses described a negative, fearful climate, compounded by an almost total lack of understanding by others in the College. The most marked feature of this theme on the part of the staff was a pervasive sense of job insecurity and anxiety about job loss. Staff views of climate were overwhelmingly negative, for the reasons discussed. In organizing this section of the structure, the focus is on the faculty and their perceived experiences of climate. I include all faculty who commented on climate in this section because each of them addressed it in a personal way.

This section is organized around the five overall categories related to climate which were discussed by the staff: (a) overall sense of climate (b) climate in regard to stress, workload, and restructuring, (c) sense of value and recognition, (d) sense of mutual trust, (e) impact of administrative management styles on climate.

Overall climate.

Kelly has a poignant anecdote to share describing one of the first department meetings held after his/her department reorganized:

Kelly: So at this first meeting... all of the Deans were there, the VPs, everybody was there as well as [our department]. Well, the first thing was there weren't enough chairs for everyone, there weren't enough handouts for everyone and I'm like, "Okay, who's in charge?" I mean, I would never put together a meeting where you wouldn't have enough handouts for everybody, you wouldn't have enough chairs.... It's like it kind of spoke to what the culture [climate] was, that, "Not all of you are welcome here. Now, some of you will be leaving. Some of you maybe shouldn't [be here]. We might not have a place for all of you." A supervisor was supposed to facilitate something there and that was the first time I'd met the Dean of Extended Learning. [But] all I remember about that meeting though was the fact that there wasn't enough handouts and enough chairs for people.

Kelly describes a meeting in which the agenda was someone else's priority, the people leading the meeting were not connected to their department in any way, and people who were already worried about budget cuts and job losses were put in a situation where there weren't enough chairs or handouts for everyone. Although others not in such a sensitive environment might just have taken this for poor meeting planning, Kelly and the staff coming to the meeting worried it had a larger message that there would be fewer of them soon. Kelly talks about this sense of job insecurity in reference to the staff s/he works with. As a faculty member, his/her expertise, seniority, and contractual protection give him/her much more of a sense of security than the staff in the area.

Echoing staff comments in the last section, Kelly also talks about how s/he believes that some of the staff resignations have been due to the Executive VP's bullying style:

Kelly: I don't think we could change, until [the President] leaves, in a more fundamental way because ... again [while] I appreciate what the Executive VP has done here, I don't appreciate his style.... The Director of Enrollment Services was, for a while, very much a part of his bullying kind of tactics, so was the VP of Finance and Facilities, and the Dean of Workforce Development. Some of the people that have left were definitely in part due to him.

Although Kelly doesn't indicate feeling personally intimidated, s/he is concerned that staff do, and lists staff supervisors and administrators who s/he believes left because of being "bullied" by the Executive VP. This also echoes the 2012 Climate Survey comment about unfairness at the supervisory and administrative level that was discussed in the staff section.

Taylor also reflects the staff concerns, as s/he has worked closely with many staff.

Taylor talks about how s/he perceives that the pervasive sense of job insecurity has influenced how sensitive discussions in meetings are handled:

Taylor: Again, I think there's all that tenderness and sensitivity to our job.... Let me give you an example. When I went through the program review process, I began by really trying to stress how valuable everyone was and how important their jobs were, but that I had some ideas. And just the idea of sharing some concerns or suggestions just by body language [of the staff there], too, when I got asked how much data do I have to support my information, we're so sensitive. And I think some of that is [the staff are thinking], "Oh my gosh, if I'm doing something wrong, maybe I'll get terminated." I don't think that there's that fear here of automatic termination, like there was a president or two ago. But certainly we want to make sure that our job is secure.... So I think people can communicate openly and honestly here at Riverland, yes. But if we're so sensitive to the feedback, then what happens after we communicate? That's the other thing. I think there's a fear, "Great, I'll say something, but then what?".... We love [positive strokes]. We love that. But we're not as open to constructive criticism.

Taylor is describing how carefully s/he tried to address some problems when meeting with the committee hearing program reviews, which is largely administrators, MMA supervisors, and a few faculty representatives. Taylor shared concerns about having difficulty with under-prepared students and some of the admissions policies and retention efforts related to that. All of this was couched in careful language to demonstrate that s/he wasn't criticizing, but was sharing problems and looking for collaborative solutions. Taylor's felt just his/her attempt to discuss a problems was essentially treated as an attack by some of the supervisors present, and s/he was counter-attacked by demands for data supporting his/her opinions.

Note to the reader: I was at this meeting, and witnessed the fear and "it must be

someone else's fault" response this discussion initiated. I was impressed by Taylor's insightfulness and overall concerns about what happens to positive progress in an institution when any sensitive or negative feedback is feared as a possible termination in the offing. What also makes this interesting is that it indicates that this climate of fear (that being wrong will result in being terminated) clearly extends to the management level, including supervisors and lower-level administrators, as well.

Although Drew was not part of this group of faculty in the previous structure, s/he is involved in faculty leadership and does comment on the intimidation s/he has seen even at the dean level:

Drew: I think sometimes some of the Deans are intimidated by [the Executive VP], and it was evident when we were [at the AQIP Strategy Forum] by some of the comments that were made. Like that they were afraid or intimidated, or if they wanted to do something they feel that they couldn't sometimes tell us because they were afraid that he would get mad at them.

Drew is referring to a climate among the deans that indicates they are fearful of or intimidated by the Executive VP. The deans are confiding in faculty about these feelings, which confirms that it was a real concern. Montana noted this as well in the previous section, as well as Kelly relating how some administrators have resigned due to problems with upper administration. As noted previously, there have been other deans and vice presidents who have been terminated or who chose to leave in the last few years. Operationally, all of this suggests that any influence or ideas that the deans may have on upper administration is minimal, which seems to be a lost opportunity for the institution. The deans have direct contact with students, faculty, support staff, and student activities, and a combined wealth of experience, and so could be a valuable resource for upper administration.

I have been discussing comments from faculty who were commenting on climate in a more critical sense than those that will follow. Of these, Kelly has the strongest identification with staff, as s/he works closely with them. Kelly's views of climate are most closely allied to those of the staff explored in the last section. However, it is important to note that the faculty

who were commenting on negative aspects of climate are primarily noting climate from the staff point of view. When the faculty discuss their sense of their own personal treatment, they regard climate in a much more positive way. Kelly and Taylor report that they don't experience the fear the staff do, but that they do experience the effects of the staff climate. I pointed out in the last section that Kelly referred to others primarily when talking about a sense of fear regarding job loss. On the other hand, s/he also felt distrustful, did not feel valued, and had grave concerns about the effects of restructuring. In this sense, Kelly is reporting the same negative view of climate as the staff participants.

However, Kelly did feel positively about the relationships in his/her own department and their work together. I found that faculty members Kelly, Tristan, and Taylor had an understanding of how the staff and faculty were experiencing climate differently. Kelly, Tristan, and Taylor each identified and reiterated some of those concerns from the staff point of view. However, all three also wanted to discuss the positives of their own experienced climate, which was in stark contrast to staff. In fact, they were all careful to mention that they experienced climate from the different perspective of a faculty member. In the cases of Taylor and Tristan, their personal experiences and views of climate were very positive, and so were the views of the other faculty interviewed. Thus, I will continue this section by discussing the positive views of climate presented by most faculty interviewed. In reading these, keep the staff voices in mind to compare and contrast with the general faculty experience.

Tristan, who in the previous section offered ideas on how some aspects of the climate could be perceived as negative in terms of a fear of job loss, also offered a comment on how s/he personally feels about the climate. Tristan said, "Yes, I think [climate is] different [than in 2001 under the last president]. It is better. More positive."

Cameron did not discuss negative aspects of climate, or climate from a staff perspective, but did discuss at length his/her own positive experience of climate as a faculty member at Riverland:

Cameron: I generally tell them it's a very good place to work. Basically, people get along with each other quite well. We don't have any extreme internal problems of the kind that I've seen off and on over the past. So on the whole, I think the climate is very good. Like with all decisions, there will be some people who are happy about this, that, or the other, or who are unhappy with all of human existence. But I think, generally, this is has been a pretty good place to work, really over the last decade or more.

Cameron also references a climate greatly improved since 2001-2002, when the first climate survey was done. S/he has many years of teaching experience at the College and says this is a time where there are not any major internal problems, as in the past. S/he characterizes a time like this as a "peaceful" time:

Cameron: It seems like a relatively peaceful time. Actually, I'm not sure why, but this seems to have been a longer period of relative peace and quiet than has been typical in my experience of the institution. Usually things come and go a little more quickly, particularly with changes of administration, but we've gone through changes of administration that have not really been earthshaking. The last presidential changes have not caused great kinds of rumbling internally.... And part of that maybe just has to do with the nature of the people that come in.

Cameron sees this "peaceful" time (s/he refers to the other, conflict-filled times as "noisy" times) as a result of the current administration not upsetting arrangements internally or causing a lot of internal conflict. S/he finishes by observing that Riverland does "reasonably well" under the circumstances:

Cameron: I have the impression that on the whole, this institution really does reasonably well given the size and structure we have and the support we have.... Of course, stuff outside of our control, like financing and so forth, is a different thing, but I think generally things seem to go pretty well....

Cameron sees this institution as managing its resources and utilizing support well, and sees the only negative as something that is outside of the institution's control, such as state

allocations. Cameron also makes an observation that you can predict when faculty will choose not to get involved:

Cameron: I think about this in different ways because there are negotiations and stuff that are going to be in this time. But the fact that people don't know what's going on is generally a sign that things are going pretty well, because nothing is happening that seems injurious to them.

Cameron thinks there is little interest on the part of most faculty in becoming involved because there is no compelling reason to be. Nothing harmful or of great concern is happening to faculty, so that frees them to focus on their academic work more than becoming involved in institutional affairs or politics. Cameron reiterated this idea more than once.

Drew, Jesse, and Bailey are involved in institutional committees and faculty leadership work. They were in agreement that climate is largely positive for faculty.

Drew discusses his/her experience of working at Riverland as “a fun” place to work:

Drew: Well, I think it's a fun place to be. I like being here. I think it's a pretty welcoming place.... I don't have any problems with administration. I think that they answer questions and they're able to provide what you need.... I think most of my interactions are pretty positive. I mean, if I'm trying to think of a negative experience, maybe I'm not super appreciative of a dean or something, but then maybe I'm bad. I just kind of bypass them. I go do what I need to do and sometimes just ignore who I want to.

Drew enjoys his/her work and working at Riverland. S/he is not experiencing any difficulty working with administrators and has developed a strategy for those s/he does not appreciate. Drew offers a thoughtful commentary on how involvement in the College actually makes a better working environment, and gives him/her a broader perspective on events and decisions:

Drew: I guess the big change for me is I'm just more and more and more involved. So, when I was first here, I didn't really know what was going on, and I wasn't that involved. I started out with just a couple committees or whatever. So I didn't have the same type of interactions that I have now. And so, I guess, it's always been positive, but now it's just that I'm so much more involved in things and I see it from different angles, and before it was kind of like a mono lens. I just saw it from my perspective as a teacher or instructor,

and now I can see it from a lot of different angles.... There's some negative individuals. [But] I like to get things happening. I like to talk to people. I'm kind of extroverted. If I need something, I just go do it. Not everybody's that way. Or I've seen faculty that I think just kind of come in, do the job, and leave. And they're not real engaged. And I'm really engaged, so for me, it's a lot more fun because I've had contact with a lot of people. I know them because I've worked with them on different committees and things.

Drew has always viewed the climate as positive, but as his/her engagement increased, so did enjoyment of the various aspects of his/her work. S/he finds it valuable to contribute and to get to know different parts of the College. Drew clearly finds it all stimulating and largely rewarding and enjoyable, and attributes his/her positive attitude to an increased level of involvement and extroverted personality.

Bailey is also an engaged faculty member who heads a program, and is involved in faculty committees, representation, and leadership. Like Drew, s/he finds work to be rewarding and the climate to be good at the College:

Bailey: College climate is good. I think we have good working conditions. I think that the Master Agreement helps the working conditions, and that the people who support the agreement hold your feet to the fire to work under the Master Agreement. I think [the culture and climate are different at the college than in 2002]. I think it's different because administration is different and there's been some turnover in faculty.

Bailey views the College climate in a positive way. S/he also notes that the faculty (union) contract is enforced, and that is part of good working conditions for faculty. Like Tristan, s/he has seen improvement in the climate since the first climate survey in 2002. When Bailey was considering the drop in overall climate ratings (for the College as a whole) the last few years, s/he offered an assessment of that:

Bailey: I think budgetary constraints have made things more negative than positive, which is out of control. That is not in somebody's control. The state has its own ... issue. But I still think when it trickles down like that, it affects people's morale and when they see things shrinking up, it affects morale.... I'm saying that budget constraints have made things not so positive.

Bailey and Cameron see any negative feedback as being largely attributable to budget

cuts, which in turn affects morale in a negative way. Bailey sees these cuts as out of local control, so s/he does not see that as a reason to feel negative about the College climate. Taylor, in assessing the drop in selected items on the climate survey ratings, believes that some people might attribute those changes to negative attitudes about administrators, but s/he does not.

Taylor says:

Taylor: That was the last time we got a raise [2005 to 2006].... I think that's our natural inclination, to think it has to do with just the leadership, but I really think that we are so sensitive to our pay and how we feel rewarded. I wonder if it isn't pay.

Taylor views the ratings drop as a sign of sensitivity to stagnant, and therefore declining, pay. S/he believes that instead of having a lowered climate rating attributed to problems with administration, the College should be considering declining financial compensation.

Jesse is also involved in faculty leadership and representation. S/he offers an assessment of climate, and like Drew and Bailey, Jesse really enjoys work and where s/he works:

Jesse: I would tell them this is a really good place to work. I really do enjoy my job, I enjoy my colleagues, I enjoy the students. Like any job, there are people you will get along with and people you will not. There are frustrations and there are joys, but overall, I really like working here.. Are there issues? Yes. Are they the same issues that have come and gone for the last 23 years? Yes. But all in all, I like working here.... I can't think of an incident that stands out and says, "Oh hey, this is one example, a big example of why I like working here." It's just the day-to-day.... I don't dread going to work, kind of thing. You get up and you want to come to work.

Jesse sees the College as a good place to work, with good people in every location. S/he is eager to come to work every day, and enjoys teaching. In our discussion of this, s/he notes only one detractor from the overall positive climate rating above: s/he teaches online out of necessity, but does not find it as fun as face-to-face teaching. Jesse notes that all jobs have frustrations, but that does not diminish his/her positive evaluation of climate. Jesse's experience is in stark contrast to Montana, who also used to love his/her job but now dreads going to work every day.

Parker and Lee echoed their colleagues' enjoyment of their job and a good working environment. Lee noted, like Jesse, that all jobs have their frustrations:

Lee: Well, I enjoy working here, I must say. There are frustrations, as with any job.... I love my job. There are pieces that are frustrating but I'd contend that you could find that frustration in any job, any place you look.

Lee enjoys working at the College, loves his/her job, and rolls with the punches when acknowledging frustrations. Parker finds the working environment friendly and positive, but is nostalgic for the days of Austin Community College before the merger. S/he says, "I think [it's] friendly. I don't think there's anything unfriendly about it, but you can't have a party now and invite the school, where that was kind of a common thing before. That was kind of fun." Parker enjoys the friendly atmosphere, but also misses the more intimate pre-merger climate. In general, these faculty find the climate to be positive, their work to be rewarding and enjoyable, and are contented with the status quo. They paint a very different picture than the staff interviewed, who experienced climate as negative and were very fearful regarding job security.

Stress, restructuring, and workload issues.

The second aspect of climate that arose with the staff was the negative climate of increased stress and workload due to restructuring. Tristan has noticed this, and commented on the stress. S/he works closely with the staff, and so is sensitive to this climate. Tristan says, "I know that quite a few people are feeling stressed and they feel like there's so much to their job that they can't do a good job because they're doing so many different jobs." As Montana, Darby, and other staff mentioned, Tristan explains that staff are feeling more stressed. S/he also thinks that their jobs contain so many diverse roles and so much work, it is hard to do a good job.

Taylor commented on the need for all employees to serve on committees, and how there

is a pervasive feeling of being so busy that they cannot do it. S/he says, “We’re stretched. I hear this all the time, ‘We’re stretched so thin, nobody can do anything. Don’t sit on any committees, don’t.’ Well, we need to.” Taylor echoes many of the staff in the previous section who lamented being “stretched so thin” that there is no time to serve on committees. Taylor comments that s/he hears from both faculty and staff that they do not have the time to serve on committees.

Kelly is concerned that the College has cut and stretched too thin in a reorganized department, and that it will become a problem when new needs arise:

Kelly: Certainly we are doing much more with less and we’re not addressing students maybe in the same way. And there are different things that we’re not able to do. But I think as far as being as streamlined with the amount of staff, I’ve never experienced that before. It seemed like before we were cutting back and ... you wouldn’t have enough people or whatever. But we all could take on a little bit more. We could fill our pockets a little fuller and it was okay.... In [this department] especially, there’s just a lot of stress.

Kelly is concerned that they are stretched so thin now in his/her department that there will not be anyone available to meet additional needs. S/he states that s/he has never experienced such lean staffing in this critical area of the College. As noted, the anxiety that there is work that cannot be done because there are not enough staff to do it also creates additional stress.

Kelly goes on to say that this is typical right now of how his/her department is treated, and that there is a lack of understanding on the part of decision-makers about their work:

Kelly: It was once again the feeling of people don’t understand [this department], they don’t understand the work that gets done, they don’t understand that [staff] people are extremely overworked in this area. They’ve been cut to the bone and beyond.... So when I think about the events that happened that help to talk about the climate, that would be an example that I think there just isn’t a core understanding about what we do and what our needs are.

Kelly again points out that staff are very overworked, “cut to the bone and beyond.”

Kelly's perception is that the upper administration who make the decisions to cut back and restructure lack a "core understanding" of the work and needs of the staff. Kelly is not referring to his/her own work as s/he has contractual protection on workload, but is concerned about the workload issues in rest of the department.

Staff were also very concerned about the negative effect on climate due to increased stress and increased and unmanageable workloads, which were worsened by restructuring. Although faculty had the same opportunities to initiate or address these issues in their comments, they did not address them relative to their own work or about themselves. Tristan and Kelly were speaking on behalf of the staff with whom they work closely.

Bailey offered an explanation of why s/he thought some faculty might feel burned out:

Bailey: Additional workload [might also lower climate ratings]. I think some people like getting overload, and then burn out from overload... as you sit down and take this [survey] you might say "no" [the climate is not good] only from being too tired. Not everyone can teach ... 18 [or more] credits a semester and then do other work. Under contract, faculty can volunteer for "overload" work.

Bailey believes that some faculty accept overload, and then feel stressed and burned out.

Bailey is direct in his/her assertion that the problem is of their making and under their control.

S/he thinks that although it should not, it may affect their climate evaluation. Bailey also discussed other reasons for a declining rating in the climate in recent surveys:

Bailey: [Ratings went] up a little bit then in 2004 and 2005, and now recently they dropped off and I might, again, attribute that to extra work. Grouchiness, fend-for-yourself budget, and then maybe seeing people losing jobs, either because of not doing work appropriately or because of the budget. Although, people mostly moved around. They didn't really lose their jobs. We only lost one person I think, in staff.

Bailey posits that climate ratings on the part of staff might have declined because of extra work, grouchiness, and budget cuts. S/he attributes the job loss to not performing work adequately or budget cuts. Bailey refers to restructuring as staff "moving around," and believes

that there was a net loss of one job in staff.

Drew also discussed the added stress, job uncertainty, and restructuring in his/her discussion of lowered climate ratings. S/he thinks that some staff are unhappy:

Drew: I think some [staff] are disgruntled. You'll find that in every place, I think. But sometimes with all the changes that we've had, I think people are having a hard time keeping up. And they're feeling like things are just put upon them, and they're supposed to adjust. And I think it's difficult for people to change. And I think sometimes that's been met with some resistance and a little bit of animosity.... The whole student services overhaul, the whole, "Let's have the dean switches." People don't know who their supervisors are.... They seem to think that they're getting supervised by people that really are not their supervisors. So I think there are just some questions out there.

Drew thinks that change itself will be met with some resistance and disgruntlement. S/he acknowledges there have been so many changes, it is hard to keep up. Like Bailey, s/he does not think the major impact of reorganization is really related to faculty concerns, but to staff. S/he discusses the restructuring and some of the confusion engendered by all the changes. Drew also brings up questions as to the current supervision structure of faculty and staff.

Kai also talked about the changes in Student Services, and s/he thinks that the jury is not in yet on the restructuring:

Kai: There have been changes, but I think some of them ... especially with this whole Student Service positions, reorganization stuff. I think that's probably too new to really see results yet on how that's working compared to how it used to work.

Kai believes it is too early to evaluate or meaningfully assess how the Student Services restructuring changes are working out.

In summary, the few comments from faculty on the issues of stress, workload, and restructuring generally did not relate to faculty issues or concerns, but more to those of staff. The faculty commenting on those issues were doing so primarily as observers. The only faculty issue discussed was overload, and only Bailey discussed that. Since overload is a personal choice and only one faculty member commented on it, that issue is not developed further.

Sense of value and recognition.

Faculty were quite vocal on the topics of feeling valued, supported, listened to, and/or cared about, and these were personal experiences that were more diverse than their general sense of a positive climate. When Kai discussed climate specifically, s/he mostly talked about student climate. However, in this context Kai also said s/he enjoys a strong sense of support and is very positive about his/her experience of climate as a College employee:

Kai: It's different now than it was when I was hired. Especially in terms of organizational aspect. It seems much more solid. I think it was with that first round of AQIP when we started. That big focus on communication after the surveys we did, and that was such a major, major area, that there was unhappiness with overall in the campus climate. Just the sharing of information and people feeling like they had a stake in decisions that were made and what was going on and all that. And I think it has definitely improved. I don't know that we're there yet, that we've arrived at our ultimate goal. Overall, I would say, in terms of faculty/administrative relationships, I think it's very positive. Like I said, I feel a lot of support from my dean. I think most all faculty seem to feel that way. I don't hear a whole lot of bad-mouthing of administration, like other institutions have.... I guess I feel like I pretty well have control over what direction to take the department in and how to run it, basically.

Kai is very positive about the state of faculty-administrative relationships, and the overall support s/he feels from his/her dean. S/he comments on the early days of AQIP and working toward improvements. Kai thinks that communication has improved, but is not as good as it could be. S/he is also very affirming about the autonomy s/he has in directing the department, which is a complex combination of academic coursework, performance-based work, student activities, and external relationships. S/he also comments that in previous employment, s/he heard a lot of "bad-mouthing" of administration, but has not encountered that at Riverland.

Taylor offered his/her views of positive and negative aspects of climate, and the negative aspects were discussed in the previous section. On the positive side, s/he discussed experiences of feeling valued and supported in the College, in contrast with how s/he thinks staff are feeling:

Taylor: I think my dean is really supportive of education and constantly tries to make

sure that we are heard, and when concerns are brought forth she helps to make change as she can. I think it's good with all of the changes that are happening at our institution with diversity that we are addressing it. We're looking at it, we're talking about it.... I think that as peers, we're very supportive of one another. I think we're quick to comment on additions to family, on awards that have been won, on successes that we have made. I think that, again, as peers we're really supportive of one another. I think our administration tries to do that as well. I just happened to get an email today, "Congratulations on your anniversary." I really appreciate that [the President] takes the time to sign each and every one of those, and write a personal note. And it may be the same personal note in every one of them, but the fact that he takes the time to sign them and address them to me, makes me feel valued.... I just think that there are attempts at making us feel valued, and so I guess that's what I would say about the culture [climate] I think there's a lot of internal promotion and I think that's a positive because that shows that we train and trust our own employees.... I think that [orientation has] become much better.... I really do think we do a much better job of that and I really appreciate that faculty receive mentors that are assigned to them.... I think that's really important to feel supported, to know who you're supposed to go to, know where you're supposed to go. That's really critical.

Taylor is pleased that faculty and staff support each other as peers. S/he feels supported, valued, and encouraged by the president celebrating his/her hiring date anniversary. S/he also appreciates the support given by administrators in recruiting a mentor for him/her as new faculty, as well as the support of the mentor. Taylor notes that all of these are attempts to support faculty and make them feel valued, and that it adds up to a very positive climate experience for him/her. Taylor also is pleased that his/her dean supports and advocates for faculty. S/he also believes that there is promotion and valuing of internal employees.

Tristan also feels valued, and was especially encouraged that s/he was not laid off as the lowest seniority faculty member in his/her department last year. Instead, the academic administration found another position for him/her:

Tristan: In having been almost let go a year ago, I guess to me, I appreciate that the door just wasn't slammed in my face. I feel like I'm part of an organization that wants me here. We were able to come up with an alternative to just being let go. And at this point, I'm grateful for it. Because it's an experience that I would have never ever gotten, to be able to do what I'm doing if I had just stayed in [a job in the field] or just been let go. Then I've never been in that position, either, but just to feel like I'm doing something that's worthwhile enough that I can stay, that I feel people value what I have to offer, is a

good thing.

Tristan feels wanted, valued, encouraged, and supported by the administration, especially since s/he knows the route of less effort for them would have been a layoff. S/he is also enjoying the new opportunities in the temporary position, and is very happy to be returning next year.

Tristan believes that what s/he can contribute is valued by the administration which is very affirming. This is a very different experience from that of staff members, such as Montana, who were “reorganized” into new positions.

Of the faculty interviewed, one commented on feeling more valued by the previous administration, and not supported by this one, which was not typical of the experiences of the others. Lee comments:

Lee: [With the previous President and Vice President.] you felt even if it was just momentary, you felt acknowledged, that you were worthwhile, and that you were an important part of the college. With these two guys, I see them rushing around in the halls, and they always stop and acknowledge me and say hello to me, but yet you just feel like you’re not that much, that you’re not that important to them.... I just wasn’t a priority for them.

Lee feels that s/he is not really acknowledged or “that important” to the current president and Executive VP, and that s/he felt differently with the previous executive team. S/he says that although they greet him/her, they are always “rushing around in the halls” and are not really focused on him/her. Lee also mentions having difficulty with trying to garner support from his/her new dean:

Lee: I know my last dean, we’ve had several deans over there, came in, [and] she would allow me to teach, but then when we got the new Dean, I think he was so new to it that he refused to let me [teach in another field].... He had to let me do it this year, because otherwise I would lose my credentialing and I think it’s been four years... And so, I wasn’t able to get back in despite my asking, so now, he has to let me in. But I was waiting and then I don’t know if that was deliberate or what, but now I have to start over again.

Lee is working toward a second assigned field. S/he was given permission to pursue

credentialing in it on his/her last sabbatical, and needs to teach it a certain number of times to complete the process. S/he also needs to teach it a certain number of semesters to be on the seniority roster in it and is having a problem getting support for that. Contractually, the dean now has to assign Lee to it, but it did not make him/her feel valued or supported with the dean waiting until he was forced to do it. The dean has also cost Lee time by breaking the run of consecutive semesters needed for credentialing. S/he is understandably frustrated because the previous dean approved his/her sabbatical plan to earn the credentialing. The previous dean had helped Lee be assigned to teach it, yet the new dean has not carried through with the plan.

With the exception of Lee, the faculty who spoke about feeling valued and supported were quite positive in their perceptions of being genuinely valued and cared about. They refer to feeling supported, to a climate of feeling valued, and gave specific examples. All of this is a polar opposite of the staff comments for this section, and provides a stark contrast between how the two groups perceive their value and worth to the College.

Sense of mutual trust.

The fourth category of climate comments that came together from the data for staff was that of mutual trust. The overall theme of the staff comments related a marked sense of distrust, especially of upper administration. The faculty had a range of views about trust and they will be presented in this section. The topic of trust elicited a variety of negative and positive observations that were germane to faculty issues and some that were common to all employees. The comments on trust generally arose in response to reviewing the question on the Institutional Climate Survey regarding mutual trust in the College.

Taylor gave an example of distrust that s/he thought was common to staff and faculty

alike:

Taylor: Personally, I like that we're doing the [diversity survey], but I don't know that that's been handled the best way in terms of encouraging participation. And that affects culture [climate]. There's a little bit of a sense of distrust. Our most recent reminder was the President stating ... that he was going to have 85% participation in his goals, so he needed everybody to participate. And I think what people read from that message was, "In order to get my bonus, I need 85% [participation], so do it." And there's a lot of sensitivity right now. I think that's the other part of the culture [climate], because being a state worker right now is not viewed as such a positive because of all the union hubbub. I think that can cause some stress to the climate, and again, that tends toward a more divisive environment ... [and] I think that that can lead to some hurt feelings.

Taylor explains that although s/he was glad that the College had committed to participating in a diversity inventory, it was not set up well initially. There was fear among faculty that their personal attitudes about diversity would be recorded and available for review by a College employee in the Human Resources department. This was eventually changed, but the damage to trust had already been done. The president sent out a message that asked employees to complete it because he had committed to it as part of his annual Work Plan. Many employees knew that if the president achieved the goals in his Work Plan, he would receive at least a 4.5% bonus that year. State employee salaries have been almost static over the last several years. Therefore, the e-mail was widely interpreted as the president saying "give me what I need to meet my goals and then I will get a big bonus." In the current negative environment of frozen salaries, job losses and insecurity, and low trust, this miscalculation further damaged trust. Even faculty like Taylor who were generally positive about climate were upset by the President's email.

Tristan explains how s/he could relate to staff members' fear of a layoff, as there was a possibility of a layoff in his/her program:

Tristan: I think that a lot of this, that trust thing, it all depends on everybody's own experience. Because right now, I feel a lot of trust. But given last fall, for a while, I didn't know. I didn't trust what's going to happen and what's going on just because that

was the situation I was in. But now, this day, today, yes, I feel like there's trust. But I think it all depends on where you're at overall.

Tristan sees trust as an outcome of individual experience, and that when there is a possibility of losing your job to a layoff, there is very little trust. So s/he can understand the lack of trust that staff feel, with the sense that anyone is vulnerable to having their job eliminated.

Taylor has another view of trust between employees and administrators. S/he thinks that administrators keep themselves too removed from the daily "grind" of other College employees:

Taylor: I think that [lack of trust] is the case. I also think that there really is distance between administration and the day-to-day grind. And there are attempts made, but having a great big meeting or having a weekly whatever, that doesn't build trust. Walking around the hallways, stepping in offices. Due to contract, administrators aren't encouraged to just walk into a classroom, but if I had the opportunity to invite the dean in, I might do that, just to have them interact more with the students. Or, I understand that people are very busy here, but I think that our administrators could spend a little bit more time getting to know staff and faculty and building trust, and maybe they wouldn't feel so overwhelmed and busy all the time because there would be a culture [climate] of trust.

Taylor sees the lack of trust of administration as stemming from administrators' lack of contact and time with the rest of the College employees. S/he suggests that "management by walking around" and extra contact would improve the lack of trust. In turn, it would reduce institutional stress and busyness all around to have an increased sense of trust between administration and the other College employees. Taylor also thinks that there is distrust of external people who may have an assigned function at Riverland. If that person plays a key role, it may adversely affect outcomes of that role. Taylor says:

Taylor: I also think that there's some distrust at our institution, especially when it's an external person. Let me provide an example for you and I don't know her personally, but I think that, for example, our person who handles diversity [and investigations]. She's not a Riverland employee and I think sometimes there is some distrust with that. And as a result, people may not report or they may not be sure what to report or they may fear reporting because something might get misconstrued. I also think there's some sensitivity and I think a lot of this has to do with our budget and where moneys go.

Taylor thinks that reporting to a diversity officer who is also an investigator and not an employee of the College may be less likely to occur because people may not want to report, may not know what should be reported, or may fear what will happen after reporting. As a result there may be situations that should be addressed by a diversity officer that may not be reported. The ramifications of this can then be quite serious in terms of impact on College climate.

Bailey discusses his/her views on mutual trust. As with most participants, s/he interprets the “mutual” part of mutual trust to be in relationship to the rest of the College, but primarily with administration. S/he has a high degree of trust, but comments on why others may not:

Bailey: For me, an atmosphere of mutual trust exists throughout the college.... Now, if I were to think of the college in general, or other people, I would say they would [rank it lower].... But I don't think that those people are as involved. I trust the people that I need to work with and I have seen the President wonder why people don't trust, because he is just such an ethical guy. I wonder if we had layoffs and a lot of changing around of personnel, and I also attribute my [being more positive]because of my leadership position. Like I said, I trust that when I say things to administration, like if we're working in faculty share governance, or in a pre-meet, that it stays there. We have mutual respect in the room and it even gets to the point where sometimes it's just funny. You know, we have a little bit of a good time, a little humor along with work. And also, some of these people have been at my home. I wouldn't invite them to my home if I didn't have any trust or like for them.

Bailey is very positive about trust throughout the College. S/he says that the current administrators have proved themselves trustworthy enough that s/he invites them to his/her house for parties. S/he enjoys working with the administration in the faculty shared governance process. Bailey echoes Drew's earlier view that the level of engagement s/he has helps promote trust. Bailey also discusses his/her perception that the President is very ethical and says that s/he trusts that there is confidentiality when it is promised and expected. Bailey also thinks that others might have less trust because they are not as involved with administration as s/he is, or because of layoffs or reorganization.

Drew also has a high level of trust, and also attributes it to a high level of engagement

and interaction:

Drew: I think that my perception might be different because I have more interaction. And as in [faculty] positions too, we're the chair of different committees, we work hand-in-hand, we do a lot of things together, so I think there's more trust and camaraderie there than for somebody else coming in cold not even knowing who the administrators are or having worked with them. Their perception might be, "Ooh, I should be afraid of them," or, "I'd better watch my back," or whatever. So I think the relationship is different, and I think that's what causes my rankings to [be] different. Unless you're working with bad people, then of course my perception would be down.... My interactions have been positive, and so I would be ranking them higher. I think that the leadership team that we work with, I think that we now trust each other, but ... there are some things that I don't trust.... I think sometimes there might be some agenda that [the leadership team] needs to be pushing that they don't always tell us about, but they really have to do it for some reason.

Drew, like Bailey, is interpreting mutual trust as being between the faculty leadership team and administrative team. S/he thinks that others might rate that lower, but that is because they are not as engaged, involved, or as familiar and comfortable with the administrative team as s/he is. Drew thinks that some employees might be intimidated by administration, but s/he is not. S/he also says s/he trusts them because they are not "bad people." Drew does note that they might have an agenda that they cannot be direct about, so his/her trust about complete disclosure would not be absolute.

Faculty who have not been in leadership, however, also have positive things to say about mutual trust and climate. Kai has seen it improve over the years. S/he says, "I would say [the highest rating for mutual trust] currently. I think so, much more so than when I was hired, I would say at least from my perspective, anyway, what I see." Kai rates mutual trust at the highest level, and notes that, from his/her perspective, it has definitely improved over the years.

Cameron also gives a high rating to mutual trust, and notes that trust seems to be all about the type of people in administration:

Cameron: Yes, I think that generally that's the case [an atmosphere of mutual trust exists throughout the college] within the places that I have experienced, which is primarily

faculty.... Partly I think that just has to do with the nature of the people that come in. I mean, [the President] is a very honest and very straightforward person to deal with. Everybody disagrees with him about certain things, but it's not a problem. And basically, we've had administrators that could be trusted, and that seemed to have some trust for faculty, maybe too much, so that's made a difference in recent years.

Cameron thinks that the high level of trust s/he observes among faculty now is related to the good character of the current administrators. S/he thinks the President is a "very honest and very straightforward" person, and that people feel free to disagree with the President. S/he also notes that mutual trust is reciprocal and that currently the College has administrators who are trustworthy. The administrators also trust faculty, which adds to overall mutual trust.

Jesse, like Drew and Bailey, has a high level of trust, but thinks there are people who do not. Jesse says:

Jesse: Actually I trust quite a few people but I know there are other people that do not. But again, even on their worst day, administrative assistants and staff that growl and have had it, you know it's not that they're purposely not trying to do their jobs. They have frustrations, too, and generally if you talk to them a little while, you can work things out.

Jesse says s/he personally trusts many people at the College. S/he also discusses staff members who may be short-tempered with faculty as an example of people who may have lower trust or who lower trust. S/he attributes those problems to a bad day or frustration, and feels s/he can satisfactorily work out any conflict with them, so it does not affect his/her trust. Bailey, Jesse, Cameron and Drew all acknowledged that although they support a high rating for mutual trust, they know there are others who feel differently.

Once again in this section on climate and mutual trust, there is a stark contrast between the group of staff, who indicate the lowest level of trust, and that of faculty, who generally have higher levels of trust. However, it is interesting to note that the faculty who rated trust highly usually also said that they thought others would rate it lower. The perceived experiences of the two groups differ from each other in regard to trust. The data from the discussion of each group

made it possible to understand why they are experiencing feelings of mistrust or trust.

Administration and climate.

The fifth area examined in the context of the staff group was the impact of administrative management styles on climate. The concerns of the staff were related to having administrators who did not listen, assigned responsibility without authority, and engaged in top-down decision making. Other concerns were the perceived dominance of the Executive VP with the lack of delegated decision-making authority to others. The restructuring, layoffs, and the turmoil and fear they brought were also grave concerns of the staff. Although there were no direct interview questions linking administration to climate per se, the overview of the climate survey questions did stimulate discussion in that area. All of the staff and some of the faculty participants had concerns about administration that arose in those contexts and others.

In assessing the overall faculty feedback on this connection between administrative style and climate, I found that there were not many faculty who engaged in discussion about it. Some faculty were interested in discussing overall organizational structure, concerns with it, and how it served the College, and those comments will be included in the next section that examines organizational structure. The few faculty who did discuss ideas pertinent to this area developed some thoughtful approaches, some kudos, and some negative or constructive criticism. However, there was no common theme among faculty as there was among staff in the sections on administration and climate. This section was similar to that of mutual trust with diverse views discussed by the faculty participants.

In the previous section of faculty and staff groups, Taylor discussed the impact of administrative management styles on climate. S/he also observes, “I think the [Executive] VP

has a lot of influence on the culture [climate]... and I feel very supported by our Academic department and our Academic leader.... I think it is better now [for faculty than before].”

Taylor comments that s/he feels supported by Academic Affairs and the Executive VP, but commented previously that s/he believes it would be different now if s/he were on staff. Taylor also said previously that each leader is viewing the different areas of the College through their own individual lens, and that in turn affects the culture and climate. In this context, Taylor was referring to climate.

Kelly concurs with the staff members who had characterized the Executive VP as controlling most of the decision-making or operational decisions in the College. Kelly says:

Kelly: I think that there are things that have cropped up that people would like to see happen, and then it seems like it goes somewhere, but then it stops with the Executive VP. Or, I’ve just heard things about how he is as a bully and again, I don’t have personal knowledge about that, but I just think he kind of has been very difficult for some people to work with.... Staff, probably more so. And other administrators. I’m not sure if I’ve heard of faculty actually.

As Darby and other staff discussed earlier, Kelly also sees the Executive VP as being the dominant decision-maker. Kelly affirms that he seems to display this style with staff and other administrators, but not with faculty. S/he discusses what s/he has heard about his style from staff members but says s/he has not experienced it directly. As Kelly is a faculty member, that would seem to be consistent with the assertions about the Executive VP’s style with staff versus faculty.

Taylor discusses the idea that although climate may be more positive for faculty, s/he has concerns about it as a faculty member, too:

Taylor: It’s great to feel supported at the level that I am, however, the library’s been greatly reduced – that’s not supporting faculty and students. I understand we have budget constraints. We have lost an Academic Dean position – that doesn’t support Academics. So I’m concerned about some of the things that are happening.... [But] I would absolutely encourage people to work here. I think it’s a wonderful place, I think we do a lot of good things. I think that it’s a pretty healthy organization, but I think that there are some things that we could do differently.

Taylor explains that the budget constraints have hurt staff, faculty, and students, and that Academic Affairs has been hurt along with Student Affairs. S/he commented previously that the cuts have also put faculty and staff at odds with each other, and that impedes realizing the College common goals of serving and educating students. Taylor also stated previously that there needs to be collaboration among all employees to realize and achieve the College's mission together. S/he concludes with the positives of the climate at the College, and the hope that there can be improvement.

Taylor has praise for the effect of administrative styles on climate, and a constructive critique for improvement. Taylor wanted to be sure that s/he gave credit where it was due – in this case, to administration for positive effects on climate:

Taylor: I think we're healthier and more trusting now than we were under some of our previous leaders. Our president's very educated, he's very articulate. He's very kind and compassionate ... and caring, and I think that influences others to follow suit. I can remember some presidents in the past that were very unkind, but there are some really, really wonderful things that happen here. I think the way that we handle graduation, for example, with such high regard. There's a lot of really good time and emphasis that goes into that and I'm really pleased with the level of support that is given to such an important ritual in our college to honor our students.... I'm really pleased to see how involved [the president] has made the deans and the non-academic areas [in graduation] ... and that makes me want to participate.... I think they've really done a nice job recognizing people with the Awards and Recognition ceremony. That creates a culture [climate] Those things are really nice to encourage people to give compliments to one another. So there are good things that are happening here.

Taylor sees the College's climate as healthier and more caring and trusting than under previous presidents. S/he is very supportive of the positive attributes of the President and what he brings to the College. S/he also noted his kindness and caring, and credited him with setting that tone in the climate. Taylor is very pleased with the way graduation honors the graduates, and the Awards and Recognition ceremony that honors and recognizes employees. On the constructive critique side of the coin, Taylor wanted to ensure that staff and faculty are listened

to, especially when their input is solicited by administration:

Taylor: If we really value people, as we have stressed so many times, then I think that there are maybe some subtle things that could be done to suggest we actually do value people. I think that we have all of these great duty days and we're asked for input, but I don't know how much of that input is used. I think that if truly we value people and we value students, then I think that there could be a few things that could be done higher up to enforce [valuing that input].

Taylor's message is that it is important for administration to show that they value the work of employees, and when they ask for input or suggestions for improvement, they should be taken seriously and used appropriately. Taylor believes that doing so would show that employees are truly valued and cared about, more than simply stating it.

Tristan also points out that there will always be people unhappy with administration, but s/he values the College's leadership. Tristan comments:

Tristan: There's still people who are disgruntled and I don't know if you ever move away from that, from people that have mistrust or people that think communication isn't right. I just think that there's always going to be a group of that.... And yes, leadership matters and right now I think that [the President] does a nice job of being personable and recognizing his people in the College. I really believe that.

Tristan thinks there will always be those who complain about trust or communication or are generally disgruntled. However, s/he believes that the President does a good job of recognizing people. S/he also reiterates that s/he believes leadership really does matter.

Jesse did not offer critique of administrative styles on climate, but instead wanted to discuss how climate has changed as the College has grown:

Jesse: As far as my experience teaching and stuff, they've been consistently positive. It's more difficult now climate-wise, administratively, because our administration is so huge now, and we have such a huge institution since merger and everything. Before, when we were Austin Community College, it was very small, very tight.... [Now,] it's hard to keep up, and administration-wise, the administration is now so much bigger.... After merger, the administration got bigger, and now I just have no idea who does what anymore. That part of the climate has changed, definitely. I don't feel the dedication of administration to trying to do things for the College has changed. I think they are no different than any other administration we've been under. I agree with some things, I

disagree with other things.

Jesse has a positive view of the administration and their dedication, but comments on the impact on climate of an administrative and college environment that is three times bigger than before merger. S/he comments that s/he has “no idea who does what anymore” because of the overall changes, new people, and structural changes. Of course, this complexity impacts climate. Like some of the other faculty, Jesse is philosophical in noting that s/he agrees with some things administration does, and not with others. Some of these ideas are returned to in the next structures.

Bailey comments on the fact that there has been a revolving door for administrators over the years, and that this has had an impact on climate. Bailey says:

Bailey: I think changing of administration affects the climate every time, and we have totally called ourselves “stepping stones.” Administrative people come to our school and want to move to bigger schools. I don’t think that we see faculty move around as much as we see administration move around. I don’t think that we see staff move around.

Bailey notes that when there is a change in administration, there is a change in climate. Faculty and staff are typically more stable within an organization. As Cameron pointed out earlier, administrators themselves, as well as administrative structures, impact climate. Lee has had negative experiences, similar to Blair in the staff group, of encountering the negative aspects of hierarchy, and believes that these adversely climate. Lee says:

Lee: There always seems to be a lack of communication. It seems like decisions are made a lot from closed doors and that you are simply told about it and that they will kind of give you lip service. They’ll say to the faculty, “Oh, what do you think about this?”... I think they just used that to say that [they] had faculty input. It does not mean that they actually accept and agree with what you say. Where, before in the hiring practices, we were actually listened to. And now it’s different. You fill out the forms, [but] you don’t know if those forms are actually even looked at. You hope they are, but you really don’t know. I think it’s a bad difference [from previous administrations].... I think faculty felt that the door was open and you could come in, and I’m not implying that it was a complaint type thing, but as a sounding board and ideas and I think it was more open to ideas. Now, I feel that this administration, that it’s closed and that they’re reactive.

Lee thinks that there is a closed door to the current administration. The impact on climate is that no one is being listened to, decisions are made behind closed doors, and no feedback comes out of it. S/he sees no value use of input that has been requested, as Taylor also observed. Lee feels undervalued, stressed, and that his/her efforts are unappreciated.

Once again, in this section, faculty had largely positive feedback to offer in regards to the effect of administration and their management styles on climate. There was also some constructive critique in the hopes of improving climate and the College. Lee and Kelly were the exception to the positive faculty experiences of this area of climate, and it is worthwhile to note that their concerns and comments mirrored those of many of the staff members in this same category.

In concluding this section on the overall faculty perceptions of climate, I will use the original categories of analysis to compare the overall findings between the staff and faculty groups. When analyzing this section on climate, I was struck by the dichotomy between the staff and faculty who were interviewed. The staff paint a uniformly dark picture of a climate that contains many negatives and few positives for them. They are constantly afraid of job loss, as was pointed out by a respondent to the 2012 Climate Survey who said, “The College needs to provide an environment where people are not afraid for their jobs” (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 99). This comment seems to be universally experienced by staff. On the other hand, the faculty are living on the sunnier side of the street. They generally experience climate in a positive way, and are largely satisfied with their work environment.

In terms of stress, restructuring, and workload issues, the dichotomy seen in the overall climate section was also apparent here. The staff are reeling under the pressures of reorganization, restructuring, heavier workloads, and the additional stresses of the negative

climate. Several responses to the 2012 Climate Survey also focused on these issues. The following is a composite of some of the responses:

Un-do the epic failure that is the new Student Services area. There isn't anyone, including students, who think the revamp is going well....

In my workspace experience, because of the restructuring of Student and Academic Affairs, communication – both listening and informing – went downhill....

Some people within the institution have received promotions based on the idea that we have no other home for them. Duties were removed from higher levels of staff and given to staff members at a lower level and less pay scale to “clean up” because the higher level employees were not able to handle these duties....

It is in my opinion that if the restructure in positions and in current staff positions [was] fully evaluated and looked at, several very good people will be leaving Riverland. Many have already. Riverland has become a dysfunctional college.
(*Institutional Climate Survey, 2012, p. 95-97*)

The comments from the individuals in the composite above describe the concerns expressed by the staff interviewed. The last survey response that notes “Riverland has become a dysfunctional college” summarizes the staff view. There were faculty who expressed concern for staff in regard to overall climate and spoke on their behalf. Generally speaking however, the faculty did not express the distress or the same level of concern that staff did regarding climate, and faculty seemed to be more content with the status quo.

In terms of a sense of value and recognition, the dichotomy between faculty and staff observed previously appeared here as well. Most staff members were very vocal about the lack of value, recognition, and caring that they experience in this climate. Faculty, on the other hand, were generally quite positive about feeling recognized, valued, and cared about.

An area that elicited a high level of discussion was a sense of mutual trust. Once again, staff generally do not experience a sense of trust, and this has been exacerbated by layoffs, fear of job loss, restructuring, and heavy workloads. A related comment on the 2012 Climate Survey

summarizes these concerns:

The trust level among employees and administration is very low. People are overworked, defensive of their time, and look out for themselves. We have been put into an environment where it is all for themselves. Our work integrity has been put into jeopardy because of workloads. Employees do not have the resources to perform their jobs. Mistakes are being made because many positions are the equivalent of two or three full-time positions. We are getting pushed to do more and more with less and the quality of service is suffering. (*Institutional Climate Survey, 2012, p. 96*)

This respondent echoes many of the staff interviewed about the factors that have eroded trust. Another survey respondent explains how poor or misleading communication worsens trust:

While there is more lip service given to the changes that supposedly have been made in communication, it is merely lip service. No real changes have been made and the level of distrust and fear has increased instead of decreased. Staff members are not treated equally, nor are they treated with respect in certain departments. (*Institutional Climate Survey, 2012, p. 97*)

This comment also echoes another observation made in the interviews, and by others on the 2012 Climate Survey. Staff members are not being treated equally, and the favoritism, bullying, and retaliation/reprisal that is mentioned repeatedly in both the interviews and Climate Survey are a strong explanation for eroded trust.

Faculty had varying views on the subject of mutual trust. One notable theme that emerged from the data was that several faculty had a high level of trust themselves, but knew of others who did not. Taylor, Drew, Jesse, Bailey, Cameron, and Tristan said although they did not lack trust, they understood why it would have a low rating on the Climate Survey. This is interesting because there were a few comments on the 2012 Climate Survey which indicated low trust between faculty and administration:

Administrators do not trust nor exhibit respect to their faculty....

Administrators do not advocate or have a sense of commitment to their faculty....

Have an administration that treats all faculty equally – not based on how much you like or dislike them. (*Institutional Climate Survey, 2012, p. 94*).

These responses indicate that there is a lack of trust between faculty and administration, or that there are faculty who believe they are being treated unequally or disrespectfully. It includes faculty do not believe administration is committed to them. The faculty interviewed for this research did not express these concerns, other than Kelly's perception that the faculty leadership might be more positive about administration because they received favors from them.

The topic of administration and its impact on climate was addressed indirectly throughout the climate section, but the last category examines any direct effects by administration on climate. Each staff member who addressed this issue either raised or reiterated previous concerns about the impact of administrative communication and decision-making, and their perceptions of the effects of various administrators on climate. The themes of bullying, retaliation, job loss, and other negative concerns emerged in other sections, and were reiterated here in connection with administration.

In contrast to staff, faculty did not have the intensity or volume of concerns, and had either constructive criticism or largely positive feedback regarding administration. The exceptions were Lee and Kelly who expressed concerns that were similar to those of staff. Some faculty reinforced the idea that there is a strong connection between administration and climate, and that with the current administration, faculty experience a positive climate. The topic of the impact of administration on climate was developed in this section. The next section develops the role of administration and how it functions and influences the organization.

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE AND ITS PLAYERS

The structural backbone of this section is an examination of the administrative structures, administrative styles, and organizational function at Riverland Community College. The interview questions that related to the low climate survey ratings and the employees perceptions of those ratings produced discussions regarding how administrative styles and personalities and administrative structures impact the organizational structure of the College.

The data analysis of the staff and faculty responses reveals information organized around their perceptions of: (a) administrators and the Administrative Council; (b) organizational decision-making; (c) organizational communication; and (d) organizational planning and budget. The subject of organizational decision-making also produced discussion related to restructuring and reorganization and personnel practices, where concerns included hiring and consistent disciplinary practices. As in the other sections of this chapter, staff perspectives will be examined first, followed by the faculty perspectives.

Staff Perspectives

Perceptions of administrators and Administrative Council.

Data analysis in this section revealed perceptions of the staff regarding the administration, individual administrators and their styles, and the Administrative Council and its function. Blair comments on his/her overall impression of the current administrative structure and its impact on the organization. S/he views it as a pyramid in shape and hierarchal in function:

Blair: In the last 12 years, the college's organizational structure has changed. When I came through the door it was much more dealing primarily with academic affairs and a student services group and the human resources group. Over the last couple years, what the college has done has meld those a little bit closer together, which is a good thing on

the surface. But in actual fact ... what they have done is created the more triangular shape with a base of people at the bottom who do the front-line work, going up into a managerial structure, where the information funnels upward and decisions are made at the top.

Blair regards the former organizational structure as being organized around the three groups of Academic Affairs, Student Services, and Human Resources. S/he states that these have been “melded together” more closely recently, referring to the overarching responsibilities of the Executive VP and the VP of Human Resources also serving as the CSO. The result is a wide-base triangle with front-line workers forming the base and a small top managerial structure. Blair is concerned that this has produced a one-way flow of information (up) with decisions being made only by the management level at the top. This view of the College organizational structure sets the stage for the following sections on perceptions of the three top administrators and how they impact the key areas of decision-making, communication, and planning, along with other areas of organizational structure and function.

Administrators.

Blair explains how s/he thinks the President’s style and preferences affect the way the organization functions:

Blair: I think our president likes things in a structured way.... When I initially came through the college, you could go to the president or the vice president at the time and have a conversation. If you do that now, you are going to be sent back down through your supervisor. And you have to hit all of the communication pieces available to you before you come up.

Blair believes that the President only wants information that has come to him in a structured way, or through the hierarchal “filters.” Blair’s previous experience was being able to directly communicate with the President and VPs. Now if s/he is going to communicate with them, s/he must go through the hierarchy. As this section is developed, there are further

illustrations of this approach to management and what some of the staff view as its limitations.

Note to the reader: For most of the College staff, accessing the hierarchy would mean beginning with a lead worker in the department and/or the department director or supervisor (usually a middle-management employee), then a Dean and or a Vice President, then the Executive Vice President, and finally the President. There are about 90 full-time staff employees at the College, so this could mean communicating with at least three, and possibly up to five, levels in order to reach the President. As Blair mentions, this has not been the approach of past administrations, at least for communication.

Darby adds another dimension to the view of the pyramidal, hierarchal structure that Blair explained. As quoted earlier, Darby believes that the top two administrators are vying for control of the College. Darby sees this “struggle for leadership” as perhaps stemming from the President’s inability to lead, combined with the presence of a dominating Executive VP, who s/he terms “an over-leader.” Used in this context, Darby means that the Executive VP is usurping the President’s decision-making authority. Darby believes that the operational leader of the College, the one in control, is the Executive VP. Any operational decision has to be made by the Executive VP, and s/he thinks people find that discouraging. If this is the true situation, it would seem that the designated leaders or decision-makers, including the President, might participate to only a limited degree in decision-making.

Montana comments on his/her perception that the President and Executive VP are actually trying to implement two different visions for the College, and how that affects the organization:

Montana: So if we start tying all these in back to MNSCU goals and the Presidential Work Plan, and actually having a strategic planning template, or something not based on critical factors, but based on the goals, what are your issues and how can you accomplish (or not) this goal... And the dean [says], “The president’s vision is here and the [Executive Vice President’s] is here and they don’t mesh.” So, that is our climate in a nutshell, if you ask me. If we have the president and the executive vice president with two different missions and goals and they don’t mesh, how are the rest of us supposed to function?

In the context of a planning discussion staff were having with a Dean and supervisor, the Dean told them it was not possible to correlate planning because the President and Executive VP had differing, non-complementary visions for the College. As Montana notes, it would be difficult for anyone else to effectively participate in planning or carrying out a plan under these conditions. Consider Blair's perception of the President's insistence on hierarchal communication and decision-making, and Darby's perception of the administrative struggle for leadership. Confusion on the part of staff members like Montana about vision seems inevitable. If these staff perceptions are accurate and the President is aware of these perceptions, it also raises the question about why this is allowed by the President. Jordan also shares an experience with the President and the administrative hierarchy:

Jordan : [The President] is a wonderful, really sweet guy. I see him being very disengaged and not really knowing all what's going on. I know he has a hierarchy, he wants you to follow the chain of command, but I think that there are times when as a President, I wish he would just stick his feet right in it and go, "Okay, what's going on here and what are we gonna do?"

Jordan has a positive view of the President as a person, but sees him as disengaged and ill-informed. S/he comments on being aware of his insistence on the hierarchal chain-of-command, confirming Blair's perception. Jordan would like the President to become involved in investigating and solving problems.

Kiley also comments on his/her perception of the President. In Kiley's encounter with the President to discuss a project in his/her area, Kiley was surprised to discover that the President seemed to have no idea what his/her division did:

Kiley: We met with the President... [He] was asking us questions that just really shocked me ... that he didn't know what our goal was in the college. It is really weird that the president didn't have a clue on these different things and so, you'd think that [he would] have a better grasp of what we do for the community... because I feel like he's kind of the face of the college ... when he's out in the community ... so you would think that he needed to be more connected with what we are doing outside so he could be

knowledgeable about the outside and what's going on when he's out there.... There's a big connection.

Kiley explained that the President did not seem at all informed about what his/her division did in the College and out in the community. Since there is a community connection between Kiley's division and the President, s/he was concerned that he was not informed enough to represent them in the community. Kiley also said that his/her supervisor had accompanied him/her to this discussion with the President, and afterwards told Kiley that he was aware that the President did not understand their work or promote them in the community.

Because the Executive VP's perceived style has impacted climate, there is a discussion and some overlapping quotations regarding his style between this section and the section on climate. This is true of Darby's comment that s/he has seen the Executive VP as behaving differently with staff and faculty:

Darby: I think that the [Executive VP] is much more pushy and coercive with staff people than he is with faculty. I don't think he goes to battle with faculty.... It's not even antagonistic [with staff], it's just like "I can control this. I can control these people."

Darby commented earlier on the "over-leader" tendency of the Executive VP, and Montana commented on the Executive VP's vision for the College competing with the President's. In Darby's quote above, s/he portrays him as seeing himself as being in control of staff, and so being more "pushy" with them than with faculty.

As discussed in the climate section, Kiley thinks that the Executive VP is micromanaging and that he overrides the other levels of decision-making, similar to Darby's perception. Kiley explains that having him override the director and Dean of his/her area is "limiting" and seems to be micromanagement. Kiley is also frustrated that he says "no" without an explanation when he is overriding his/her direct supervisors' decision on a request s/he has made.

In the restructuring of Student Services in April 2011, the Vice President of Human Resources (VPHR) was appointed as the CSO, then her title was changed to the Vice President of Employee and Student Affairs. The Vice President of Employee and Student Affairs (VPESA) now reports directly to the President. The Executive VP previously supervised all of Student Affairs and Academic Affairs. The current organizational charts show the VPESA reporting to the President, with Academic Affairs reporting to the Executive VP (Appendix G), who in turn reports to the President. This appointment to the combination role of VP of Human Resources and Student Affairs has been controversial.

Blair is concerned about the loss of the neutral party that s/he would expect from an HRD.

Blair: The head of human resources is now a supervisor of student services. So there's no [place] within the college to go to that could even have the perception of neutrality. Human resources is now a supervisor of half the college, a third of the college.... If you perceived human resources as being neutral within something even in the past, now the person who's in charge of human resources is also supervisor of student affairs, [and is] also the person involved in making the key decisions in the college. [She] has already been involved in all of those decisions and now, you're going to go see if you can get someone neutral?... So we've engaged all the neutrality. We've removed all of the checks and balances within the college [that could have provided] any voice of frontline workers back up through the system.... And I don't know if there's reprisals.... I think there's been a change in the college as there's no ability to provide an alternative view to a decision.

As Blair points out, being supervisor to a large group of people in Student Affairs removes the VPESA from the neutral ground in Human Resources to a place where the VPESA and her division are under scrutiny. Blair thinks that employees having recourse to an administrator who is not in their line of supervisors is important. S/he sees this as a lack of "checks and balances" on the system, especially for front-line employees whose access to the remaining institutional hierarchy is limited, as s/he, Darby, and Jordan have discussed.

Montana discusses the problems and possible advantages encountered when the HRD

also is the head of Student Affairs. S/he believes that there may be an advocacy advantage, but also sees a conflict of interests:

Montana: I have two scenarios. The VPESA has been an advocate to the point where she's starting to understand the amount that has been put on us [in Student Affairs] that can't be done. So ... we are hiring for two more processors. [On the other hand] there's also some inconsistent supervisor roles going on, where instead of being the CSA, or CSO, she needed to be the HR. So, she hasn't been able to take off one hat and put on the other hat very smoothly.... There was position descriptions being put together, and the two positions have different supervisors. They're not both under VPESA. So, one supervisor had to give a very descriptive, "This is exactly what this new position will do." The other supervisor didn't, and it was questioned. And VPESA said, "Well, because I'm not her supervisor." But you are the head of HR.... So, in one aspect, she's starting to know what Student Affairs does and everything and is an advocate in that way.... But then she just doesn't know when to switch hats and which role to play. Which I cannot fault her [for] at all. I have a hard time switching roles and which hat I'm playing at what time.

Montana describes having these roles as putting on one hat or another. The advantage is that the HRD can advocate for the needs of Student Services with first-hand knowledge of the needs. The problem is that when the supervisors in the Student Affairs area are directed by the VPESA, they must follow her standards in supervision. However, the VPESA does not hold another, lateral supervisor in an area that she does not supervise to the same standards for supervision. Montana gives this as an example of not being able to switch hats easily. Blair believes that the HRD should represent all areas of the College equally and be a resource for everyone, but feels this is not possible with the HRD also being the CSO. Montana is contending that the human resources "hat" should make sure they are consistent, while the student affairs "hat" does not want to step on the toes of a supervisor who is not in her direct report.

Note to the reader: Montana is referring to a somewhat confusing structure wherein the financial aid staff and supervisor are supervised by the Chief Financial Officer, and Student Affairs staff are supervised by the VPESA. However, under the new restructuring, the financial aid front-line workers (processors) and Student Affairs front-line staff work in the same area and are cross-trained to all be a one-stop shop for

students requiring any kind of financial aid or Student Affairs assistance. So having supervisors write differing job descriptions may produce problems when they are expected to do the same work.

Montana also comments on how the roles of CSO and HRD are in conflict when it comes to reporting on how the restructuring is going in Student Affairs:

Montana: VPESA ... is Vice President of Employee and Student Affairs, which just seems a direct conflict, if you ask me.... I'm not picking on her, the VPESA ... but if [for example] ... you ask her how the student affairs restructuring is going, she's going to say "Wonderful. I've talked to a few students, they all tell us that they really like it and that it's going very well." We have 3,000 students and I'm willing to bet if we do that services survey that we did two years ago, it will not come back glowing.... And then I keep saying we need to investigate [that], but it's time and [money].... So if you ask [VPESA, she'll say], "Oh, it's working wonderful." Well, 70% [at least], of the staff members in the new restructuring will tell you it's not going well.

Montana is concerned that most staff members in Student Affairs do not believe the restructuring is going well. Normally they could have told the HRD about their concerns, but because the HRD is also an administrator of Student Affairs, she might feel pressure to defend the restructuring and her supervision of that area. Montana also thinks that if Riverland were able to survey students, they would also say the restructuring is not supporting students.

Note to the reader: The same individual has held the positions of Human Resources Director (HRD) and Vice President of Human Resources (VPHR). In another controversial decision, a previous President created the VPHR position and promoted her to it without a search. The decision was controversial because it included a pay increase without real change in position, it was at a time when she did not have degree credentials, there was not a search for the new position, and MnSCU does not generally provide for VPHR in the College administrative structure. Most other MnSCU colleges use the Director position and designation. Her position was expanded to include marketing and the title became Vice President of Employee Relations and Marketing. The current president made another controversial decision in Spring 2011 and designated her Vice President of Employee and Student Affairs (VPESA), again without a search and the type of degree and experience credentialing that would be expected in this position, reigniting some of the earlier controversy. It was exacerbated by having the information about the new responsibilities spread informally for some time before the new position was actually confirmed by the President. The resulting change in the Executive VP's position (no longer reporting directly to the President for the Student Affairs division) was not clarified for the College, as at the time of the interviews the participants were not sure what the reporting structure was. This confusion about a new administrative role and the

poorly-communicated decision were controversial, as the previous popular VPSA had first been demoted to a Dean of Student Services and then had been laid off due to budgetary restraints.

Administrative Council.

One climate survey item that has had low ratings, declining further in 2010 and 2012, is whether or not the Administrative Council (AC) has an accurate perception of what is happening in different areas of the College. In reviewing this item during the interviews, some employees commented on their perceptions of how well-informed the AC is in their area.

Montana does not think that the AC knows or will address what is happening:

Montana: No. I don't think [that the Administrative Council] knows what is happening and what things are like. I don't think that they really know. And I think if they know, they're just, "Oh well, we have no money." I don't want to say they're taking a blind eye to it. I just feel like they feel like we're stuck in a hole.... They really are not understanding what is happening.

Montana believes that the AC does not understand what is happening, and if they did, they would either attribute any concerns to budget restrictions, or dismiss solutions as being too costly. S/he does not want to say that they are refusing to see problems, but that they simply do not understand what is really happening.

Blair does not think that there is any way under the current structure that the AC could have an accurate perception of what is going on in the entire College:

Blair: I just think that the administration is so filtered.... Everything is filtered upward and I have no idea of what's going on.... And what I see is people who are dealing with an issue. They deal with it. They have a quick understanding of it, based on whatever information they have. A decision is made, but I don't see how it's made and I don't see the end result all the time.... You're isolated. You're expected to do your job. Your communication is upward to your supervisor. And your supervisor is expected to know ... all the nuances of your job and then represent you at the decision-making level [on Administrative Council]. But this is a fairly complex and very, very diverse organization.... And to expect literally, three to five people to understand all the nuances

of all the pieces of the college and make an informed decision that is meaningful to everybody is, I think, an overwhelmingly difficult scenario for people.

Blair is relaying his/her concern, previously expressed, that information to the top is “filtered” through too many layers. With such a complex and diverse organization, accurate and timely information is not likely to reach the AC. S/he does not believe that a small number of people will have access to the needed nuances of information to make a good decision. S/he thinks the results are rapid, relatively uninformed decisions that the rest of the College may or may not hear about, which is another problem discussed in the communication section. The core of Blair’s concern, expressed previously, is the lack of direct access for information exchange and the inability to make decisions in his/her own area.

Kiley also discussed concerns here, as well as in the previous category, regarding the President’s lack of information, and s/he extrapolates this to the AC:

Kiley: The president didn’t really have a clue how we were run. And so, it does make you wonder in these Admin Council meetings, what they’re talking about. If they’re talking about each individual department in there, or if they’re talking about things at another level.... [We are] a pretty good arm of the college. And do they think about that? Do they think that we’re just hanging out here?

Kiley’s concerns dovetail with Blair and Montana who also do not think that the AC knows what is really happening in their areas or at the College. Since Kiley believes that the President should have learned more about his/her area at the AC meetings, s/he wonders if they are considering individual departments of the College at those meetings. S/he does not feel that the area is being heard or adequately represented at AC meetings. Kiley’s comments also support Blair’s concern about a lack of communication from the Administrative Council about their process, decision-making, and the level of issues addressed there.

Dakota discussed being stymied by having a supervisor who does not want to listen to his/her concerns:

Dakota: I can tell you ...just from my own experience with my own supervisor, who [is] on the administrative council. When I've tried to convey what is happening, he does not want to hear, and I don't know how to answer that.

Dakota has tried to share what is happening in his/her area but sees the supervisor as being unwilling to listen. In that case, the supervisor would not be able to keep the AC informed or abreast of any changes in the area, and Dakota is not sure how to address this lack of involvement.

Perceptions of organizational decision-making.

Administrative decision-making is a topic that has been discussed in the previous sections in relation to faculty and staff groups that continued to surface throughout the study. The major decisions affecting the institution tend to be made at the administration level, and many employee concerns are associated with decision-making and its results. As previously discussed, the Executive VP is generally seen as being the primary decision-maker, especially in regard to internal operations. Montana, Darby, Kiley, and Blair also discussed perceptions that the Executive VP is the one "pulling the strings." Although decision-making will also be discussed in regard to the areas of planning, communication, and budgeting, there was also data that emerged about decision-making in regard to restructuring and personnel practices which will be covered in this section.

Restructuring and reorganization.

One topic that surfaces repeatedly, especially from staff, is that of the constant reorganization and restructuring in this era of administration. The most visible is the Student Affairs restructuring discussed earlier, but there has also been restructuring in other areas such as

Finance, Facilities, Technology, and Academic Affairs. Many of the concerns related to the constant cycle of change in restructuring and reorganization were discussed earlier, but there were others that surfaced in the interviews. Blair discusses a sense of this constant structural change:

Blair: You ... look at the VPASS [Class A] group, or it's changed its name again, and that's the other thing. We have a continual change of structure ... of names and structures, so you're not really too sure where it is. At one stage that group was a decision making group and it's now been degraded within the organization to an information session. So, information gets passed up to the administration through that group, but it does not necessarily pass anything back down.

Blair is commenting on the fact that, from an organizational perspective, there are constant structural and name changes. That poses difficulty in communication and decision-making. Blair also finds it confusing to try to discern where any information s/he provides is going, and to determine who is making decisions and how they are made. His/her sense of frustration at the lack of input, feedback, and information available is palpable, and the "continual change of structure" s/he cites complicates this.

As Blair and others discussed previously, the sense that decisions are being made behind closed doors without rationale or communication is a perception held by many of the staff. One succinct comment in the 2012 Climate Survey about this lack of communication noted that, "Positions were combined that make no sense and therefore services have suffered ... decision-making level at the College is very muddy" (*Institutional Climate Survey, 2012, p. 99*). The decision-making on restructuring and reorganization is "muddy" at best, as when asked who made the decisions in the Student Services restructuring, Montana said "VPESA may be the face on it, but [the Executive VP] was pulling the strings on it." This would also seem to fit with the previously expressed view that the Executive VP is the dominant administrator.

Although technically budget falls under the President and Administrative Council's

purview, staff perceive the College's budget to be under the Executive VP's control. Because of this paradox, as Blair and others have discussed, there is no clear pathway, rationale, or communication for many decisions. Some of the staff also said that any options to question or challenge the decisions are not apparent, due to the frequently-noted fear of retaliation and job loss.

In addition to questions about how decisions are made, there are also concerns about the decisions themselves. As discussed in the climate section, staff do not feel they are listened to or that their input is valued. They are afraid of consequences if they question decisions. Even if they do provide feedback on decisions, the perception is that administration does not listen or respond. Staff comments about the problems relative to the restructuring were discussed at length in the climate section. Positions were cobbled together in ways that did not make sense and that could not reasonably enable someone to accomplish their required work in the time allotted, if at all. "Too much work on too many people's plates" was the way Montana put it, and "too many varied kinds of work" was the concern of Darby and others.

A composite of comments in the 2012 Climate Survey reveals the same issues with the Student Services restructuring:

There is not a good evaluation tool in place to determine if a position description or duties is too much for one person to possibly do. Administration does not have an accurate view of what is happening. Every complaint is answered with a budget issue. Most of a "deal with it" attitude.

Increase the number of Student Affairs Enrollment Advisors. Four advisors cannot keep up with the number of students they meet with everyday. They do not feel they can take time off (vacation & comp. time earned) because that puts them farther behind. Morale is low.

The new Admissions structure, fewer counselors, no personal phone service for people calling in, and no Dean of Students or Activities Director has greatly diminished the College's ability to offer students a complete and fulfilling experience. We will lose students to bigger colleges like RCTC if we continue to lose our "personal touch."

(Institutional Climate Survey, 2012, p.82-83)

These respondents were concerned about creating position with too much work, not evaluating whether the positions were “do-able,” and the loss of critical positions in Student Services.

There were also many comments on the 2012 Climate Survey regarding the consequences of the decisions to eliminate the receptionists on each campus and adopt an automated phone system. The comments mirror the views of those staff members interviewed who spoke about the frustration with this change, and its consequences to students and the College. A composite of these concerns follows:

We seriously, SERIOUSLY need to consider getting our receptionists back. For customers/students to walk into the front door of a building and not have someone there to help them is damaging to our customer service and our reputation.

I am dismayed that budget constraints took away our ability to provide a receptionist on all three campuses. First impressions are lasting and when visitors enter our building without someone present to welcome them (particularly students whom we ask to spend thousands in tuition dollars) it reflects poorly on our college. We tout that we “value students” yet we cannot allocate resources to give them a proper welcome when they come in the door. It just seems inappropriate – at the very least a work study [student] at every entrance who will be attentive to those entering our facilities.

One of the most important aspects of keeping student focus is to re-do the phone system!!! I have tried to contact people by calling the main line, and it was such an extremely frustrating experience! I have talked to students, and they’ve mentioned how frustrating it was for them. I really think this phone system is a huge barrier for Riverland getting many more students. The personal touch is lacking! *(Institutional Climate Survey, 2012, p. 82-84)*

Enrollment in the 2011-2012 year dropped by about one-and-one-half percent each semester, which has prompted concerns that the drop is linked student services losses in the restructuring that took place in April 2011.

Another concern surfaced in regard to the restructuring in Finance and Facilities. Both the Vice President and Business Manager positions were eliminated, and the work from both was

rolled into one Chief Financial Officer (CFO) position. Dakota observes:

Dakota: You don't eliminate a CFO without it affecting the people below her as far as workloads go, as far as no support, as far as having to stretch yourself. And ... when she came in she said, "You need to stretch yourself." Fast forward ahead. Okay, stretch yourself because she didn't know facilities, and she needed to learn that.... She left, the Business Manager took the CFO position.... You don't eliminate one full Business Manager position and not let it affect the rest ... on the bottom.

Dakota is concerned about the extra work generated for those left in that division when a position was eliminated. S/he laments the lack of leadership, training, mentoring, and support, which are concerns s/he discussed previously.

Kiley points out the effects of turnover and supervisory changes in his/her area, and that there is a lack of any kind of orientation or training for the work.

Kiley: So, someone new coming to the position where I am at ... good luck.... I've seen a lot of people fail since I've been in this because there's no training, no mentoring, there's nothing.... Everybody's so busy.... I've seen it, and the person I am, I try to help everybody that comes in too, but you know you can't do everything either.... Everybody tries to do what they can, but as far as from leadership, we don't get that mentoring thing that we should be getting.... So, I mean, I knew what I was getting into, and I knew exactly what I needed to do when I got the position. But now these new people coming in, they're not succeeding. There's a lot of them that have come and gone because they just come in and they flounder. They don't know what they're supposed to be doing, which is really interesting.... I mean, we are very self-sufficient and you have to be.... [But] the new people coming in, they don't have any training.... It's every man for himself.

Kiley succinctly summarizes what it is like in his/her area with the comment "It's every man for himself." S/he discusses how the work in this area requires preparation and training, but it is not provided. Kiley describes new hires as "floundering" and says s/he would like to help more, but can only do so much at the expense of his/her busy schedule. S/he also points out that many new people have come and gone, and attributes it to the lack of training and support. Kiley thinks this attrition problem suggests a systemic problem that leadership should be addressing in order to rectify the situation.

Personnel practices.

The areas related to organizational climate and structure on the climate survey generated significant interest on the part of the employees interviewed. Personnel practices also impact climate, so there is crossover between these personnel issues and the climate section, and I point these out as they are discussed.

Hiring practices.

Hiring practices can reflect administrative philosophy, as well as required guidelines and compliance with MnSCU system policy and state and federal laws. Montana noted that s/he thinks Riverland did a good job with hiring practices until recently:

Montana: It's just because now what we're doing is if there's an opening, we just pull whoever ... if we need a spot for somebody, then we'll say, "Oh. Now you're going to do this."... We're not taking a look at what's the best way for the college to fill positions and what new positions to fill. I just don't think that we're doing it in the most effective way possible. And then we're filling positions just because somebody needs [a job, regardless of their] ... qualifications. I think that we have done it well, it is just recently, and it could be due to budgets, or at least it's under the umbrella of budgets....

Montana's concern with current hiring practice is that it seems as though people are being moved into new positions to keep them employed rather than engaging in a search for someone who meets the desired and established qualifications for that position. Montana notes that simply appointing someone into a new position to conserve their employment status is not the most effective way to manage an organization. A comment on the 2012 Climate Survey reinforced this, and also noted the inconsistent application of personnel policies:

Hiring practices – are very unclear and are not enforced equally among all departments. The rules for which procedures need to be followed change significantly according to departments. Procedures for requesting vacations and time off are not applied consistently to all members in the same department. Department heads play favorites when granting these leaves. (*Institutional Climate Survey, 2012, p. 81*)

Consistent disciplinary practices.

A question on the Climate Survey asks about prompt and consistent disciplinary practices regardless of an employee's position. As the employees interviewed rated and discussed this item, they elaborated on what they have heard, witnessed, or experienced. There were a number of concerns related to a lack of consistent practice and fair treatment of employees.

Darby does not believe there is prompt and consistent discipline at Riverland, as s/he also discussed in the climate section:

Darby: I don't see any prompt dealing with any type of disciplinary action.... I just don't see that happening, I think, and you know, sometimes people think they can't because of union types of protection and issues and laws with that, but I don't.

Darby asserts that instead of disciplining employees, they are simply "maneuvered" out of jobs as discussed previously. S/he says that others may think that discipline won't work because of the unions, but Darby does not think that is the case. S/he also discussed an impression of this in the section on restructuring, and as noted there, s/he and Montana believe that "getting rid" of employees is the real reason behind restructuring. Darby also points out that the method of eliminating the employee is to eliminate the position he or she held, instead of engaging the disciplinary process to address inappropriate behavior, lack of productivity, or other issues.

Jordan thinks the union protections are so powerful that discipline is not possible:

Jordan: I don't know that it's for a lack of possibly trying by administration, but their hands are so tied by the union contracts and the protections that are in place. We have some major, major issues. I mean, we have a safety issue, and nothing can really be done about it. I blew the whistle.

Jordan thinks the administration may try to discipline, but their hands are tied by the union contracts and employee protections. S/he also asserts that because of this, there is a major safety issue among others in his/her department that cannot be addressed. S/he has "blown the

whistle” on this problem without results or resolution, and finds this to be a major concern.

Montana does not find discipline to be consistent either, especially in regards to whether it is directed to faculty or staff:

Montana: I don't think that it [discipline] is consistent. And it's not consistent, I don't think, between faculty and staff, which it probably can't be, depending on the infraction. That's just my perception.... I don't know which way it would go. I just feel like it's different ... on our staff side; if somebody complains about us, we hear about it right away. It seems like faculty has to have a big, gigantic, monumental, 200 students have to complain before something is done. That's what I mean.... There is a difference there, yes. Because we've heard complaints about certain faculty members for years and years and years and one student complains and we get talked to. And it could be because of unions, I understand that. But I just don't feel like it's consistent.

Montana thinks staff are treated differently than faculty when it comes to discipline, which is how s/he is evaluating consistency. S/he says that staff are told immediately if one student complains about them, but faculty may have many student complaints and not be disciplined. S/he is not sure if it is due to union protection, but relates the example of faculty members who have had many student complaints for years. Montana does not think the complaints have been addressed by administration.

Kiley also attributes union protection to the lack of discipline. S/he first discusses the case of a long-term employee protected by the “classified” staff union, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME):

Kiley: [Unions can be] helpful or harmful to people. Because of unions, there's probably a lot of things that go on that can't be taken care of because of the union. I've kind of witnessed a few of those types of things over the years ... [with] a couple different unions, too.... In the AFSCME union there was somebody that just didn't seem to do her job, and she just was not very nice to people and this whole piece and you're in customer service, really? And you're not doing this well? You know, the union saves them.

Kiley believes this employee did not do their job, was rude to customers, and was either not disciplined or at least retained the job because of AFSCME union protection. Kiley then discusses how s/he thinks full-time faculty also receive undeserved union protection:

Kiley: [The union saves] faculty, too. The faculty union is very, very strong. I've experienced working with faculty and it's so much different working with adjunct faculty as it is full-time faculty.... This instructor, it was full-time faculty, he wasn't teaching the curriculum.... Class was over, he entered grades, he turned in all his paperwork ... [taught] a whole skills certification class and never did any hands-on ... so Riverland certified them, I found out after the [fact]. I was upset so I had sent an email to [the instructor] and then copied it to both Deans and my supervisor on it, saying, "Class is over, I noticed you didn't use this stuff. Can you please tell me what you did? Did you do any hands-on? Because [the College] needs this for the records.... No response, nothing. Nothing. That was the summer class and then this fall then he was teaching another [skills certification class]. He quit partway, left Riverland. So, anyway, he's gone finally ... but what can they do about this stuff? I don't know. Everybody's really scared of the unions. They have to have the proper documentation in order to do the reprimand ... so in the meantime while they're trying to gather their documentation or whatever so they could do something, it still keeps getting worse and worse because nothing can be done about it until it's really bad.

Kiley thinks full-time faculty receive the benefits of union protection to a greater degree than adjunct faculty do. Kiley relates the instance of an instructor who taught a skills certification course without ever using the supplies needed to teach and test out on the skill. Kiley notified his/her supervisors and the supervisor for the faculty member, and asked for redress and communication. Neither were forthcoming, either from the supervisors and Deans involved, or the instructor. This instructor was then given the same class to teach the next semester. Fortunately for the College and students, he resigned early in the semester and someone else was hired to complete the class. Kiley is assuming no disciplinary action took place, as s/he was not aware of any. S/he is frustrated that the low-performing instructor could be assigned to teach the same class the next semester. S/he attributes this to the time needed to amass documentation for union process. Kiley says, "Everybody is really scared of the unions," and that the situation worsens while the necessary documentation is compiled to address an issue with full-time faculty.

Note to the reader: Data privacy does not allow administrators to discuss their disciplinary decisions and actions with anyone other than other need-to-know supervisors and administrators, MnSCU Human Resources staff, and possibly union representation.

All Riverland employees who are union members would have the right to union representation in the case of a disciplinary action, which could include steps from the grievance process up to representation by a union attorney. “Excluded” administrators at the Dean level and above, are at-will employees, and their employment conditions are at the pleasure of the President with a 90-day notice. Disciplinary action for all non-administrative employees at Riverland would typically require documentation, formal meetings, and a sequential process. This process differs somewhat for the six different unions, but typically involves reprimand, suspension, and termination as the minimal sequence, with documentation of cause for each step. Full-time and adjunct part-time faculty are in the same union, Minnesota State College Faculty (MSCF). Minnesota is a “fair-share” state, meaning that even if employees elect not to join a union that is available to them, they will still contribute 80% of the dues paid by a union member who elects full membership. Full membership includes rights to vote on union issues and contracts, attend member meetings, and receive full grievance protection in the event of disciplinary action. Adjunct and part-time faculty members have these rights, but many of the rights are pro-rated, and pay is tied to the ratio of credits taught. Instead of discipline, an adjunct faculty member can simply not be re-hired, which is why disciplinary actions against faculty may be more likely against full-time faculty.

Perceptions of organizational communication.

The previous categories on administration and decision-making alluded to problems in communication in these areas. Communication within the organization is another topic addressed in the climate survey, and one that several participants addressed because communication is such an innate part of organizations, decision-making, and other areas. Communication is especially important in human resource-intensive organizations. It was also the category that received the most responses to the open-ended questions on the 2012 Climate Survey.

Blair previously commented on the phrase “a culture of inquiry” that occurs in connection with planning, communication, and governance. S/he sees the problem with it as being only downward, not upward:

Blair: It’s an overall structural [problem], and I’ve played that through. Which, if I had changed supervisors, if I was at a different supervisory level.... So, right now I report to a dean. If I reported to the VP? No, I don’t think so. I think it’s the structure of the college.

Blair does not see the College as a whole as being able to participate in a culture of inquiry. S/he sees inquiry coming down from the top, and as s/he and others stated before, information goes up, decisions come down, and there is no “communication loop” throughout the organization. Blair finds this lack of returned information and the lack of justification and back-and-forth discussion on decisions to be frustrating. It is a loss to the organization, as well. Administration is losing the opportunity to exchange information and learn first-hand about the impact of decisions on front-line workers, and front-line workers have lost the opportunity to participate in and share responsibility for the outcome of decisions.

Kiley also comments on the lack of communication and gives an example:

Kiley: I hate to be negative ... [but] there’s really a lack of communication from the top down and that’s huge, and I think that’s pretty obvious to everyone. A lot of things happen and nobody gets told about it until after the fact. You know, even like a small example would be last summer, or last spring when Sumner school came here and we hosted the elementary school ... and they knew that this was in the works, but they didn’t communicate it with anyone else. So, we had [reserved rooms ahead] but had to scramble last-minute to find places for all these classrooms. So, there’s a lot of things that they don’t think about.

Kiley discusses the lack of top-down communication, mirroring Blair’s comments. S/he also says it is “pretty obvious to everyone” and is concerned about not being given information in a timely fashion. S/he gives a “small example” of having reserved space for a big workshop, and not being informed by administration until the last minute about a conflicting commitment. The lack of communication from the administration created more work and problems which then had to be handled by front-line workers. This could be interpreted as a lack of awareness or organization on the part of administration, but the comments by staff indicate they also see it as consistent with a pattern of not sharing information with the rest of the College.

Kiley follows up with a comment about a situation in which s/he was informed about a

potential space conflict:

Kiley: Although I was pretty impressed now, that when they're talking about moving this daycare into the building here, that they did take the time to meet with all the departments that would be affected from it, they met with us. So, I felt that they were proactive on that one, so that was very good. Because most of the time, they make the decision and then after the fact, they're like, "Oh, hmm. That's right, we need a place for this." So that was a good thing.

Kiley credits management with being proactive on the new child care center construction.

However, s/he also adds a negative comment regarding a perception that most of the time they would make the decision, and then worry about the implications and communication of it after the fact.

Jordan also shares a concern about communication:

Jordan: [Information] seems to be more top-down, yes. There is no way up.... And see there again, I don't know... what other ways are there to get accredited besides AQIP that maybe is more user-friendly for everyone in a facility or in an institution to follow?... Then I'm trying to decide: is it AQIP itself or is it the method of communication that went on within the institution?

Like Blair, Jordan also sees information as going one-way, or top-down only. S/he says "there is no way up." S/he is attributing that to AQIP, but then wonders if it really is AQIP or if it is the way communication in general is handled at Riverland that is the problem.

Darby discusses how s/he and others view information that comes from the top:

Darby: They don't trust the information that's there, they think that perhaps there's a hidden agenda.... There's real information that they're not getting. I think that they think that there's information that they're all getting but that it's actually ultimately that the decision's made by one person or two people, and they don't have an effect over that.

This observation by Darby is also discussed in the climate section. It is relevant in concerns regarding communication too, as there are profound implications for the College when workers view communication as fundamentally misleading or corrupted. They feel there is information they are not getting, and the information they do get is the result of a "hidden

agenda” by the administration. Furthermore, the information they are not privy to is critical, as it regards the security of their jobs. They also view these decisions as made by one or two people, with the affected workers not having an opportunity to give feedback on the decisions.

These perceptions of communication by staff at the College reveal problems in structure and organizational function in many areas. The staff views discussed in this section present the view that employees are frustrated by “top-down” decision-making that occurs with little communication, a “culture of inquiry” in which information should flow up and down, but does not “loop” back. There is a fundamental mistrust of information disseminated by administration, particularly in regard to job security. These staff members would like to see more equal access to administration, a free-flowing exchange of information, and to be part of decision-making in their areas.

Perceptions of organizational planning and budget.

Organizational planning.

In this category, I examine the perceptions of staff in regard to planning: strategic planning and planning for the new grant-funded efforts to recruit and retain at-risk and underprepared students. Next there is discussion regarding whether the College administration is encouraging progress and innovation, rather than stagnation. Several staff, including Blair, Darby, Jordan, and Montana discussed their perceptions in this area.

Blair thinks the College had a strategic plan and thinks that it is taken seriously, but s/he has concerns about how it is being implemented:

Blair: I think the college has a strategic plan and would like to be strategic, but I think really ... again, it’s an administrative decision. So, your input goes up, but you don’t know where it goes.... And you don’t understand whether or not the decision was made based on a “gotta’ do” or a strategic “have to do.” And one of the examples is, you

know, in the last year, we underwent a whole bunch of cuts to save people and to save all this, but at the end of the day we were a million dollars to the good. So, we not only hit our goal, we went right through the tape and kept on going and did an [extra] million dollar cut on a \$30 million budget.

Blair says that s/he gives input into planning, but has the same concern about lack of feedback discussed earlier: that decisions are made at the top in regard to planning, but without communication or rationale. Blair was also concerned that the budget and personnel cuts were deeper than needed, as an unplanned extra million dollars was kept in reserve at the end of the year. S/he and other staff who discussed this consider such a large surplus poor planning as many critical initiatives went unfunded.

Darby is not sure if the College understands what its strategic direction is, other than trying to survive financially:

Darby: I don't know if we know what our strategic direction is. I think our strategic direction, for the most part, has been saving money and keeping above water.... It's supposed to be about pre-eminent and prominent or from prominent to pre-eminency, or whatever those kind of things are.... You have people doing more with less and so, the budget's not supporting a strategic direction for growth [and] stability, just in people and that kind of thing.... I don't know if things are different than they were, let's say, four years ago for people who were instructing. I guess, maybe full time [faculty] positions don't get filled and yet they do.

Darby thinks that whatever the stated strategic direction is, the primary focus is staying afloat financially. Employees need to "do more with less." S/he believes that the budget is not sufficient to support a strategic direction or growth, as it is mostly supporting salaries. S/he points out that it seems as though faculty positions are relatively unaffected, which is another instance where faculty seem to have an advantage over staff.

Montana had the most in-depth comments on the subject of planning. Montana raises the concern about differing visions from the President and the Executive VP:

Montana: I think that we've kind of been put into a position where nobody knows exactly what they're supposed to do, because sometimes we do things that we think that

we're supposed to do and then all of a sudden we find out no, you did it wrong.... There was a vision out there, but not how to get to that vision. So, you try to get there with no direction.... And again, we're talking about [the President] has this vision and [the Executive VP] has this vision and they don't mesh. And then how do we know where we're supposed to go as a college.... Especially on the strategic planning side.

Montana says that no one knows exactly what they should be doing. When they do what they think they should be doing, they find out it is wrong. This not only wastes time, but is demoralizing and frustrating. As Darby discussed earlier, there is a vision, but no map for achieving it. Also, the President and Executive VP have differing visions, and no common vision for the College's direction.

Montana believes that Riverland should be aligning their strategic planning with the MnSCU planning goals:

Montana: I mean we really don't have a sense of direction. And here is my point, where we can start dealing with these things.... Because really, our whole organization should be run, in every action that we do ... around MnSCU goals ... and the President's Work Plans [based on the Chancellor's work plan]. Every action that we do ties back to those goals and that Work Plan.... In our administration, they're not on the same page. I know how frustrated I feel when I see that we're directing departments to just strategic plan from critical success factors, when we are being asked to align all of our goals and our plans back to the MnSCU goal and the presidential goals.

Montana thinks that the institution's planning goals should align with the MnSCU goals (which are the Chancellor's Work Plan goals). So the President's Work Plan goals should align with these MnSCU goals, and the strategic planning goals should originate from these. The non-academic departments are instead being asked to identify "critical success factors," and strategically plan around them. Montana finds the conflicting goals frustrating and a barrier toward any kind of progress. This is another indication of the lack from upper management of a unified vision for the College as Montana and Darby have discussed earlier.

Note to the reader: In the MnSCU system, the lead administrator is the Chancellor. The Chancellor develops an annual Work Plan that reflects the system's strategic planning goals and targets, and it is approved by the MnSCU Board of Trustees. In turn, each

college president in the system develops an annual Work Plan with goals and targets compatible with the Chancellor's Work Plan for MnSCU, as well as individual College goals and performance targets. Montana is concerned that a College administrator is asking them to identify completely different "critical success factors" for each department and plan from them, instead of them developing a plan based on the Chancellor's and President's Work Plans.

Montana goes on to discuss what happened in the planning session where his/her department was asked to identify "critical success factors:"

Montana: And so they say [for planning], well, what is the biggest critical factor that you can see that affects you right now.... And I said, "Well, I'll tell you. I've worked with these people for 15 years. You give us a goal, we'll tell you how we're going to meet it. We will lay out plans and targets and tell you how to meet it. If you give us these factors, and you don't want to hear what our issues are, we won't set a goal. We'll just sit here and tell you what is wrong until we're blue in the face, because we've done it over and over ... we did that twice, and it's still not changed.

Montana's department was asked to ignore aligning their goals with MnSCU goals because the President and Executive VP had differing visions for the College's goals. Instead, they were asked to identify "critical success factors," but the administrators conducting the planning session would not listen to the department concerns about the planning conflicts or what was not working in their department. Montana is explaining that they are not being heard with their concerns, and setting goals under those circumstances does not make sense. Montana asserts that his/her department is capable of setting and meeting reasonable targets, but must have their concerns about planning responded to first.

Montana concludes by commenting on what s/he thinks should happen next:

Montana: The whole restructure and restructuring at the time that we made all of the cuts has been extremely stressful.... Without getting into specifics, I think that everything needs to be mapped out strategically, and I think we're just piecemealing things together, like our jobs.

Montana thinks that the stress of restructuring could be addressed with the appropriate use of strategic planning to construct positions logically. S/he attributes much of their stress to

the “piecemealing” of jobs. Montana also commented on this previously, and explained how the jobs after restructuring were unmanageable. The resulting positions had too many disparate job roles and too much work put into each new position. S/he believes this is due to a lack of planning.

Riverland secures annual Access and Opportunity Grants from MnSCU to recruit and support at-risk and underprepared students and has also secured other grant funding to assist with this effort. Riverland also recently created a Director of Retention Services position and is targeting retention as a primary focus for the College. A small group developed a Retention Plan at the Minnesota Engagement Institute conference, but the plan was not finalized and shared College-wide for several months. Montana explains how the Access and Opportunity Grant monies are awarded, and that it requires an annual report that tracks a cohort of identified students throughout that year:

Montana: What ...we’re doing is we’re throwing services out there in hopes that the people that need them will come to them. Instead of identifying who the students are that need them and ... directing the services to them. That’s the issue that I see.... So when it comes to the retention plan, even our Access and Opportunity grant that we have to report on ... there is no group of cohorted students. We’re not pulling them first to follow them. We get the Access and Opportunity Grant we get every year ... so then [the College will] have to backtrack and call everybody and say, “Can you give me your group of students who we are tracking for this,” and there is no such group of students for a couple of these goals.

Montana discusses how the grant money is used to provide services for the at-risk students. However, instead of identifying the students and offering them the service, the services are simply available. Then, there is a scramble at the end of the year to identify students who used them. In effect, a cohort is created at the end from data on these students, and that is the reverse of what should be happening.

Montana goes on to explain that the students who could benefit should be identified as

they are admitted, then offered relevant services, and then followed to see how they progress throughout the year:

Montana: This semester we should identify who is at risk.... It was for who was at risk and underrepresented. We need to identify who these students are on a student level and then that is the group that we cohort and that [are tracked].... Did they take up tutoring services? Did they go sign a success contract? How many times have they met with the counselor? Are they going through ABE?... We should be doing that now. But what will happen is at the end, we'll say, "Okay, how many," then we'll try and report out numbers.... [We should be] trying to put together a group ... at the beginning of the year. Does that make sense? If you were to ask for the name of a student that has been identified as [part of this cohort], you would not be able to get it. Yes.

Montana is promoting a logical sequence that would comply with the Access and Opportunity Grant guidelines, and would help to measure both the use of retention services and their overall effectiveness. S/he is concerned that a "cohort" is actually created after the fact versus at the beginning of the semester.

As s/he developed his/her ideas on this College initiative, Montana explained why s/he is so frustrated with the status quo:

Montana: This is a long story short, but this is my frustration about working at Riverland at this current point in time, because nobody knows what everybody else is doing, we don't have any links between plans ... some of what we're doing in Access and Opportunity is what we've identified as a retention. To provide Access and Opportunity actually has something to do with retention but I don't know if it's necessarily in the retention plan, because I haven't seen it. And when you ask who's in charge of Access and Opportunity, and how does this align with the retention plan, they don't know [or] if it reflects this 3-5 year plan [the College] set at the Minnesota Engagement Institute.... We don't have targets. We don't have goals. We're not saying how we're measuring them. And I said, "That comes from AQIP. And that's something that we need to be having in the back of our mind."

Montana is concerned with the lack of available information about these recruiting and retention efforts. S/he says that no one knows what anyone else is doing, and that the planning for these efforts should be linked to the overall strategic goals described earlier. The lack of familiarity with the retention plan is a source of frustration as well, as it is impossible to align

with a plan that is not available. As noted earlier, Montana very much wants to align all planning for the College with the current strategic plan and mandated MnSCU plan goals and targets. Montana notes that documenting meaningful measurement or assessment is not possible in reverse, and that doing it in a forward progression would also be consistent with AQIP processes.

In the fast-paced world of higher education, funding and allocations are declining, costs to students are increasing, and graduates face stagnating employment rates. This means that educational innovations such as changes in occupational programs and customized training offerings are essential to maintain an educated workforce, prepare students for employment, and generate enrollment. Community colleges are well-positioned for these rapid changes, as their curricular processes are usually more streamlined and there is an emphasis on meeting employer demands. In this environment, the ability to plan for, encourage and sustain innovation is crucial to students and the College alike.

Jordan sees Riverland as being positioned to do great things in terms of innovation:

Jordan: Well, we're going to give [the new program] a try because I believe that we have the capability of really doing some great stuff.... And overall, I do think that we're looked at as an institution that does like to move ahead, or does like to be innovative, but ... I think it's pockets [of innovation] and you know it's probably going to be like that no matter where you go; you're going to have some people ... that are willing to think out of the box and come up with new things and then those who are going to stay with your tradition [which] overall though then... kind of flattens everything out.... Yes, in some ways we're really innovative and yet in some ways we're just kind of status quo. So when I look at it overall, just as a blanket view I think we could kick it up a notch, I think we have that capability. And again, I think I come from that because I look at what we could be doing in here as a program and go, "We could be doing so much, we could really be leaders."

Jordan believes Riverland is viewed as an innovative institution, but noted this only occurs in some "pockets" of the College. S/he characterizes the institutional elements of the groups which gravitate toward change and progress, and those which want to maintain the status

quo. S/he thinks “we could kick it up a notch,” and make a greater commitment to be a leading institution in that regard. Jordan would like to see the College plan and commit to innovative strategies for growth.

Budget.

In the data analysis of staff comments on the budget, I found that although faculty made many references to budget, budget restrictions, and the lack of resources to fund growth initiatives for the College, there were not nearly as many comments by staff regarding budget. These have all been discussed in previous sections that also related to another topic connected to budget.

In the climate section, I discussed the perception on the part of Darby and Montana that budget had been used as a “straw man” in order to justify the restructuring and funding cuts. In the hiring practices section, Montana commented that administration has attributed the current hiring practice of appointing an internal person to an open position rather than doing a search, to lack of budget. Montana and Darby do not think that is the real reason.

In the section on planning concerns, Darby and Blair discussed how these related to budget. Darby thinks that no matter what is said about the strategic direction for the College, currently, it is actually all about budget. S/he also says that the budget does not support a strategic direction for growth, it just maintains salaries. Blair also commented that in the last round of budget cuts, the administration had actually cut an extra million dollars beyond what was required to meet the reserve requirement and funding needs for last year, leaving that extra million in surplus going into this year. Blair believes that this is poor planning, and that the money should be used strategically for growth.

Faculty Perspectives

As discussed earlier, the topics of climate and organizational structure were often interwoven in the interview responses. The data analysis of the faculty responses is organized around the same topics as the staff section: (a) administrators and the Administrative Council; (b) organizational decision-making; (c) organizational communication; and (d) organizational planning and budget. The subject of organizational decision-making also produced discussion related to restructuring and reorganization and personnel practices, where concerns included hiring and consistent disciplinary practices. The faculty interviews also included discussions about organizational decision-making related to the College's policies and processes.

Perceptions of administrators and Administrative Council.

Most of the faculty members interviewed discussed their overall impressions of administration. Generally, faculty impressions are positive in nature and affirm good relationships with administration. Drew has had a good experience with the current administration, and gives it a high rating. Drew says, "I don't have any problems with administration. I think that they answer questions and they're able to provide what you need." Drew finds administration to be responsive, trustworthy, and says his/her interactions with them have been positive. As discussed earlier, s/he does understand that people not as involved as s/he is or who are new might be more apprehensive about administration, but s/he feels a sense of camaraderie with administrators. Drew's observation is somewhat similar to Cameron's, who comments that the amount of internal "rumbling" correlates to faculty-administrator relationships:

Cameron: The last few presidential changes have not caused great kinds of rumbling internally. Partly I think that just has to do with the nature of the people that come in.

The other thing that always seems to matter is ... there's certain aspects of the faculty-administrative relationship ... it does matter significantly what happens within the administration, with the president, typically, and to a certain extent with the deans, so things can kind of come and go based on that.

Cameron says that the faculty-administrator relationship is important to faculty, particularly with the President and their Deans. If the "nature of the people" coming in is seen as threatening to faculty, that matters, too. Cameron views the current time and relationship as "peaceful," as quoted in the climate section, and so believes that the current relationships between faculty and administration are good. Kai also commented previously on the current state of faculty-administration relationships and how s/he thinks others view them. Kai views faculty-administration relationships as being "very positive" currently. S/he receives a lot of support from his/her Dean. Kai thinks most faculty feel the same way, and does not hear much "bad-mouthing of administrators" as some other institutions seem to have.

Tristan explains the view that administration often does not get fair treatment by naysayers:

Tristan: I think people are always going to be disgruntled with administration, whether they're doing a good job or not. There's always going to be people complaining about their work or what goes on in their work environment [and blaming] it on administration. So if something's not going right, I feel like, just politically, that's how it goes.... I know that administrators are human. We're all human ... [and] they are. They're stretched thin, and they're stressed, and they do the very best they can for the organization they're representing, and for the people that they're working for. So when people complain about administration, I don't have the heart for it. I think to myself, "You have no idea what those people go through to make a judgment like that on them."... It's not like administrators make decisions to purposely hurt people. You make decisions because you think it's the best choice at the given time. And you're put in positions of having to make very difficult decisions that will affect people. But you don't make that decision to say, "I'm going to intentionally hurt somebody." Or "I'm going to intentionally cause stress to 25 people."

Tristan believes that some people will always be unhappy with administration, and blame any problem or anything they do not like at work on them. S/he does not think that is fair. As

s/he says, “We’re all human.” They may make mistakes, but they are stressed, stretched thin, and most people have no idea how difficult administrative jobs are. Tristan does not “have the heart” to complain about administration, and believes they are doing their best and have the best of intentions. S/he does note that employees may be hurt or stressed by administrative decisions, but that administrators do not intend those results.

Jesse gives administration credit for doing their work with dedication, but thinks there is a problem in that the “left hand doesn’t know what the right is doing.” As s/he observes:

Jesse: Our administration is so huge now, and we have such a huge institution since merger and everything ... the right hand doesn’t always know what the left hand is doing.... I don’t feel anybody in administration is purposely trying to shirk their duties or anything like that, I don’t think they’re purposely trying to make it difficult to teach or anything like that.... I don’t feel the dedication of administration to trying to do things for the College has changed, I think they are no different than any other administration we’ve been under.

Jesse does not think this administration is different from any other as s/he thinks the administration is hard-working and conscientious. S/he just thinks they are not well-informed about what even other administrators are doing because of the “huge” size of administration and the growth of the College since the merger.

Taylor, Kai, and Lee also offered some critiques on this topic earlier in the climate section. As Taylor noted, there is a distance between administration and the other employees. S/he offered a suggestion that they do more walking around and talking with faculty and staff in their work environments to build a sense of trust and support.

Administrators.

As with the overall impressions of leadership discussed above, there are a range of opinions on the President. Some comments were made in discussing climate and were presented

in that section. Taylor thinks that the College is better off under this President than some others, and says, “Our president’s very educated, he’s very articulate. He’s very kind and compassionate. Sometimes, I wished we moved things faster.... But, you know, he’s very kind and caring and I think that influences others to follow suit.” Taylor has high praise for the President, seeing him as kind, compassionate, caring, and inspiring others to follow suit, but s/he also notes that s/he sometimes wishes he acted faster to move things along. Tristan, Cameron, and others also noted these personal characteristics that are not necessarily related to Presidential effectiveness.

Cameron was also very positive about the President, and as quoted in the climate section, believes that he is a “very honest and straightforward person to deal with.” Cameron commented on the trust that faculty have for the President currently, as well as a view that the President trusts faculty. Tristan was also quoted in the climate section as believing that the President is “personable” and is good about recognizing the achievements of people in the College.

There were also faculty who were critical of the President. Kelly and Lee had concerns about the President that were similar to some of the staff. Kelly did not mince words about his/her opinion of the President:

Kelly: Well, I’ll be very blunt and say what I have said to other people: that I think we have a doormat for a president and a bully for a vice president. And so it’s difficult to know who’s in charge when it comes to administrative things.... I really have struggled with [him] as a president ... unless he’s doing something great and wonderful that I’m totally missing, but I don’t see it at all.... I just have a hard time with [him] as a president. I just don’t see him performing at that caliber, at that level.... I don’t think he has the knowledge, skills and abilities to do the job. And I don’t think he ever has.

Kelly views the President as being “a doormat” for the “bully” Executive VP and thinks it is “difficult to know who is in charge” administratively. S/he does not view the President as “performing at that caliber,” and does not think he has what it takes to do the job. Kelly believes

he does not have, and has never had, “the knowledge, skills, or abilities to do the job.” S/he goes on to discuss the current struggle for leadership that s/he sees now and that Darby also referred to in the staff section. Kelly says:

Kelly: I think that there’s been some movement now by the President to take a little bit more control of the situation, [but] I don’t know if he has it within him in order to do that because [the Executive VP] is a strong personality. So ... how are you going to be able tame that down? I mean he does hold the power of being the President and he could do that but I think [the Executive VP] even sees it himself and that’s partially why he’s looking to move on is because he needs to get his own Presidency to do his own thing somewhere else, which is fine.... I just don’t know [if the President] remains ... who the next VP would be and how that interaction would be with [the President] because I don’t see that [he] has changed significantly or become a stronger leader. I’m sorry, I just have really negative feelings about him. Nice guy, but....

Kelly thinks that the President is trying to take more leadership, but s/he is not sure how that will work out given the Executive VP’s strong personality. S/he notes that the Executive VP has been transparent about his desire to obtain a Presidency, but Kelly is not sure how the President will work with another person in the VP role. S/he does not see the President as a strong leader, which echoes some of the staff who also saw him as ineffective and ill-informed.

Lee’s view of the President is that he does not seem to belong to the College, as he does not interact effectively:

Lee: I think ... people at the college know that the president seems to be non-existent. You hardly ever see him on campus. You hardly ever see him walking the halls or interacting with the college, with the teachers. He’s usually networking outside of the college or up at the Capitol building, and so you don’t really see him interacting with teachers. So, they don’t have a real good sense of where he’s at. Or even taking an interest in you, in your area.... [He’s] not interacting personally ... very distant.... I mean, he seems like a nice man, but do you really know him?

Lee refers to the President as “non-existent,” and says people at the College know this. S/he does not see him interacting with faculty or around the building. S/he thinks he is probably “a nice man,” but is very distant and gone most of the time, either networking or at the State Capitol.

Some of the faculty comments regarding the Executive VP were discussed earlier in the climate section, and I noted there that faculty also had differing opinions of the Executive VP. Taylor sees the Executive VP as having a positive influence on the College and feels supported by him and the Academic Affairs department. Kai also thinks that the Executive VP has been good for the College with his decision to link strategic planning to budget, which is discussed more in the section on planning.

Kelly's comment previously revealed his/her opinion of the Executive VP being a strong personality and leader, and that s/he sees him as a "bully. In the section on climate, Kelly and Darby both discussed what they viewed as his bullying tendencies. However, Kelly also sees positive qualities in the Executive VP, and positive results of his leadership in Academic Affairs. S/he observes:

Kelly: I frankly like [the Executive VP] as a person, and I think I'm very fearful of what our college would be if we didn't actually have [the Executive VP] leading the charge on some things that he led the charge on in the last two years.... I just think if we didn't have [the Executive VP] really pushing things, to make sure faculty are getting these extra credentials ... the state, money isn't going to be flowing from anywhere anytime soon. You're going to have to figure out things and we're going to have to have something that sets us apart from the other colleges ... in order to continue being able to be funded and operate.

Kelly likes the Executive VP "as a person" and is very supportive of his leadership with the faculty. S/he thinks that it is important that he has been pushing for the faculty to gain extra credentialing, as the College will need that to set it apart in the struggle to improve enrollment and secure funding.

As noted previously, Kelly also has negative perceptions of the Executive VP related to his relationship with staff. S/he speaks from that perspective:

Kelly: I think I just struggle with I'm not sure who's in charge. And so, I think that that has impacted even like the VPESA or other people because they're not quite sure who they're supposed to please. Who are they supposed to be doing things for? I think that

there are things that have cropped up that people would like to see happen, and then it seems like it goes somewhere, but then it stops with [the Executive VP].... I've just heard things about how he is as a bully and again, I don't have personal knowledge about that, but I just think he kind of has been very difficult for some people to work with.... Staff, probably more so, and other administrators. I'm not sure if I've heard of faculty actually. Because it seems as though our current faculty president and grievance rep are getting favors from him. It doesn't seem like they would see that he's a problem at all. And I don't know if they should see him as a problem. I don't know if faculty in general should see him as a problem.

Kelly thinks that this leadership struggle has resulted in a situation where people are not sure who they need to please, and that makes decision-making on anyone else's part a non-starter. S/he says the Executive VP has not tried to bully him/her, but s/he hears about it happening to staff and other administrators. Kelly does not believe this is a problem for faculty. In fact, s/he thinks faculty leadership have been receiving "favors" from him, and thinks that this influences their opinions of him.

Lee has a low opinion of the Executive VP's commitment to the College and availability to work on behalf of the College:

Lee: The Executive VP, you have this sense [he] has one foot out, he's self-promoting himself, he doesn't really seem to have a lot of interest in getting to know you or staying and being consistent and improving the college.... Everyone at the college knows that he has one foot outside of the college and has had for many years. That he's looking for different areas to promote himself.... And that he's climbing and that he used our college or is using our college as a stepping stone. And I think people feel that. I think they feel that he doesn't have the buy-in, he doesn't really care, because he's just looking to promote himself.... And I understand [his] reasons, certainly.

Lee's concern is that instead of being committed to the College, the Executive VP is pursuing career growth at the expense of his role in the College. S/he thinks that other people also believe that he does not care about improving the College or in getting to know faculty and staff. S/he thinks that he is only acting out self-interest and furthering his career. Lee uses the same "stepping stone" language as Bailey in describing how administrators may view Riverland in their career path.

As noted by staff earlier in this section, the combined role of the former VPHR or HRD with the CSO or VPSA (now termed Vice President of Employee and Student Affairs [VPESA] at Riverland), has prompted concerns. Kelly's primary concerns are centered around the loss of a "neutral" administrator who can represent all employees, in an advocacy role and not as their supervisor. Kelly has experienced workplace discrimination in the past when there was no HR department, and this makes him/her even more concerned about the role combination. Kelly comments:

Kelly: I needed an HR person, and we didn't have an HR person. VPESA came after that situation. And that's why I say HR should be Switzerland. We need a neutral person who can help us with all these things at all levels and instead ... she's the HR person and I do think that those roles do not work well together. And so I've shared [and she] knows that. I've talked to [the President] about it. I've been very vocal about, "This is the situation. It happened to me. And it should never have happened."... I think the human resources person and the student affairs person, that shouldn't be the same person. So it just bugs me.

Kelly says that the HR person should be like "Switzerland." Without this "neutral person who can help us at all levels," the College is left with an HRD who supervises many of the College employees. As VPESA, she is now supervisor of the HR department, Marketing and Public Affairs, the Web team, counselors, and all of Student Affairs. Kelly has shared his/her concerns with the VPESA and the President to no avail. As noted earlier, Montana and Blair share Kelly's concerns.

In discussing perceptions of administration and administrators, some faculty discussed their perceptions of Deans as well. Taylor commented on the support s/he has received from the Dean of Liberal Arts and Sciences (LAS) earlier in the climate section. Parker wanted to discuss his/her relationship with this Dean, as well:

Parker: I can't imagine anybody that has the Dean for LAS for Dean being really upset about her.... Like a supervisor of the Dean for LAS would probably have had higher [ratings], and a supervisor that had another Dean, that kind of attitude would probably be

not so good.

Parker thinks that all faculty supervised by the Dean for LAS would be happy with this relationship, but s/he believes that some faculty supervised by other deans would not be as satisfied. S/he has more positive comments on the Dean for LAS's commitment to the College.

Parker: My dean knows everything that I was doing. I don't mean that spying-wise, I just mean that working together, talking, she knew what I was doing. She let me do my job. And there was no problem.... [My dean] doesn't miss a concert or a game ... [she] goes to everything.... I think, you know, so she really has her eye on the college. And she is more than a supervisor to all these people. I think she really cares.

Parker has high praise for the dean as a supervisor and as a person who really cares about the people she works with. Parker believes the dean is someone who goes the extra mile.

Note to the reader: Other than the VPESA for the counselors, the faculty are all supervised by a Dean. Some, like the Farm Business Management faculty, have their day-to-day work coordinated by a faculty coordinator or department leader, but are still supervised by a Dean or the VP. Under MSCF contract, faculty can only be supervised by an "excluded administrator." Because of this, faculty would be likely to have more direct contact with an administrator than most staff, whose direct supervisors would typically be a middle-management person.

Administrative Council.

As noted in the staff section on this topic, perception of the Administrative Council is an item on the climate survey that has had declining rankings over the last six years of the survey. Although the make-up of the Administrative Council has varied over time, it currently consists of the President, the Executive VP, the VPESA, the three academic deans, the Dean of Institutional Development, the Facilities Manager, and the Director of Technology. Faculty commented on their perceptions of the AC and there were diverse views on this topic among them.

Cameron thinks that the Administrative Council is doing what is expected and, because the make-up of the Council has changed over the years, might even be improving:

Cameron: As far as I can tell from what people say, it seems to be doing what they expect. But again, that's an area also where I think [it] is changed.... There have been some people on the administrative council, who have not been on before recently. So, I get the idea that at least some people from before had not very much sense of how that operated or really, how the decision-making process operates in the institution. Some people, at least, have gotten more involved.

Cameron believes that the Administrative Council is doing its work well and that it is improving as more positions are added to it. S/he thinks that those additional people will help with communication about how decisions are reached, and s/he sees it as a plus that more people are involved in the Administrative Council.

Kai is not very familiar with the inner workings of the Administrative Council either, but is confident in his/her representation on the Council:

Kai: I don't know the inner workings of the administrative council, but ... at least from a faculty perspective, it seems like if we have issues, concerns, our faculty leadership is very forthright about sharing those with the administration.... I don't get the feeling that the administrative council is clueless on what's going on and the realities we face and things.

Kai is comfortable with the faculty leadership assisting administrative leadership to understand faculty needs and concerns. S/he believes faculty are well-represented by the faculty leadership and their commitment to sharing faculty concerns and difficulties with the administration. Because of this, Kai does not think the Administrative Council is "clueless" about faculty concerns.

However, Parker thinks that the Administrative Council is not trying to find out what is really going on:

Parker: I always call them "The Security Council."... I think if we're going to call it a sin, and I don't think it is ... it would be a sin of omission, not a sin of commission. I don't think they're actively trying not to find out what's going on, but I think they are not actively trying to find out what is going on.

Parker thinks that the Administrative Council would be guilty more of a "sin of

omission” than commission, since they are not purposely avoiding becoming informed, they simply are not trying to become better informed.

During the interview, Jesse asked who was on the Administrative Council, and when I told him/her, his/her response was that the level of awareness depended on the person:

Jesse: About 50% of those people do know everything that’s going on in the College, and about 50% are clueless.... It depends on the individual.... So the council as a group is only as good as the members and only about half of the members are clued in.

Jesse views only half of the membership of the Administrative Council as being “clued in,” thus rendering the information and the decisions based on it as being only partially effective, at best.

Drew does not think that the Administrative Council is receiving accurate and adequate information, and believes that adversely affects any decision they make:

Drew: Whenever I hear them talk about, “Oh, well we presented at the Admin Council...” it’s like, “You know, if you’re talking about faculty things don’t you think faculty should be involved in this?” Specifically I’m thinking of that retention plan and all of these other things and they get different people involved that think that they know information, but they don’t. Because I can read a document [presented there] and go, “Oh, no, no, no.” So I think sometimes that [the] Administrative Council might rely on certain people to give them information but the information isn’t adequate. I’m like, “If you’re relying on their information, its [inaccurate]” because they’re getting fed this stuff that they asked for.... I don’t think that it gives the accurate perception of what faculty might think about certain things, and we’re kind of a big group. But they’re hearing what they want to hear, “Oh, well you’re doing all this great work, oh,” you know, but still, what’s the job and what really are you doing?... I don’t know if [the information] would necessarily be biased. I think that there might be some inability to really understand the data, and so it might be biased because they are not educated enough to be able to interpret things.

When Drew hears that administrators or supervisors say they have presented on something affecting faculty at the Administrative Council, s/he is concerned about their information, its source, and who is interpreting it. S/he is on several College committees where this information will eventually appear, and s/he says it is usually not as accurate or adequate as

the presenters think it is. Drew is also not sure about the ability of all the members of the Administrative Council to understand the data. His/her specific concern at the time of the interview was the retention plan that Montana talked about in the staff section. Drew believes the lack of faculty input and review makes it less viable and accurate.

Lee also thought the Administrative Council is not very well-informed:

Lee: I would like to think they have a good handle on things, but they are so busy doing their work. I really feel how could they possibly?... I've never had them come to us and ask and say, "Well, how do you think we're doing?" They never sought that input.

Lee, like Drew, is concerned that faculty are not asked for their input on matters that affect them. Because the Administrative Council is a decision-making group, not seeking input or information prior to decisions would mean less-informed decisions.

Taylor's concern about the Administrative Council is that they are removed from their constituents. S/he says, "I think sometimes [they] get so distanced from what's actually going on that [they] forget about how those decisions affect the day-to-day work of the people who they make decisions about." Taylor thinks that the Administrative Council has become so distant from their decisions that they have forgotten how those decisions affect the work and workers who are the subject of the decisions. It was interesting that no one I interviewed knew exactly who was on the Administrative Council, other than the executive team. This may reinforce concerns about the effectiveness of the AC's communication and connection with the rest of the College, especially in regard to their decision-making processes.

Perceptions of organizational decision-making.

Decision-making is a topic that elicited interest and discussion on the part of faculty. As discussed previously, Lee thinks the experience of having to communicate at every level of the

hierarchy creates extra work and inefficiencies, and suggests that meeting the first time with the ultimate decision-maker would expedite the process for all concerned. Kai was also concerned about the time that decision-making takes, and said, “Right now we’ve got leadership where it is very deliberative, almost too much so sometimes, in terms of some decisions that need to be made.” Kai sees leadership at the College as being too deliberative, and thinks decision-making could occur more quickly. The other aspects of decision-making that were discussed by faculty are related to reorganization, personnel practices, and policies and processes and are discussed next.

Restructuring and reorganization.

The effects of restructuring in the non-academic areas have been felt most keenly by staff, and many comments from staff were discussed previously. Even though the faculty were not as directly affected by staff restructuring, there were concerns noted. Faculty also had concerns about the frequent turnover in administration, especially at the Dean level which happened as a result of layoffs, resignations, and reorganization. The Dean of LAS has been a Dean for the past 13 years, the Dean of Extended Learning has been at the College for two years, the Associate Dean of Health Sciences began in July 2011, and the Dean of Workforce Development (WD) began in February 2012. The areas of responsibility for each of the deans have been restructured several times in the last few years. As faculty previously discussed, this leads to concerns about how prepared and well-equipped they are to lead their units. There have also been several periods of transitions between dean reassignments where faculty are technically assigned to a new administrator, but have felt like they had little real support from administration during this time. This will also be discussed in the upcoming sections.

Drew has noticed that staff jobs are changing. S/he observes that if s/he or other faculty or staff want to lead or fund a student activity, they must get a signature approval, but are not sure how to get it:

Drew: People's jobs [have] changed so much. The VPESA's job has changed now. I'm supposed to get signatures from VPESA [if] I'm doing student activities because now VPESA has taken that over. But then, what's her name ... is the student activities person here, but ... there's confusion about [that] ... kind of like, "who's on first?"

Drew says that locating the signature authority for Student Affairs is difficult, as it has been placed under the newly-appointed VPESA combined roles. However, there is also a Student Affairs worker who is involved, and no one has clarified who Drew or others should contact initially. Kai has also experienced the same "who's on first" confusion as to the role of VPESA, the new designee in Student Affairs, and who to go to, which s/he discusses in the planning section.

Jesse has commented previously on the increase in size and complexity of the institution after the merger:

Jesse: After merger, the administration got bigger, and now I think it's just, I have no idea who does what anymore ... That part is a little different.... Since [the President] has come, it seems to have spiraled into larger numbers of different people doing totally incomprehensible job descriptions, [who]-knows-what, kind of thing.... It's just sometimes it's so huge, I have no idea where to go anymore to ask.

Jesse laments that s/he does not know who does what anymore, but also says s/he does not think administration is necessarily in-the-know either. S/he does not know who to go to, or even who to ask. Jesse fears that the organization is "spiraling" into more and more people, with no idea of who is actually doing what. This has become a common sentiment among faculty, especially since the restructuring in Student Services. Drew also talks about the expectations placed on faculty during the transition time between deans, some whom may not even be aware of a new process for signature authority:

Drew: There's not somebody around.... I think that's been a frustration. Currently, now that [my dean] is gone ... I got a thing back from the business office that said, "Make sure that your dean signs this" and I'm like, "I don't have a dean!" You know? I'll just sign it myself. And I would just go to the Executive VP anyway, but somebody else who maybe isn't as assertive or who would maybe be intimidated to go to him would probably go, "Who's supposed to sign things?" Where I would just walk into his office and say, "Hey! I need this signed."

Drew had trouble locating "who's on first" when it came to signature authority for the faculty currently not assigned to a dean. S/he is not as concerned for himself/herself, as s/he feels comfortable asking the Executive VP to do it, but is concerned other faculty may not.

Staff were more concerned about the extra work and lack of training and mentoring occurring after restructuring. As noted previously, faculty concerns are focused more on new deans who are not familiar with the College, the faculty they are supervising and the actual work in their positions. Parker mentioned previously that s/he thought faculty who were supervised by the Dean of Extended Learning (EL) would be unhappy with him. Lee mentioned previously in the climate section that the Dean of EL was new to his/her area, and s/he is now frustrated that s/he had to start over to gain some credentialing. Lee was making progress toward his/her goal, but thinks that because the Dean is new, the progress was halted. Drew is also frustrated in working with the Dean of EL:

Drew: I think sometimes if I have an issue or a problem with someone, like, for instance, the Dean of EL, I don't really think that he moves fast enough.... I mean, he just doesn't seem to be real knowledgeable.... And when I brought that up to the Executive VP, I just said, "Well, this is unacceptable. If he's not going to be up to speed, I am not going to do this, because I'm not going to be here when the ship goes down because he didn't do his job. And if you're putting him in the position of power to make some decisions, then he's got to be able to do that."... I think that can be kind of frustrating to me, but I don't have any control over whether he decides to do his job or not.

Drew is concerned that this dean is not as knowledgeable and efficient as is needed, and thinks that the Dean is not going to be able to make the decisions necessary. As a faculty member associated with some of his work area, Drew does not want to be tarred with the same

brush if he fails.

Lee is also frustrated that the dean's lack of experience or knowledge is causing extra work for him/her and others. S/he had asked him for the forms needed to complete the work he assigned him/her, but another dean had to help Lee instead:

Lee: Now they want us to be a program. Which is wonderful for us, but, I went to my dean and said, "Okay, can you direct me as to what forms and where I need to [go]?" No idea. He sent me to another dean.... It was such a waste of time for me. We're all busy. And so the other dean says, and I know felt a little put upon, "Well, that's his area." It was like, "What did he send you to me for?" I feel bad and I understood their frustration. But people [have been] thrown into a position because they've cut deans, and I don't know if that's the reason or if it just is a lack of leadership and experience and skill level at the top that's not trickling down to their deans.

Lee is not sure whether the problem was a dean who did not receive enough mentoring, leadership, and skills training, or whether there is too much work with the reduction in deans. S/he was not sure whether the dean should have known the process and did not. In any case, s/he and the other dean assisting were both frustrated with the situation.

Drew also has concerns about the newly-created positions of the Associate Dean of Health Science and the Director of Retention Services, and the newly-created signature authority on each campus. The signature authority designees are middle management supervisors, one on each campus, who cannot supervise faculty but are designated to sign paperwork in the dean's absence. Drew observes:

Drew: I think we have questions about, "What does an associate dean mean? What does a retention director mean? And what exactly is your job?" And I think when job descriptions aren't communicated, people get frustrated. The [signature authority] supervisors and faculty have run into issues with, "Oh, well, [this person] thinks she can sign off on something when it really requires a dean's signature." And there hasn't been good clarification [of] can somebody who's not even an academic dean sign off on certain paperwork? Or ... a mileage sheet is one thing, but [what] if it's your professional development plan?... Why would somebody that's not even a representative of the dean sign off on that? And I think there's been some questions about that. And maybe some over-stepping of boundaries because they think they have more power than what they have.

Drew is frustrated by the lack of clarity for the signature authority designations, and by the lack of job descriptions and organizational tie-ins for the new dean and signature-authority positions. S/he and other faculty are concerned that middle-management supervisors will think they can supervise faculty. S/he has brought these concerns to administration, but there has been no reply yet.

The faculty also have other concerns which primarily relate to the effect of the restructuring on their supervision, their own departments or on their students. For example, Drew has noticed an overall disgruntlement with the changes which s/he attributes to a variety of reasons:

Drew: I think some [people] are disgruntled. You'll find that in every place, I think. But, I think sometimes with all the changes that we've had, I think people are having a hard time keeping up. And they're feeling like ... things are just put upon them and they're supposed to adjust. And I think it's difficult for people to change, and I think sometimes that's been met with some resistance and a little bit of animosity.... The whole student services overhaul, the "Let's have the dean switches." People don't know who their supervisors are.... They seem to think that they're getting supervised by people that really are not their supervisors. So, I think there are just some questions out there.

Drew sees the pace of change, the changes themselves, and the lack of information to be the most challenging factors at play. S/he is referring to both staff and faculty as having a hard time "keeping up" with all the changes and feeling like all this change has "just been put on them." S/he is referring to faculty in the "dean switches," i.e., faculty not knowing who their supervisors are and feeling like the supervisors who have been given signature authority are trying to act like their deans. Drew says that faculty are not pleased with this, and staff and faculty have both commented that they are not happy with the Student Services restructuring.

Jesse sees the changes as having a negative effect on planning for important work that needs to be done:

Jesse: I think [not knowing who is doing what] has had a negative impact on the College, in that there are things that should be getting done that don't get done because nobody realizes no one's doing them until two years later somebody says, "Well, hasn't somebody been doing that every six months?" Well, no.... Look at program review.... That's the one that just jumps out, but there are other important things.... For two years after the VP of Student Affairs left, nobody bothered with retention because that was something he did and it just got swept under the rug. Well now, suddenly it's like, "We're behind on retention." Yes, and nobody noticed, because nobody knew who was supposed to be in charge of it anymore.... In the meantime that was two or three years where nobody was paying any attention to something important that needed to be done.... I think some of them are just starting to slap us in the face.

Jesse thinks that when a position is eliminated or reorganized, "something important" falls between the cracks of the reappointed responsibilities and does not get done. S/he gives the example of program review when an earlier dean position was eliminated, and the more recent example of retention not being addressed after the previous Vice President of Student Affairs (VPSA) position was eliminated. A lack of planning for the responsibilities of eliminated and restructured positions is a concern not only for staff who are struggling with extra work, but also poses concerns for faculty, especially when it directly impacts their work or their students.

Note to the reader: The position of Student Activities Director was eliminated in the April 2011 restructuring of Student Services. The Vice President of Student Affairs position was eliminated in 2008-2009, then reconfigured into the VPESA position in April 2011. Faculty are offered stipends to advise/mentor the various student activities and organizations, and previously worked with the VP of Student Affairs to coordinate those. When the position was eliminated, an MMA supervisor coordinated the faculty advisors and the part-time Student Activities Directors on the Austin and Albert Lea campuses. Technically, the Enrollment Advisors are now coordinating Student Activities, but it seems unclear to all concerned what they should be doing and who they work with. When I asked about funding for the Student Activities Director position, which previously came from Student Activities fees, I was told that in order to continue funding athletics, music, and theater, the other positions had to be cut.

Kai is concerned about the recent change in a sense of student community as reflected in student activities. S/he attributes this change in part to a change in administrative philosophy, which in turn, impacted the restructuring. Lack of planning for how to re-purpose Student Activities has impacted faculty and students. Kai observes:

Kai: I don't feel that sense of community in terms of a student body, as much as there used to be. It was never particularly strong anyway, from my perspective, but it's especially now with our ... student activities director position, being eliminated or greatly reduced. [Someone else] is somehow involved with student activities now, but I am not sure what she does ... and [that is] as a club advisor. I've never had any direct communication with her, or any sorts of information from there.... I'm not sure that they know what the structure is and what their duties are..... When I started to feel there was a disconnect starting to happen was when [the VPSA] position was eliminated and then [the Executive VP] took on the Student Life aspect; there's no way you could absorb a whole other Dean position essentially and do both effectively. I certainly don't know who's in charge of what and who's doing what.... I don't know, for instance, who my direct supervisor is, if I wanted more money or had issues or whatever. I don't know who I would report to, for instance, not a clue.

Like many faculty, Kai has been actively involved in different aspects of student activities. Under the previous VPSA structure, the student activities supervision and funding were planned for and administered by the VPSA. After the Student Activities Director position was eliminated, Kai says it started to deconstruct, and now the entire area seems to be unplanned and unattended. This is also an example of the "who's on first" confusion discussed earlier, and may also be an example of "something important" that is dropped and then "slaps us [the College] in the face," as Jesse says.

Drew, Kai, and Parker have no idea who is supervising student activities, or who to go to for funding or if there is a problem. They have all been involved in student activities up until this year, so there seems to be a significant gap in planning, communication, and implementation in this restructured area. Montana commented earlier that the Student Activities Director position is now supposed to be managed by one of the restructured positions that already has an overwhelming workload, which may bear further analysis. Kai also discussed this concern of what happens when positions are eliminated, and the work is redistributed to others. It does not mean the work will get done or be done well when it is added to an already-stressed staff member who has an overwhelming work to do.

This concern about Student Activities was also one that garnered several responses to the open-ended questions in the 2012 Climate Survey. Since these comments mirror the faculty concerns, and since faculty have traditionally worked in partnership with Student Affairs on Student Activities, I present a composite of those comments here.

Students have suffered under the current lack of coordinated activities. There is no one who really has time to focus on making the College an enjoyable place for students and to assist staff working with student groups.

I think continued examination of the academic administrative structure would be useful. The Student Life side of our institution has really suffered since that dean position was eliminated/absorbed. I do not feel like we have effective organization/administration in that area. Part of my own position falls under the umbrella of Student Life, and yet I really have no idea who is in charge of what. And I am not convinced many others – at any level – do either. I also have noticed a palpable difference in the campus climate among the student body. With fewer and fewer student activities being offered, students are participating less and less in campus culture.

That side [Student Affairs] has been cut so much and duties/responsibilities absorbed into other positions, or eliminated altogether, that things are limping along rather than striding. And when it comes right down to it, it's the students, and in turn, the institution as a whole, that suffer. (*Institutional Climate Survey*, p. 82-83)

As Drew and Kai also discussed, these respondents are concerned that the lack of attention to Student Activities will hurt the student community and impact the College in a negative way.

Kelly shares concerns about Student Services' work being managed in what seems to be an illogical and unplanned way:

Kelly: I don't know what's going on. I don't know if ... the Director of Financial Aid is overseeing the call centers, which again ... doesn't make any sense to me that... Because she should be busy and is busy being a Financial Aid person ... it's a huge job. So for her to oversee call centers when call center stuff is kind of the general information piece ... again, the alignment doesn't seem to make sense. But it's aligned [that way] because either people have to have supervisees or ... it almost is based on persons and personalities not based on work. I'm saying the structure, I think, is based on [The Director of Financial Aid] needs to supervise some more people now so now she'll supervise call center people and when [someone from there] goes to Director of Financial Aid to complain about it, [she says] "Oh, it's going fine, it's going fine." ... At meetings

she'll say, "Oh yes, it's going fine."

The director of Financial Aid (FA) is overseeing the call centers, which are a core area of Student Affairs. Kelly sees this as illogical and the result of poor planning and implementation. S/he thinks that in divvying up and trying to even out workloads, it was placed there in a way that is not consistent with the work area. Previously, Taylor talked about the supervisors' fear of public failure and subsequent job loss. Kelly reinforces this sentiment by noting that even though the call centers have been a constant concern, the Director of FA will insist there are no problems. The concerns about the call center structuring also reinforces Montana's concern about jobs being "piecemealed" without any logic or planning.

Tristan is also frustrated with the impact of restructuring when trying to assist faculty or students:

Tristan: [In the restructuring] I know that people, quite a few people are feeling stressed and they feel like there's so much to their job that they can't do a good job because they're doing so many different jobs. Yes, it'd be good to know [job descriptions after the restructuring], because now I don't even know who to call.... I don't know who does what, now.... Like, who's responsible for like a billing question or a registration question?... Is it a one-stop you call the same person for everything?... Yes. Like who takes messages or who answers the phone. And what's happening to our receptionist?

Tristan touches on the now-familiar theme of restructuring having produced unmanageable jobs due to so much work and "varied types of work," as Montana noted earlier. Tristan has a few "hats" s/he wears in his/her faculty role, and is concerned that s/he has no idea who to contact or who is doing what. Drew and Kai had similar observations about this in the "who's on first?" problems discussed earlier, and Tristan is concerned about how this is affecting the faculty and students s/he is trying to help.

The restructuring of Student Services and the reorganization of other areas of the College have left many of the faculty with questions about the resulting changes. They are unsure who is

doing what, have concerns about lack of coverage, important work being dropped and the quality of work. They are also concerned about a lack of leadership, mentoring, or training for the new jobs. In these respects, they echo many of the same concerns by staff and those presented earlier regarding the ICS open-ended responses.

Personnel practices.

Several faculty were very interested in discussing issues and practices related to how hiring is implemented and how personnel issues such as discipline are handled. Both of these areas are under administrative purview, and so reflect organizational structure in practice.

Hiring practices.

Lee and Blair commented in previous sections on their perceptions of the changes in the way hiring committees are now structured. The candidate's strengths and weaknesses are forwarded "up the pyramid," where a decision is made by the President or Vice President of that area. Kelly comments on how the search process seems to be circumvented by a selection process where someone internally is chosen:

Kelly: Once again, I think different people have been able to get different jobs. Either faculty or staff or administrators. I just know my own experience was I had to apply for every job that I got, even though I thought I held the job. I mean, I had to apply and re-interview ... [but] now somebody chooses somewhere that certain people can stay on the island and others have to go ... they don't know who all is out there in the pool. So they're making a determination that, "Well, this person should be doing this." But they don't necessarily know these other three people would really love to do that, and they're doing okay in the job they're in now, so they're just going with the pool of people that are kind of floating next to the island and they're saying, "We'll pull you in." Rather than, "You know what? Here's somebody else who's on the island, but they'd really like to try something else."

Kelly thinks that the restructuring and elimination of some positions have triggered a

process where an open job is given to someone who would otherwise be losing a job. This means that workers who could apply and compete for an open position in the past are not able to now, as someone else is arbitrarily assigned to the job. Kelly's metaphor is that of an island, with those about to lose their jobs floating around the island. It seemed to him/her that some are arbitrarily chosen to be "pulled in" and chosen to stay on the island. However, there are other people already working on the island who might have wanted a chance at the position, and perhaps would have been better suited or more qualified for it than the person to whom it was given. Yet without a search process, one would not know who the qualified or interested people might be.

Drew's concerns about hiring practices were centered around the Institutional Researcher (IR) position that was given to a faculty member earlier this year, also discussed by Montana earlier. Montana was also frustrated with the fact that the job was filled without a search. Drew explains why s/he is frustrated with this administrative decision:

Drew: Anybody can gather a few numbers, but can you really interpret it? Can you really do a statistical analysis? I don't think anybody that's doing any of the gathering of data can do that [including the current IR person]. That has been one of my biggest things that I've talked to the Executive VP about. I'm like, "If you're going to have somebody in Institutional Research, you need to hire a statistician, or you need at least hire somebody that is well-versed in stats, because you can't have somebody just gather numbers, 'Oh, so we had seven phone calls yesterday,' that does not make me a statistician. Anybody can make little check marks on a piece of paper." So I don't believe that person in IR understands or has enough education to be in that job. You need to have somebody that's a researcher.

Drew says that the person appointed to fill the IR role does not have the training or experience, and the College should have a qualified, credentialed researcher to fill that position. S/he also mentioned this earlier in the concern that data generated or interpreted for the AC was not being represented accurately. If the information is not "pulled" from the databases, analyzed and interpreted correctly, that undermines the validity of the decisions based on that data.

Consistent disciplinary practices.

Disciplinary practices were another area that generated faculty interest and comment. The faculty opinions were very similar and most who commented said they thought personnel practices were generally consistent. However, there were exceptions which were troubling. Interestingly, most exceptions noted by the faculty occurred in cases where the faculty opinion was that the person should have been disciplined.

Drew explains how faculty can be disciplined according to their contract, and notes that this administration has added a preliminary step known as “a letter of expectation.” Drew says:

Drew: What I have seen is that when people are doing things ... that they're not supposed to be doing. I think it's been consistent [for faculty] that you get a letter of expectation, you get a letter of reprimand; those things have been very consistent. What I think is inconsistent ... is at least in one case ... it was just over and over ... and it was like, “Would you decide something? If this is not going away and this is problematic for how long? Do you think a letter of expectation is going to do something?”... I guess the Deans ... primarily have done it the same way, and some, I think, would choose not to engage in any type of a confrontation ... and there's timelines that they have to follow and everybody [has] all followed the timelines that they need to.

Drew says that after the warning letter of expectation, faculty may next be given a letter of reprimand. S/he thinks the administration is consistent in that approach and notes that contractual timelines seem to be followed consistently as well. However, s/he finds it frustrating that a person was warned in a letter of expectation over and over and was never formally disciplined. Drew's criticism is that the person who was warned repeatedly should have been subject to progressive discipline. Drew also thinks there is inconsistency among deans. For example, a particular dean may initiate and follow through on this process, and another may simply avoid the confrontation all together.

Cameron also commented on faculty who should have been terminated but were not:

Cameron: The comment that I would make is ... and I only know about this, of course, within faculty.... We have had people who there was clear reason for them not be here.

And they were kept. And I know that, now, the motivations for that are often good motivations, but the results of it are sometimes really terrible.

Cameron thinks the motivation for not engaging in discipline might be good, but the results are “sometimes really terrible” for the College. Kai also believes that when necessary, it would be better to engage the disciplinary process early on. S/he thinks this should hold true for staff, too. Kai comments:

Kai: There certainly have been some exceptions [to consistency] in terms of employee behavior and discipline. I think a lot of times administration could have taken action earlier or taken the correct actions earlier. [In] thinking back to a recent firing of an individual and a couple of others that come to mind ... I think it's pretty much across the board, because I think there are staff as well.

Kai and Jesse agree that employee discipline is put off for too long. Jesse's concern is that the action finally taken may not be contractual, which is then less likely to be upheld if challenged. Jesse adds:

Jesse: Consistency, promptness, and necessary disciplinary action are basically a low rating. I think the employee's position, I've never really seen that make a difference, in my opinion.... Most of the disciplinary actions I know about would be faculty-related and a lot of the low rating comes from [when administrators] hem and haw around it and suddenly they decide they want to do something about it, and then instead of following the contractual language, they make up their own way of discipline.

Jesse notes that s/he does not think the employee's position makes any difference, but s/he does not think discipline is necessarily consistent or prompt. S/he comments that effective discipline is less likely when administration is not decisive about it or following the contract in how it is administered. Parker was aware of a case of someone who was not disciplined in a contractual way, which confirmed Jesse's concern. Parker says:

Parker: I don't want to make it sound like everybody here is doing things wrong, but there have just been a couple instances, I think, where, “Come on, get rid of the person.” The idea of people either doing something that's clearly inappropriate or just not doing their job.... I remember the President telling me, at one point, “But ... such a long and illustrious and dignified career” or whatever, “we would hate to have it end on a bad note.”... If they're not doing their job, it's a bad note. It's not anybody [else's] fault....

That person should have been disciplined. If you go through the history, I'm guessing that every one or two years there's one person either faculty or staff that really screws up and they want to maybe be too nice to them. I would hate to say that being too nice is wrong, [but] you work really hard and you get your [work] done and then someone ... never does it and they just never do it, and it's like, "Well, why?"

Parker thinks that there have been "a couple of instances" where someone is not doing their job and it has not been addressed appropriately. S/he says "I would hate to say that being too nice is wrong." However, it is a disincentive to others who work hard and do a good job.

Parker relates an instance in which the President wanted to treat a person near retirement gently and not invoke disciplinary action, but Parker thinks that was a mistake.

Drew, Cameron, Kai, Jesse, and Parker primarily referred to faculty when considering the climate survey question about consistent, prompt, and appropriate discipline. It is interesting that Drew believes that discipline is a consistent process, while Jesse and Parker think it is not. Kai said that s/he thought his/her comments applied to staff. Lee and Kelly both discussed discipline for other employee groups. Lee observes:

Lee: Now at the staff level, I think about [a staff member] and I think about how many times she has not had to do things and then I think they've had complaints about her yet she still has her position. So, I do wonder about that [consistency], yes.

Lee is aware of a staff person who has not been doing their job and believes it is inconsistent that the staff person has not been disciplined. Lee thinks this has perhaps not been consistent with other approaches to employee discipline. Although s/he cannot be certain, Kelly thinks the Executive VP could be an example of an inconsistency regarding who is subject to discipline. Kelly says:

Kelly: I would say that probably below the Executive VP level, maybe even below the dean level, I don't know, there may be that inappropriate behavior [that] might be dealt with, [but] I seriously would say that the Executive VP has bullying tendencies, if he's not just an outright bully. He has bullying tendencies. So, that's inappropriate behavior and I'm not sure how that's dealt with. I'm not sure if the President deals with that or not.

Kelly has commented previously on the concern with what s/he perceives as the Executive VP's "bullying" style, and that s/he thinks the President should be addressing it. S/he is not sure whether it has been addressed, and notes instances of what s/he perceived to be the Executive VP's "bullying" behavior. This would be an example of positional power affecting the outcome of potential discipline.

Note to the reader: The letter of expectation that Drew refers to is an approach developed by the current administration as a precursor or warning letter to formal disciplinary action. Contractual discipline for faculty only provides for a letter of reprimand, suspension, or termination. When faculty refer to an "alternative" type of discipline that is not in the contract, they may be referring to a negotiation with local or statewide union leadership that provides a less punitive or more appropriate option to contractual discipline. For example, the faculty member and union representation may have been presented with a proposed action that would be more favorable to the faculty member. Union leadership can be subject to civil lawsuit for inadequate representation, so even though they might think discipline would be better from an institutional standpoint, their primary obligation is to the employee they represent.

Policies and processes.

Some of the faculty interviewed brought up concerns regarding ineffective policies and/or processes at the College. Since establishing policy and process is the province of administration, a discussion of these general concerns follows. The staff did not raise these concerns, although some of them did make similar comments regarding planning. Some of the staff thought that if correct policy or process regarding planning had been implemented, it might have prevented some of the situations from occurring.

Drew had an encounter with a threatening student, and is very concerned that there seems to be no policy in place for that situation:

Drew: I've had some problematic students. I've had students that I've had to immediately remove.... And so, then that came to a meeting with the [administration].... He was threatening me, and there was no recourse, there was no policy in place to what do you do if a student is threatening you? And I didn't really feel supported. I'm like, "I

wouldn't be saying this guy's a danger to me if he wasn't, because I've got plenty of other students that might do something, but I would not bring it to this level."

This is a safety issue from the instructor's point of view, as well as a behavior issue that the institution should address with the student. Drew finds the lack of support and lack of action by administration to be very troubling. S/he had enforced the College's internship and program admission policies, but did not have support or recourse when a student became threatening. Drew went on to discuss the role of the Complaint Officer and whether that would resolve the lack of policy in the case of a threatening student:

Drew: Now that they've got the Complaint Officer in place, I don't know if things are different. There was a student that threatened her, one of mine, and so she's like, "Oh, do you know this person?" and ... "Is this somebody I should be afraid of?" And [I say], "If you're that afraid and uncomfortable when she's on the phone and she was threatening you, why don't you as a Complaint Officer file a Student Complaint?" Which was kind of amazing to me. If you feel threatened, and you're the Officer – write it up. But she chose not to.... And the same student has threatened someone else too, [saying] "I'm going to break your kneecaps...." Just like old mob-ish type of things, which is kind of crazy, and she told that to the Complaint Officer, and [the Complaint Officer asked] "Do you want me to write a report?" And the other person [said] "No, not yet. It hasn't gotten bad enough." Like, "I've still got kneecaps, things are good."

Drew is describing two problems in this situation. First, the Complaint Officer did not address a situation with a threatening student, even when the student was threatening her. Second, the other College employee who was threatened also chose not to file a complaint. Drew thinks that even if there is a policy and process in place to address immediate recourse and support for whoever is threatened by a student, the current Complaint Officer is not going to be willing to address it decisively with the student. The lack of understanding of what the options are and what any employee should do when threatened by another employee or a student is a gap that management could address. It is also somewhat ironic given the time and attention paid to the results of the emergency drill (regarding an intruder assault) that Taylor describes in the next section, since having a clear process to pursue early on with a threatening student could perhaps

prevent an emergency later.

Drew was very concerned about the administrative lack of attention to the situations described previously. S/he has repeatedly brought it to their attention through the shared governance process. S/he also related the incident of an employee who felt threatened by a faculty member:

Drew: I've heard from a staff member who has ... felt threatened by a faculty member, and I just redirected that back to the Dean and told that person, "Talk to your Dean, let them know." ... People I think just say, "Oh, well it wasn't that bad" and I'm [saying], "How bad does it need to get? You need to make sure you're documenting things and that you're letting somebody know because otherwise you're not going to have any type of evidence or any type of record that this was occurring."

Again, Drew is frustrated that the employee does not seem to be aware of the process to follow if they feel threatened, and that they do not take it seriously enough to report and document it.

Cameron also discusses the lack of process when it comes to reporting incidents, whether it is with employees or students:

Cameron: I think people are not very clear about what the consequences are of reporting. Whether it's things involving staff members, or things involving students. I think there's a lack of clarity, and considerable anxiety, I think, at times about what happens. I think [the anxiety is] about ... what you're getting into when you get into the process or whatever.... And I think the other thing that goes on there in a number of areas is just plain ignorance of the processes and what they are. And so people get into things that they didn't know there was such a thing until, suddenly, they're in it.

Cameron sees this problem as exemplifying a lack of clarity about the "consequences" of reporting or what happens when you do report. S/he also thinks there is a lack of understanding of how to engage the process or how it works once engaged, and anxiety about how the process will conclude. The common denominator for Drew and Cameron's concerns seems to be systemic confusion about policy, process, reporting, and consequences when it comes to reporting unacceptable, inappropriate, or threatening behavior by employees or students. Drew

and Cameron are long-term faculty members who are actively engaged in a variety of College committees and functions, and so their questions and lack of clarity surrounding this issue is significant. This also suggests that ongoing bullying, retaliation, and reprisal may be in part due to a misunderstood, poorly communicated, unenforced or ineffectively administered process or policy.

Perceptions of organizational communication.

This is a broad area for discussion and a topic of interest in all organizations. The faculty responses which touched on communication fell into the following categories: (a) a sense of whether people at the College feel safe in communication (the related climate survey question referred to “open and honest communication”), (b) a litany of examples at the College that illustrate problems with communication, and (c) a general sense of how communication is going and problems that may exist.

In the climate section, Drew commented that s/he thinks people feel safe communicating honestly at the College, and explained that s/he thinks staff have a perception that they might get in trouble if they speak up. However, Drew does not think this is the case:

Drew: I think it’s maybe more of a personality difference, but I think people can definitely say things, and I haven’t seen anybody get in trouble because they’ve said something. And I haven’t heard of anybody getting disciplined because they said something, I think it’s just a perception that they might.

Drew’s example is of staff who are afraid to say something they think a supervisor or administrator may not want to hear. Drew is personally comfortable communicating honestly, but his/her example is interesting because it describes the reactions of some of the staff interviewed that I reported in the climate section. S/he is attributing their reticence to personality and is confident that no one would get in trouble. Since s/he has not seen or heard of this

happening, s/he thinks it is just a flawed perception. The staff who spoke to this feeling in the climate section said they are fearful that if they speak up, they might even be “maneuvered” out of their jobs. There is a gap in this area between staff and faculty perceptions of safe communication.

Jesse and Kai think that faculty can communicate openly and honestly, but are not so sure about staff:

Jesse: I think faculty can [communicate openly and honestly], yes. I don’t know about how staff feel. They don’t have as many protections under the contract, and I don’t know if they feel they can or not.... I know that if I was in their position and I was serving at the whim of the President or whatever, that I would curb my language a little bit more than I do with the protections under the contract.

Jesse’s comment about serving at the “whim of the President” and how s/he might temper his/her communication more if s/he was in that position may reflect some of the reluctance Drew is seeing in staff regarding open communication. Kai is not sure about staff, but like Jesse and Drew, s/he feels comfortable communicating openly:

Kai: I think it’s maybe different from a faculty’s perspective.... I don’t know what I base this on, I guess just gossip in the hallways or whatever ... [but] I don’t know if all of the staff would feel quite the same as being able to communicate openly and honestly in their positions. There are only a few staff that I really talk to in any sort of deep level about this sort of stuff, so it’s hard to judge.

Kai has seen some indication that staff may not feel as comfortable with open communication as faculty do, but s/he is not sure as s/he is not close to staff members. Bailey also thinks that staff may feel hesitant about communication, and talks about what s/he has observed as the result of that reluctance:

Bailey: I can communicate openly with people I need to talk to, but I don’t think people feel that they can around the college. There’s kind of undertones in the way people, talk to others. Not voiced, but on the side. I just say it out [loud]. Maybe I should have said “undercurrent.” Sidebars, it’s all sidebars. It’s not open communication.... You probably wouldn’t write it on email, because it could go anywhere. Unless you totally trust the person and then even that could go somewhere. Does that make more sense?

Some people just aren't willing to say their opinions out loud. More on the staff side.

Bailey is comfortable communicating openly, but says s/he sees staff communicating more in an "undercurrent" or "sidebar" type of style than openly. S/he thinks they are afraid it could go somewhere else if they say it on e-mail, so they choose a safer, more indirect form of communication. Again, what is striking about this is how it mirrors what many of the staff reported in the climate section.

Taylor thinks that faculty all feel comfortable communicating with peers, but not necessarily the next "layer up" of administration, or with staff:

Taylor: I think that we communicate openly and honestly with our peers. I think that we are hesitant to communicate openly and honestly with the next layer [administration] and with staff. But, certainly we want to make sure that our job is secure.

Taylor refers to job security in conjunction with communication. S/he has worked closely with staff for many years, so this is an interesting reference. S/he sees faculty communication as being open and trusting with each other. This is similar to other faculty comments that faculty generally feel they can communicate openly and honestly without fear of reprisal, but some noted that they think staff do not feel the same way. This is reminiscent of the faculty discussions on mutual trust in which they report feeling trust, but think others would not.

Next I turn to examining some examples of problems related to communication at Riverland. Taylor commented on one of the concerns s/he has about communicating with other employee groups. This centered around a new policy on class no-shows that was implemented suddenly in the fall and overlapped with the admission of a large group of at-risk students.

Taylor says:

Taylor: We do not do a good job here of groups communicating about decisions that are made. Like reporting no-shows. That should have been planned out more effectively. "And here's what happens if the no-show really is a show, but they just didn't know." We didn't have a back-up plan. And we were left with a lot of angry students. So I think

people can communicate openly and honestly here at Riverland, but if we're so sensitive to the feedback, then what happens after we communicate? And then what happens to it?

Taylor is referring to trying to initiate a discussion of the problems with this policy at his/her program review meeting. This was discussed previously and his/her attempt to problem-solve was upsetting to the supervisors present who managed the affected areas. S/he is relating a view that communicating honestly is not always welcome and seems to induce fear and/or resentment. It may also create an environment where people tend to communicate less. As a result of that lack of communication, a poorly-constructed policy was implemented before faculty had a chance to give feedback. Taylor was distressed by the impact on students who were dropped involuntarily from their classes. Taylor goes on to say that s/he wants to have an environment where there is opportunity for safe, constructive criticism:

Taylor: We love [the positive strokes].... But we're not as open to constructive criticism.... I'm pretty sure I can do my job better ... [but] if everyone's only telling me, "You're wonderful. You're wonderful," how am I going to improve as a teacher? But of course, the students are really open about giving feedback, so that's not a problem.

Taylor is promoting the type of feedback that faculty receive from students that helps them improve. Yet with staff currently feeling afraid of job loss, it may be difficult to implement. As Taylor noted in the climate section, the supervisors at the program review were afraid of an open discussion of a problem that was in their area of responsibility.

Taylor had another example of communication problems that s/he was anxious to share. In this case, it was an admonishing e-mail from the Safety Officer after a failed emergency drill.

Taylor: We have a safety officer and I was actually amazed at the email that came out [from him] after we failed our test ... there was an intruder test or intruder thing. The way I read it, you should stop tests or whatever in the middle of a practice [drill], and frankly, we know how precious little time we have in the classroom, and to stop an exam or [a student] giving a speech for a pretend emergency drill? And the email that came out, I felt like I was being a naughty child and I wasn't even here on the day that they did it. So, it's interesting to me. I think sometimes people take that, "We've done something wrong. Let's make a huge deal about it and make sure everybody knows." And then

sometimes we don't even report because we're afraid, and maybe that's what we fear. That it's not going to be, "Let's sit down and talk about this and make sure we're doing it right." It's, "Oh my gosh. You're in so much trouble and here's "naughty naughty" what you did."... I didn't appreciate it at all.... I don't need to feel naughty.

Taylor is unhappy about communication from a fellow professional that made him/her "feel like a naughty child." S/he was concerned that the drill had been interrupting exams, student speeches, or other important in-class activities. Instead of problem-solving the failed drill to find out why faculty did not participate, the Safety Officer sent a scolding email. Taylor goes on to discuss how responses like this might keep people from reporting and may contribute to an atmosphere of fear and lack of trust. Being found out may be synonymous with a public scolding for those responsible. Taylor thinks this inhibits open and honest communication.

Kelly also contributed his/her ideas about communication problems. S/he sees this from two perspectives. First, there is a lack of communication that administration seems willing to discuss but unwilling to actually address. Second, some of those communication issues can be attributed to a lack of listening when there is communication upward in the hierarchy. S/he observes:

Kelly: We talked about communication. That was how we started about how communication was so bad and well, that was when I first opened my mouth.... And I finally just said, "Excuse me, but we have talked about ... how poor communication is?"... We've talked about that for 18 months easily, and I just stared at one of the Deans there. I said, "Really, if you need us to tell you more about how bad the communication is at this College, we can spend another however many minutes to do that, but frankly, it just needs to be fixed." And then the VPESA said ... "What would you propose, or how would you do it?" And I said, "I'd have a six month timeline, I'd say, 'These are the goals, these are the people in charge, this is what you're going to do and this is how you're going to do it' ... so that we feel as though we've been listened to and that you are trying to act on it." That's part of our issue I think as a College, that maybe things have been done, but people don't know that it's been done, so they need to ... let us know.

Kelly is sharing an example of a meeting where poor communication was being discussed. S/he found this frustrating because the people in his/her area have been trying to be

heard on issues for some time. Kelly said it would be more productive to make a plan and fix it, rather than just lament it. S/he is also frustrated that when a decision is made on an issue, it is not communicated back. Kelly goes on to give an example of how s/he thinks changes in processes and communication are at least partially responsible for declining enrollment:

Kelly: We've lost enrollment but we just want to say that we've lost enrollment because the Workforce Center doesn't have money to pay for students anymore. Well, that's not the only reason why we've lost enrollment. [It is] because we've changed, again, many of our processes. And that's where I think part of that communication too is does what and how do we get heard? And then, a staff member in this department ... said she has complained herself.... She goes, "I came up with these things and I talked to my supervisor and I kept complaining ... so I just want to know, is somebody hearing what I have to say about it?" Because it's not as though we're not wanting to solve the problems, it just doesn't seem like it's going somewhere.

This example demonstrates the effort Kelly and the staff members s/he works with are making to address problems. However, they do not believe they are being heard on this or communicated with when policies or processes do change. Montana and Blair expressed similar frustrations for similar reasons in the staff section on organizational communication. In the climate section, staff members also discussed not feeling heard and not having information communicated to them.

Previously, Lee gave another example of communication problems. Lee does not trust that when input is sought, it will be heard or valued. S/he echoes Blair's comments about decisions taking place behind closed doors, and information going up but not coming back down. Lee views participating and giving input as a waste of time. In this case seeking input and then not valuing it is not likely to produce improved communication and trust between faculty and administrators.

Jesse and Parker commented on communication problems in a more general way. Jesse does not think that communication about decisions or process has ever been good.

Jesse: I don't know all the specifics of how they [make those budget decisions]. I just see the end result, I don't see how they come to that.... That might be one of the negatives: communication is never real good as far as processes, [and] how they go about their processes, but it never has been. That's nothing different than [way] back. You get from point A to point B [with no communication]. It seems like we hear about point B and sometimes I get the feeling there was no process to get to point B. There has to be somehow they got to this decision, [but] we never hear about the process.

Jesse uses budget decisions as an example of how the end result suddenly appears, but there is no information on how the process worked. Although Jesse noted earlier that s/he is generally positive about communication, s/he does not think transparency about the process of decision-making has ever been good. Parker has a similar view:

Parker: The communication was always a big thing, over the years, right? It would get low scores. And then they'd do a survey and then we'd all talk about how there was no communication and then what really changed?... I don't know. Maybe it did. I think maybe some attitudes changed, but ... I don't really know if it changed that much or not.... Maybe a little bit.

Parker, who is a long-term faculty member, believes that communication, although occasionally surveyed and addressed, has not substantially changed over the years. S/he notes that it is always an area of low scores on the climate survey and there may have been a little change, or not.

The analysis of the faculty perceptions of communication revealed many interesting insights into aspects of communication at the College. Faculty generally feel safe communicating openly and honestly. However, several spoke on the behalf of the staff, and do not think that staff do. Some faculty do not feel listened to when they communicate with management, and some think that management is not effectively communicating decision-making process to the faculty.

Perceptions of organizational planning and budget.

Organizational planning.

Faculty commented on their thoughts related to organizational planning. In general, there were comments about planning in regard to strategic planning, the admission and retention of at-risk students, and the Student Services restructuring. Although these topics have been addressed in other contexts in other sections, the focus in this section is to consider how they relate to organizational planning and budgeting processes.

At Riverland, any request for funding is tied to a Planning and Budget Initiative (PBI) forms. Kai comments positively on the link between strategic planning and the budget:

Kai: I think our current Executive VP has certainly put an emphasis on tying paperwork to [strategic spending or budget], [and] putting in writing why and how money is spent.... That's been a huge shift in terms of paperwork for one thing involved.... [It is tied] only marginally to instruction directly, I guess, but more into the College vision statement, value statements, mission statement, how it correlates. But even other things, even technology requests or just about anything anymore, seems to be tied in with that. Which is great for outside stakeholders, [and] even internally, I think it's good.

Kai thinks that linking strategic planning to budgeting works very well as a means to consider what gets funded. Kai is also positive about how this will be viewed by both outside and inside stakeholders, as s/he thinks there is a real value in linking funding requests to the College's mission, vision, and values.

Another perspective on the PBI comes from Lee. S/he discusses input into the budgeting process with the use of the PBI forms that Kai referred to earlier. Lee says:

Lee: They put out those budgeting, planning and savings forms, and I filled out those religiously. [They] never got funded because [they] were lost – several of them. That was when ... it was a transition from the former dean, to the current dean ... so nothing ever got funded. So I stopped using them because I figure, they take my time and they were not utilized.... I know that the form is there, but if it's never looked at or never forwarded or never presented, what good is it?

Lee submitted these forms “religiously” to fund innovations and initiatives in his/her

program. They were all lost in the transition between deans, as far as s/he knows. Lee feels that time wasted and doubts the veracity of the process. There was also a comment on the 2012

Climate Survey regarding the PBI:

The PBI system does not work. Once a request is submitted it seems to “disappear.” If when a decision is finally made, the information is usually not passed on to the applicant. In order to be innovative, the College needs a better system for requesting funds. (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 82)

This comment supports the perception of some faculty that the PBI system does not always work. This respondent is concerned that funding requests are lost and the discussion on the request is not communicated. The respondent believes the system needs to be revamped to keep the College innovative.

Taylor is concerned about the lack of planning related to the admission of a large group of at-risk students in the Fall of 2011:

Taylor: We have really made huge efforts in the past two to three years to market to and bring in at-risk students, but we do not provide the services to support that. And I feel very strongly about that. We needed to have that [support system in place for at-risk students] in place before we brought in all those students in; we’re dealing with all those students right now. I can’t tell you how many students I’ve had in my office, as I’m sure that you’ve had ... crying because they’re so overwhelmed. They took way too many classes. They took classes they shouldn’t have signed up for and it’s not just for my class, it’s just they were under-prepared and were in over their heads.... And it’s not just the faculty members’ responsibility to ensure their success. I think that we need to make sure that we are ... supporting these students ... as a College. And our at-risk students need more support.

Taylor feels very strongly that the College should have planned for and had services in place for these students before they were admitted. S/he talks of deeply distressed students crying in his/her office because they were so underprepared for the work for which they were registered. Taylor thinks faculty are then being expected to make these students successful. However, the College administration also has an obligation to support them, and to plan for and provide that support before the students are in crisis.

Another faculty concern that speaks to a lack of planning before implementation is the effects of the Student Services restructuring which are currently being experienced by faculty. The staff, both in this section and in the climate section, have spoken volumes about how a lack of planning has led to implementation issues in that departmental reorganization. Perceptions of a lack of adequate planning, communication, and implementation related to the Student Services restructuring have surfaced in the data analysis in this section. A metaphor for this situation would be a rock that is dropped into a still pond: the ripples move outward, and eventually affect everything, including the shore. Student Services staff certainly were the most directly affected by the restructuring, but the ripples are affecting the rest of the College. The lack of planning to anticipate and ameliorate these effects also impacts the rest of the College.

As mentioned earlier in the corresponding staff category, an important aspect of planning for community colleges is providing for the innovation that is critical for growth and development. Since community colleges are historically responsive to the community employers, being innovative helps meet employer, community, and student needs.

Lee and Kelly discussed concerns about the College making innovative progress and moving forward. Kelly's comments were discussed earlier in relation to his/her perceptions of the Executive VP and were positive in relating the role the Executive VP has played in preparing the College for more competitive and leaner times. However, Lee is concerned that the leadership is not helping the College move forward:

Lee: [The President and Executive VP] seem to be more reactive, instead of proactive with the college. That's my sense of them. That they are reacting to things that are happening and ... I don't have a sense of them being proactive and putting forth a vision for the college.... In that respect, I lack confidence in their ability, [not in their] ability to react and solve problems after the fact. I really think they're not giving me proper leadership, because they should. They're educated, they have their degree in leadership, they should be moving ahead. And I'm really disappointed in that they're still talking in the same old [budget] story from last year.... I feel that this administration, that it's

closed and that they're reactive and they're still ... in that slash and burn and layoff and money and they're not open to leadership ideas and new programs.

Lee does not think that the current President and Executive VP are leading the College in a proactive, progressive way, but are instead caught in last year's budget mentality. S/he thinks the College has been harmed during their tenure, and that they are not open to "leadership ideas and new programs." S/he is disappointed in what s/he perceives as a lack of leadership and a lack of ability to do what they should be doing. Lee also thinks that the President and Executive VP are "closed" and "reactive." Lee commented further on these ideas:

Lee: They're not really making themselves available to promote this College and grow this College. [The head of the Foundation said] in his newspaper piece ... [that] one of his goals was to help grow the College, and I don't feel that that has been realized because I feel that the College has not grown with this administration. In fact, they have cut programs and they have reduced faculty.... I think it's more [their] personality, and perhaps the economic times, that they seem to have gotten stagnated with the economy and I think they've forgotten a lot of their mission at the College. They seem to be focusing on one area ... [with] no idea of even being able to bring new ideas to them. They've cut themselves off from ... that phase. I feel, as I've talked before, that they are not really, truly bringing leadership to this College.

Lee thinks that the current leadership is not performing due diligence for what should be their priority: growing and promoting the College. S/he says that they have instead cut faculty and programs, and thinks they have become obsessed with the budget while forgetting their real mission of growing and promoting the College.

Budget.

The College budget was also a topic of discussion in the faculty interviews. Some faculty were concerned about the effect of the lack of monetary resources on the College and its programs and others were not in agreement with how money was being spent.

Bailey, Tristan, and Kelly all commented on how tight budgets are, on how limited

resources are hindering what the College as a whole can do, and how the College is stretched more than ever before to provide instruction and services for students. Tristan's comment sums up their common message:

Tristan: I just think that budget-wise, it's tough right now. And it's hard to do new things and it's hard to focus into the future when you don't have the money to support what you want to do. I just think that right now it's just not ideal ... [due to lack of] adequate resources, probably.... I don't think it's people's decisions that caused us to not have money or to have a poor budget. I think it's just the allocation isn't there to support some of the things that we want to do.

Tristan says that the budget crunch is due to lower allocation, not to any mismanagement. S/he articulates the idea that both current operations and future planning are difficult when there is no secure funding to support what they want to do. Bailey and Kelly both think that a lack of allocation from the State initiated the current budgetary crisis.

Jesse acknowledges that every College, including Riverland, is struggling with a lack of funding right now. However, s/he is also concerned with certain budgetary choices:

Jesse: I don't think our budget supports anything right now, but that's no different than any other college. As far as budget supporting new program development, new class development, even just getting a raise after eight years would be nice. I see it as a lack of direction. I keep waiting for it to get better, but it seems to get worse every single year. Every biennium it seems to get worse, where there's just less and less for anything.... Your academic budgets are so little these days that making copies and getting Scantrons blows the budget for the whole year. You can't even buy a video set.

Jesse thinks that the College could be making better choices about spending, and refers to it as "misdirection of money." S/he sees the lack of money, especially for instruction, as getting worse every biennium and now has nothing left in his/her department's budget after paying for copies and test forms.

Although budgetary restrictions and lack of allocation are currently seen as problems at Riverland, the greater concerns discussed by faculty in this and previous sections suggest that lack of resources is not as problematic as how the resources are managed and directed. A 2012

Climate Survey comment noted concerns about a decrease in their program budget by saying, “My program’s budget was cut severely this past year. We will need to discontinue some professional activities that add to our student’s educational experience in order to meet budget. I think this is a step backwards” (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 85). While there are some concerns about budgetary restrictions among faculty, it did not present as a major concern among the faculty interviewed.

This section on organizational structure and its players examined the staff and faculty perspectives of the administration, and the way key processes such as decision-making, communication, and planning and budgeting are implemented at Riverland. The data in this section is closely enmeshed with that of the previous sections, since the staff and faculty groups and climate perceptions correlate with those of organizational structure. As in the other sections, this section examined the data on staff perceptions first and those of the faculty second, and I compare the data from both here.

Staff views of administration and the Administrative Council were consistent with those emerging from the staff climate section. Staff generally viewed administration as hierarchal and removed from the daily work of staff. Their view of administrative personalities and management styles revealed a perception of the President as distant and ineffective, the Executive VP as overbearing and controlling, and the VPESA as inappropriately assigned to Student Affairs while still managing Human Resources. There was also an analysis of what staff viewed as a current struggle for leadership authority.

Faculty, on the other hand, tended to describe the administration in much more positive terms, with a positive view of faculty-administration relationships. Two faculty members did differ from this otherwise largely positive assessment, and described the administrative styles in

much the same way as staff. The faculty perceptions of the President were mostly related to his positive personal characteristics, while their perceptions of the Executive VP were more divided between a dislike of his leadership style and praise for his vision and initiative. There was also concern about the overlapping roles of the VPESA and the lack of expertise and effectiveness of the Dean for EL, but positive support for the Dean of LAS.

The perceptions of the level of awareness and effectiveness of the Administrative Council also varied among staff and faculty. Staff generally saw the Administrative Council as not understanding their work and being ineffective in terms of decision-making and communication. Faculty had a range of opinions on the Administrative Council which varied from positive to being ill-informed and removed from the daily work of most of the College. There was no consensus of opinion apparent in their comments regarding the AC.

One comment made by Lee about the need for a process to evaluate administrators was echoed by a few respondents in the 2012 Climate Survey. One example of this type of comment, "Evaluate the administrators.... They have become so far removed from the actual goal of education" (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 82). This also reinforces some of the comments made by staff and faculty about the administrators and the Administrative Council being removed from the daily work life of the employees.

Note to the reader: Before the current President took office, the College had a common practice of doing "360° Evaluations" of administrators which consisted of distributing evaluation forms with anonymous response options to a cross-section of peers and those they supervise. The administrator's supervisor would then analyze the evaluations, perform their own evaluation, and present the information to the person being evaluated. It was comparable to faculty and staff evaluations and gave those being supervised by an administrator a safe way to participate in providing constructive critique. However, in the past seven years of faculty leadership I have never received one for the executive team nor had the interview participants, indicating these "360 Evaluations" have not been utilized in any comprehensive way while the current President has been in office.

The next area that emerged from the participant data on organizational structure related to

decision-making in the organization. A comment representative of several of those on the 2012 Climate Survey and that mirrors those of interviewees mentioned the lack of timeliness of decision-making. A respondent wrote, “Administrative Council and Deans take much too long to make budgetary, hiring, and programming decisions. Both of these groups need to make decisions in a more timely manner” (Institutional Climate Survey, 2012, p. 99). In the staff and faculty interviews, some participants attributed the slow speed of administrators to the concentration of decision-making at the Executive VP level.

The areas of decision-making that elicited concerns were centered around restructuring, reorganization, hiring practices, and personnel practices. There were many types of concerns related to the April 2011 restructuring, including those raised in the climate section and the planning category of this section. In the context of organizational decision-making, the concerns about restructuring were associated with the decision-making around the process. The primary concerns that arose from staff were the lack of transparency regarding how decisions were made, the lack of communication about the decisions themselves, and the inability of the staff to be heard in their concerns regarding the problems and consequences of the decisions.

The staff interviewed believe that the result of the restructuring was a loss of critical services, unmanageable job descriptions and workloads, and skyrocketing levels of stress and plummeting morale. Although faculty were not as directly affected by these reorganizations, they also had concerns. The faculty were quite concerned about the resulting lack of job descriptions in a “who’s on first” type of confusion, and the resulting impact on the staff and student services. Staff, and faculty to a lesser degree, were also displeased about how newly-created positions were filled after the reorganization. In many cases, jobs were assigned by administrators without internal posting and institutional search protocols being followed.

A lack of consistent disciplinary practices also emerged from the data as a concern of both staff and faculty, and there was general agreement that this area needs improvement. Disciplinary practices are seen as inconsistent and far too slow in happening, if they happen at all. The staff thought the faculty union contract kept faculty from being disciplined appropriately, while faculty raised questions regarding disciplinary actions in the case of other faculty, staff, and administrators.

There were also several comments on the 2012 Climate Survey regarding disciplinary procedures. One respondent noted: “Certain individuals continually break policies and procedure without consequences. Their actions make more work for others, and their continuing ignorance of that fact is a major morale booster [buster]” (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 83). Another wrote, “Provide employees with the training and the tools they need to do the job and then expect them to do it and hold them accountable when they don’t) (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 95). Like other staff and faculty quoted on this topic, these respondents want consistent, timely disciplinary action when it is warranted.

The faculty had an additional area of concern related to organizational decision-making which were institutionalized policies and processes. The primary issues emerging from the data were the lack of policy to address threatening students, and the uncertainty regarding reporting inappropriate behavior from students, fellow faculty, or administration. In this section, staff and faculty were generally in agreement that administration needs to address these concerns and develop a systematic and transparent approach to decision-making. Comments about this need were also found in response to the open-ended questions in the 2012 Climate Survey. In an open-ended question regarding decision-making, several respondents said the College needed to stop giving space and resources to external agencies, and focus on internal and student needs.

This was a concern that was not discussed by the interview participants.

Faculty and staff also discussed organizational communication at length.

Communication has come up in the previous sections, but in this context, it was discussed from the standpoint of organizational structure. Many of the staff concerns about communication were first discussed in the climate section and were reiterated in this section. The top-down communication, lack of communication about decision-making, and lack of trust about the information that is offered were the primary concerns noted by staff.

Unlike the staff concerns, faculty concerns about organizational communication were largely unaddressed in the climate section, and so were developed in this section. The faculty comments were generally related to whether they felt safe communicating openly and honestly, and problems with different types of communication they had experienced. In this context, similar to the mutual trust category in the climate section, faculty generally felt very safe and comfortable communicating openly and honestly to peers and upwards. However, faculty were not so sure others, especially staff, would feel comfortable communicating upwards.

Faculty also noted concerns they had about organizational communication in general. Participants each had different experiences and concerns to relate, so there were several issues discussed. One faculty member was concerned that only positive communication is welcomed by administration or staff. Another was concerned with poor communication surrounding restructuring and administrators failing to listen and respond to concerns about those issues. Another faculty member gave an example of input that was sought by administration, but not acknowledged or used. Others noted that poor communication has been cited on every climate survey and is always discussed, but does not seem to be addressed or improve.

Overall, in this section, staff members noted fears about communicating upward,

concerns about not being heard, and distrust of top-down administrative communication. Most concerning are the perceptions that the real information they need to have is not the information they are given, and that when staff provide information to administration, it is not valued or given a response. Faculty had a variety of other concerns regarding dysfunctional communication within the organization, some of which overlapped with those of staff.

The 2012 Climate Survey also had many comments which reflected all of these viewpoints. One respondent wrote, “Communication continues to be a problem. There is not enough of it, it comes too late, or not at all” (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 99). There were also concerns noted on the Climate Survey which support the complaints about lack of clear and direct communication from administration. One respondent observed:

Communication is still a problem. A person learns more from the “grapevine” than anywhere else. I think the problem is at the “middle” level. The word is getting communicated but the link breaks above the “laborers.” Everyone says they are “too busy,” but what they don’t realize is that the lack of communication on their part constitutes more work for others who have duties or tasks that directly and indirectly affects our end users – the students. (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p.).

This writer thinks that the problem is the supervisor and dean levels, and that information is not being “passed down.” It is attributed to a supervisor being “too busy,” but the writer points out that it negatively affects the organization and students.

Another comment on the same topic focused on how communication-breakdown affects employees:

Communication has been less/worse. I would recommend a monthly employee newsletter – explain changes, upcoming changes, and communication. Currently all information is through the grapevine. Important information is learned through word-of-mouth AND THEN an email is sent out. Terrible, horrible, disrespectful errors in communication, or lack thereof. (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 98).

In all, there were more negative responses regarding communication than any other category of open-ended questions on the survey.

The last category in this section was on organizational planning and budget. The staff perception regarding planning was that input from “below” is largely disregarded. They also thought that the strategic planning efforts of the College are not being coordinated or implemented effectively. One major concern that surfaced was that even where planning is critical, such as the new student retention effort for at-risk students, most of the effort is going into creating follow-up reports. The staff discussing this believe that the time and energy investment should go into planning and preparing a way to track the College’s actual retention efforts, and reporting will follow naturally. This “backwards” effort does already-underprepared students a disservice because there is no actual plan in place to connect them to needed student success and retention services from the beginning.

The faculty had similar concerns about planning for at-risk students and student retention efforts. There was also concern about planning for and implementing innovation, which is critical for growth. However, as was pointed out in the climate section, the competing visions of the President and Executive VP may handicap any resulting planning effort. In this aspect, the faculty comments on planning mirrored those of the staff, although faculty did not address planning as extensively.

There were several comments on the 2012 Climate Survey related to planning for and assisting underprepared students. One respondent wrote:

Working harder and faster on serving underrepresented and underprepared students. Working on cohorts, first year experience, tutoring, mentoring. Cut scores on classes will have a significant [negative] impact, and it was implemented before some clear cut strategies were mapped out to assist students that fall under that category. Serving the above [mentioned] students with a successful plan will help them be more successful in the long run. (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 82).

This respondent points out that the results of cut scores on reading that will be implemented in Fall 2012 have not been adequately planned for, and that Riverland lacks a

comprehensive plan for serving at-risk and underprepared students. This theme was echoed in both faculty and staff interviews.

There were both positive and negative comments on the PBI, with the positive views being that the PBI process linked budget to strategic planning, and the negative views being that the process was a waste of time because of lack of a response to many requests. In terms of budget, although it is mentioned frequently in the 2012 Climate Survey and both faculty and staff interviews, the data analysis revealed that there was not a high level of concern associated with it. Staff noted that because there was a \$1 million surplus in the 2011 fiscal year it seemed contradictory that the administration cited “budgetary concerns” as the reason for restructuring and reorganizing positions. A 2012 Climate Survey comment also affirmed the idea of the administration using budget as a way of avoiding the real issue. One respondent wrote, “Everything negative in the last survey was attributed to budget, and so lost the opportunity to explore why ratings really went down” (*Institutional Climate Survey*, 2012, p. 99). On the other hand, faculty were concerned about an overall lack of monetary resources, and pointed out that there is disagreement over how money is allocated.

Having examined the perceptions of staff and faculty in regard to organizational structure and its players, the next section will focus on the Riverland AQIP effort.

THE ACADEMIC QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM

The interview questions included a section on the participation in and impact of AQIP on Riverland. The responses to these questions and the areas discussed in relation to AQIP were quite diverse. The AQIP effort has many longitudinal aspects given its 11- year history, and has had two AQIP Systems Portfolio submissions and corresponding Appraisals by AQIP reviewers,

a number of Action Projects, and other initiatives associated with it.

In considering the College commitment to the AQIP process Skylar summarized the purpose well:

Skylar: The purpose [of AQIP] is to have a perpetual self-improvement process in place, where we are identifying challenges ... identifying areas of strength and weakness, identifying or evaluating our effectiveness in certain key areas that we're accountable for, or that we're required to provide, as a member of the North Central Association.... As a member of that, we are responsible to provide for our students. And so, it's a process that's designed to ensure that that happens. So, we have to be able to identify areas that might be at risk or that where we're not perhaps meeting the [reaccreditation] criteria and then establishing plans, or developing projects, to address those needs and ensure that the quality continues.

Skylar sets the stage well for the following section, as s/he describes how the AQIP process is designed to generate continuing self-improvement with self-evaluation and correction in needed areas. When Riverland employees discuss the AQIP process, there are many areas they may be considering. A detailed timeline of the history of AQIP at Riverland is provided in Appendix H. The most recent portfolio was not well-received by reviewers, and the College was directed to address the areas of concern before the next review. The primary, ongoing deficiencies are discussed in this section and are: (a) student learning outcomes (SLO) assessment, (b) data-driven decision-making, and (c) planning linked to resource allocation/budgeting.

Staff Perspectives

Staff responses in the area of AQIP were diverse, although there were some common themes that emerged: the view that it has not yet impacted the College climate in a noticeable way, the desire to genuinely practice the principles of AQIP as a system for both accreditation and assuring continuous improvement, and the desire to have non-academic areas of the College

much more involved and included in the AQIP effort. After analyzing the data, the following categories were identified in both the staff and faculty responses: (a) the importance of AQIP, (b) AQIP-required improvement, and (c) concerns about AQIP including AQIP leadership, communication and the continuation of AQIP.

Importance of AQIP.

One of the interview questions was whether AQIP was a real priority for the College or just a stated one. The staff vary greatly in their responses to this question. Blair thinks it is a real priority, and measures that by committed resources. S/he says, “I think it’s a real priority and I think you can tell it’s a real priority by the amount of time and energy and finances that have gone into collecting [the data].” If you consider time, energy and resources put into AQIP, it is apparent that the College values and considers it a genuine priority. Blair follows this with a directive to “follow the money,” and says:

Blair: I think AQIP has been bolstered within the current administration. I mean, it’s been given a bigger focus, it’s been given more resources. And there’s a saying in everything; “follow the money.” So, figure out how much money somebody’s spending on something, you’ll figure out how important it is. And I think that we’re seeing much more focus on AQIP [with] pieces designed within the college to capture that improvement and to show back to the accrediting bodies that, “Yes, we are actually doing something with this.” Follow the money, and I think if you look at it, you’ll see faculty development days that have gone towards AQIP. I think you’ll see that there’s been positions, [faculty] people have been recruited to do that and a large part of their job is going towards capturing the right type of data. And I think you see it from the classroom level up through.

Blair believes that if you consider the additional money, including faculty paid to work on AQIP priorities, the classroom focus on AQIP priorities, and faculty development days to develop assessment strategies, it is clear that this administration has increased resource commitment to AQIP. Blair says you can determine priorities by following the money, and the

money trail leads to AQIP-mandated improvements. S/he also alludes to the area of AQIP that has been most elusive for the College and that will be included later in this section: capturing and recording evidence of the improvement effort.

Dakota is not sure if s/he knows or could tell if AQIP is a real or stated priority. Dakota summarizes his/her reason for this indecision:

Dakota: I think [AQIP is a] real [priority] to somebody. To me, it's stated.... Somebody's doing something with it, I don't know what, but I guess I'm putting trust in the fact that somebody is, because the word is that we're still talking about it, but I don't really know for sure.... That's a good question, I don't really know how I could tell if it was a real priority.

If AQIP is a real priority for the College, Dakota has not had access to information that would confirm that. Montana believes that it is a stated, not real, institutional priority for similar reasons. Montana says:

Montana: I so want it to be real. I want it to be a real priority, but now we're just like, "How do we report on it? How do we gather the information so our Portfolio doesn't totally [fail] when we have to submit it again?" I think right now, it's just a stated priority.

Montana makes a distinction between a real priority and complying with reporting requirements. S/he explains that s/he wishes it were real, but that receiving a good rating on a Systems Portfolio review is more of a focus than actual improvement. Darby expands on this idea:

Darby: It's a stated institutional priority and it becomes a greater priority when there's due dates and deadlines. And I feel like there isn't a deadline right now, looming, that's super urgent, so no one's really attending to it and yet this is the time when I think it really should get a lot of attention. So that we're ready when the deadline gets there. And I think we should use it as a way to do the things that we need to do to make the college better, regardless of whether or not it's related to our accreditation process.

Darby, like Montana, also thinks that what is real is the need to comply with the process and the deadline. S/he would like to see the quality improvement part of the process become the

emphasis, rather than just reporting or worrying about re-accreditation.

Among staff, Blair believes there is a clear resource trail to academics that proves AQIP is a priority, Dakota is not sure as s/he sees no evidence in their area, and Darby and Montana believe the priority is complying and reporting, rather than improvement.

In assessing the overall impact of AQIP on producing real change in the College, most staff expressing an opinion on this believe that it has not impacted the College in a significant way. Montana echoed Blair in the last section in affirming the value of AQIP on the academic area, especially assessment, but did not believe it had impacted student services. Montana notes:

Montana: I don't think [AQIP has] made an impact [on the College as a whole].... No, no. We didn't do restructuring because of what came out of AQIP. I think what came out of AQIP was the student learning outcomes ... the plans and responses. And I think that's a positive impact, and the master course outlines.

Montana believes that AQIP commitment did spur the commitment to the academic assessment projects: the student learning improvement plans and responses, master course outlines revision project, and current emphasis on SLO assessment.

Blair commented in the previous section that academic areas had benefited from AQIP involvement, especially in resources. Blair and Kiley both think that real changes in the College are not due to AQIP. Kiley also does not think environmental changes are due to AQIP:

Kiley: I don't know if AQIP had a change on the environment or the culture [climate]. I don't think it does. When you think of culture [climate] , I don't think of AQIP. You know? It's more of the other type of thing. You know, politics. I don't see AQIP as being part of that, culture-wise [climate-wise]. I think of AQIP more as a process to improve and I think it's just two different things.

Kiley, like Blair, sees the political environment of the College as being more responsible for change. In this reference, Kiley uses the term "culture" when the term "climate" would be more accurate. Kiley was also quoted in the organizational structure section as saying s/he saw the Executive VP as the main driver of change. Dakota echoes this sentiment, as s/he does not

think AQIP has had any discernible effect on his/her work.

Dakota: I don't think that it's had any effect at all on my work function and my work area.... I guess I can't speak for the rest of the college.... I couldn't make a fair judgment or assessment of that, because I don't know enough about it. As far as improvement, I don't know if it's done anything to improve anything. I think if you ask almost anybody in our department, they would say they don't really know much about [AQIP] ... it seems to have more to do with academics, I would guess.

Dakota does not think AQIP has impacted his/her area, and believes others in the area think the same. S/he says AQIP has more to do with academics. Jordan agrees and observes, "I sure don't feel like it's impacted [anything].... It's like, 'We don't know other than it's for accreditation.' It's just a process you have to go through." Jordan sees AQIP only as a required accreditation process, which mirrors Dakota's comment previously.

Skylar believed the AQIP effort had an impact during the earlier years:

Skylar: I definitely saw an impact during the beginning when I was more involved, I was much more aware. Because people were very, I felt, excited about it ... about helping, about getting on a project and having a voice, and putting forth effort to ensure that quality is improved.

Skylar recalls that people were excited about involvement with a project, "having a voice," and working on quality improvement. During that time as a staff member, s/he was more aware of what was going on with AQIP. One of the concerns Blair expressed in the climate section was that of having lost a voice, and here Skylar mentions specifically the earlier excitement and the feeling of empowerment of having a voice in AQIP. Skylar was discussing the time before 2005 when staff were involved in contributing to and writing the first AQIP Systems Portfolio and working on the AQIP Action Projects.

With the exception of the earlier enthusiasm for AQIP, Skylar does not discuss any lasting changes associated with AQIP. The staff did not see any lasting impact or improvement associated with the AQIP effort, with one possible exception being in the academic assessment

effort. The ongoing efforts, as Darby and Montana noted, are those of complying with reporting requirements rather than those associated with transformative change or improvement.

AQIP-Required Improvement.

Student learning outcomes assessment.

In this section, I present the data regarding the areas of accreditation that Riverland must address by the time of the next AQIP Review visit in Fall 2013. These areas are: (a) SLO assessment, (b) the planning and budgeting process, and (c) data-driven decision-making. Of these, the decision-making area elicited the most comments from staff and those comments related not only to data and decision-making, but also to communication and decision-making. These concerns correlate with some of those discussed in the communication category of organizational structure, as well as in the climate section.

Note to the reader: These three areas have been required as areas for improvement since the last traditional reaccreditation (PEAQ) review in 1994. They were noted in the first Systems Portfolio Appraisal in 2004-2005, and are now a mandate after the 2009-2010 Systems Portfolio Appraisal. At the time of the last Appraisal, there were no active approved Action Projects, and the College was required to identify and submit those as well.

In AQIP, SLO assessment must be an ongoing Action Project for every institution. It is also a mandated area of improvement at Riverland. Blair works closely with faculty, and so has more familiarity with their work in SLO assessment than most other staff. S/he discusses how the AQIP process stimulates faculty to make and track improvements, and how s/he sees the AQIP effort as being focused at the classroom level. Blair notes:

Blair: AQIP gives people the ability to look back at ... changes and track the changes at the classroom level. And I think that they can see their improvements from the very first they're asked to track ... they can look back at all records and say, "Hey, I have changed. I have improved. I'm not doing the same thing every year. I'm not just coming to class and teaching the same way. I found something. I looked at it. I changed it. I got this

improvement. It worked. It didn't work. It was neutral." And I think what you see is you get this question going out there about what you should change and how you should change it.

Blair is equating participation in AQIP with working on the required improvement, such as in assessment. S/he thinks there are crucial components that AQIP-required documentation provides for the assessment effort. These include the ability to make changes for improved instruction, to track and document the results of these changes, and continue the improvement effort in this way. Blair notes that AQIP involvement has also stimulated College support for online faculty to be certified and to certify their courses through the Quality Matters Online Accreditation program. S/he says:

Blair: [AQIP] is being done primarily at a classroom-level, is what I'm noticing. That's the focus for us online, is to show that people are trying to improve and what we're doing, and there's a structural system in there for faculty to improve and to capture the improvements that we know are going on.... It's Quality Matters online. But there's more than that.

Blair thinks that the evidence of AQIP involvement can be found at the classroom level. S/he believes that the Quality Matters online accreditation program is part of the overall SLOAP, in that it also encourages focusing on capturing improvement. Although Blair thinks that there is a laudable emphasis on AQIP principles at the classroom level, s/he still has concerns about how decision-making at the administrative level can impact the classroom:

Blair: I don't think anybody asks the question here. You know, we're an educational institution. I'm not seeing administration make the pieces [fit]. If we make this decision, what will be the impact in the classroom? I'm not too sure that I'm always seeing that connection made within the college, and I think AQIP could give that piece. ... That would be the indicator that AQIP is having an effect. Because AQIP is supposed to be quality improvement and it's called the Improvement Institution, and we are an educational institution, so wouldn't you think that would be the place you'd want to improve?

Blair would like to see the classroom-level improvement values encouraged by AQIP modeled at the administrative level. S/he thinks that AQIP also encourages making the

connection between administrative decision-making and impact on the classroom. Blair believes that decision-making at the College should be examined in light of its impact on instruction.

Planning and budgeting process.

Accreditation criteria encourage examining the connection between strategic planning and resource allocation, and documenting that connection. This is also now a required area of improvement for Riverland. As mentioned in the Organizational Structure and Its Players section, the College has created and implemented the use of a Planning and Budgeting Initiative (PBI) form that is intended to capture and document that process. Blair says that although use of the form is required, there is more needed:

Blair: Budgetary forms [at the department level] are being filled out to capture it and how are we supporting it and how is the money being done. Asking people to sort of say, “Okay. You did this improvement, what did it improve? How did it improve?” And I don’t think we’ve hit on the structure that makes it very easy for people to do. We are in three campuses and in three different counties and it’s very difficult to get papers to move between places and we haven’t figured out how to do that electronically and easily for people. I think the institution level is looking at trying to figure out how to get it, but I don’t think they’ve got any better with it either.

Blair is referring to the fact that although the PBI forms are used, there is no systematic way developed yet to track them and record their results in such a way that they provide a base of documentation linking the planning and budgeting processes. This accreditation deficiency links closely to the next area of data-driven decision-making.

Of the staff members interviewed, Blair, Darby, and Montana are the most familiar with AQIP involvement at Riverland. Each has had concerns related to these areas of deficiency that have been discussed previously. Blair has concerns about decision-making and communication, especially as related to hierarchical administrative structure. Montana is concerned about the lack of planning and linking plans with forward progression. Darby has concerns regarding

decision-making and communication, and Darby and Montana both commented on the focus on reporting and complying with requirements as opposed to making actual improvements.

Data-driven decision-making.

Blair discussed data-driven decision-making at length and the lack of progress in this area:

Blair: We haven't become a data-driven, decision making group. We are still very much looking at the data in reverse, instead of saying, "Okay, we made this decision. Did we make it right? Did we get it right?" It's not using [the data] to go forward. They're looking at it, sort of to say what we did. And I think that that's the change that you need to see, is that rather than go forward and make a decision, and sort of say, "Okay, did we get it right?" and look at the ... history, you need to look and use the history and logic course the other way. And that's a much more difficult institutional shift that I don't think we've made.

Blair is echoing a previous comment by Montana about looking at data "in reverse." By this, s/he means looking at the data after the fact to see what it can support, rather than using data for planning, setting a course and analyzing the results. S/he sees that as an institutional shift that Riverland should make, but has not. This is similar to Montana's concerns explored previously about the report for the Access and Opportunity grant.

Blair goes on to explain what s/he thinks will be a helpful approach to this structural problem:

Blair: As people learn new structures, it takes three to five years for the organization to figure out who's doing what and how it should be done ... how to catch up and what are the measures and what are we looking at.... We're failing to capture that material in a way that is meaningful and straightforward. So, we're not building structures that make it easy for someone to participate and to capture, and we don't always know what the data is that we want to capture, so we're still very much feeling our way. Because ... we didn't have the structure at the college to do that. So, we're still building that structure.... That's the change I'm seeing.

Blair believes there is an intent to build a structure for capturing institutional data and

creating ways to access it, but that it has not been developed yet. S/he also thinks there are other issues, such as not having identified what should be documented or measured, which also complicate the situation. Blair thinks that this will be a three- to five-year project, once a plan is developed.

There is a fledgling effort to collect and house institutional data in one place, which is termed the Office of Assessment and Student Improvement Services (OASIS).

Blair: AQIP OASIS [institutional research] data is housed in the Office of Instructional Technology. Interestingly enough, while it's housed in [that] office, it's housed in a paper format in there, but there's no real electronic format. So, I don't see the [overall] use of it, but I see that we're collecting it and I see that ... certain groups as they go through accreditation for their individual pieces, have made use of it.

Blair says there are many potential uses and ways to organize OASIS, but that currently, it is primarily paper documents without an electronic warehouse or format. So there are challenges to meet, first in identifying, collecting, and warehousing data, and then in creating access and opportunities for its use, in order to meet the AQIP mandate of data-driven decision-making.

Note to the reader: While collecting research for this dissertation, I was given permission to access all institutional data, excepting anything that was subject to individual data privacy concerns. The comments of Blair (and Drew discussing this in the corresponding faculty section) were predictive of the problems I encountered in trying to locate data: no systematic way of archiving, retrieving, accessing, or disseminating data; missing data (e.g., climate survey results only found for some of the years); no institutional researcher or anyone who had a comprehensive knowledge about data available; some data are available electronically, but most data are in three-ring binders in an unorganized cupboard in the Office of Instructional Technology (which is termed OASIS); some data are in the President's files, some in Student Affairs, some in HR, some in the library, and some apparently has gone with people who left the College. Since there is no systematic way of organizing and accessing data, using it to make decisions would be very difficult at this stage.

In spring 2012, a few individuals were asked to draft proposals for new Action Projects, and in most cases, these were not the same individuals who were working on the proposals for them in the most recent Strategy Forum. The proposals were then discussed and approved in QUILT and Administrative Council to be sent to HLC/NCA. In Fall 2011, a faculty member was assigned institutional research responsibilities, but as

Montana and others noted, he had no previous work experience or credentialing in institutional research, or familiarity with Riverland's data collections, so presumably there would be a high learning curve before progress could be made. In late spring 2012, the College purchased a software package that will be used to organize planning, accreditation, and SLO assessment data. However, the software is not yet completely functional, nor is there a comprehensive plan for how it will be set up, supported, maintained, and integrated with available data.

AQIP action projects and systems portfolios.

Darby is concerned that although AQIP requires that the College has ongoing Action Projects, this does not seem to be the case at Riverland:

Darby: Currently, I feel like nobody understands what the Action Projects are and I don't think that there's been a lot of focus on them.... I know that the [team] all went to [the AQIP Strategy Forum] and they were supposed to ... redo what the projects are, but I don't think that they've been officially sanctioned.... And I don't think that they have any traction.... I just know that the last time they went to write the AQIP systems Portfolio they were [in trouble] because there had not been on-going, documented projects.

Darby does not think there are any Action Projects currently approved or that they have any "traction." S/he points out that it was the same problem with the second Systems Portfolio, because there were no Action Projects that had official standing. Montana commented earlier that neither member of the executive team went to the most recent AQIP Strategy Forum, which may account for the lack of clarity on the Action Projects. Action Projects would require approval from the executive team or Administrative Council before submission to AQIP.

The second Portfolio process was different than the first, as several of the staff noted.

Montana explains his/her perception of what happened:

Montana: The former VP of Student Affairs left and all of the sudden, "Oh my gosh, [the Portfolio is] due." It was because we didn't have it organized and there wasn't anybody there to write it ... it was just thrown together and they don't have a really accurate picture of what we're doing.

Montana says that after the VPSA position was eliminated, the due date for the second

Portfolio seemed to catch everyone by surprise. The lack of preparation to develop it meant the HLC/NCA reviewers did not have an accurate account of what Riverland actually is doing in regard to AQIP. Montana goes on to say that the problems were compounded by the lack of attention to the Portfolio reviewers' responses:

Montana: [We aren't] really, truly listening to what the Portfolio [reviewers] say.... The truth of the matter is we don't know how to plan.... [We should] listen to them. I'm thinking they're saying, "You don't know if you're improving or not."... It says [repeatedly] that you didn't set targets, how are you measuring this? I'm not saying we're not doing it, I'm just saying ... we don't know if we're doing it.... We should listen to the feedback.

Montana thinks that the reviewers are asking repeatedly how data can be evaluated, when targets are not set and measures are not clear. Montana has discussed his/her passion for integrated planning previously, and is explaining how that lack of planning has been noted in the Systems Portfolio Appraisal. Montana believes it is impossible to know if targets have been met when the targets and measures of analysis have not been identified.

It is telling that only three staff members could speak to the AQIP-required improvement areas: Blair, Darby, and Montana. All of them, as noted, have had work assignments which give them proximity to AQIP efforts. This reinforces the lack of involvement in and impact of AQIP on other areas of the College. Progress in AQIP-required improvement areas was thought to be primarily in academic (SLO) assessment and planning and budgeting processes, but it was noted that those projects are in the early stages in regard to the required documentation.

Concerns about AQIP.

AQIP leadership and communication.

As noted earlier, Darby and Montana believe one of the primary concerns with AQIP

involvement at Riverland is the emphasis on reporting and compliance rather than on real change. Darby says:

Darby: The purpose of [AQIP] on our campus is ... to maintain accreditation. I don't think it's so that we focus on continuous improvement.... I think that it's for us to focus on accreditation, by using this continuous improvement process.... I guess an example of where I would say that we did that was with the assessment project ... that was instigated by accreditation, from my understanding.... And yet, that was a continuous improvement project that should have been focused on whether it was related to accreditation or not.

Darby wants Riverland to embrace continuous improvement and undertake projects that are worthwhile from that perspective (e.g., assessment). S/he is frustrated that the institutional energy seems to flow to compliance with AQIP and reporting, rather than considering real and necessary change. This integrates with Blair's and Montana's concern about working "in reverse", another misplaced emphasis. Montana also has another concern regarding AQIP and reporting: s/he thinks that fear is interfering:

Montana: People are not looking at it as quality improvement and it's really an opportunity for us to look at ourselves, and say what we're doing correctly and what we're not doing well, because nobody wants to say what we're not doing well, because they're afraid that they're going to lose their job.

Montana believes that the fear of job loss is influencing how others perceive AQIP efforts. Instead of focusing on improvement and viewing a problem from that perspective, it is feared as a failure that could affect job security. This is another aspect of the climate of fear discussed in the climate section.

Darby also has a concern about a lack of consistent and committed leadership in AQIP:

Darby: There's been a lack of leadership as far as who is leading the AQIP train. The Executive VP is leading it, and yet the former dean was the liaison and now the Dean of Extended Learning's liaison and I've had many conversations with the Dean of Extended Learning.... I feel like he doesn't have the authority to do what he actually would like to do because, at the end of the day, it's ... what the Executive VP says accreditation efforts are going to be focused on and yet they don't get really operationalized.... I know that people that went to [the AQIP Strategy Forum], they were just so energized and they had made great strides and there was a map that was kind of starting, but [now] I ... feel like

nothing's happening. You know, there's just no leadership.

Darby says that a lack of leadership is reflected in the uncertainty about whether the AQIP liaison, a dean, is empowered to make decisions about AQIP or whether only the Executive VP is making those decisions. This uncertainty about decision-making was discussed in the previous section. Another similar comment reflected the lack of follow-through on the plan developed at the last AQIP Strategy Forum. Darby believes the AQIP effort is foundering due to a lack of clarity about leadership and commitment by administration. This perception ties in with Montana's previous concern about not having the executive team committed enough to attend the Strategy Forum or work with that team on identifying future directions for AQIP and Action Projects.

Although Blair acknowledges the hierarchy as a valid decision-making model, s/he has persistently commented that communication does not make a "full loop" throughout the organization. S/he thinks it should be better than it is currently:

Blair: Without that [full communications loop] ... you're not seeing that AQIP ideal, which is the full comeback and check at an institutional level. I think that's lacking.... You have people who are trying to make decisions ... all decisions within the college are going on at the supervisory level.... [AQIP] gives you that solution. If you're going to want to make people improve, then you have to give them that feedback. You have to give them that full loop.... [Otherwise] you don't get those people who [say], "Well, I did this, but here's a way we could improve it." And if you always are waiting for that top-down approach, then you sort of stifle any growth or innovation that you're going to get within your organization.

Blair believes that AQIP provides the management at Riverland with an opportunity to improve communication about decision-making. S/he says that a "full loop" is lacking, as there is no feedback after decision-making. S/he believes that this top-down approach inhibits growth and innovation in the organization, and that the feedback from the "check" at the employee level would be helpful.

Darby and Jordan are concerned that the AQIP effort has not been communicated well at the College. Darby says that there is a lack in identifying the AQIP effort:

Darby: [I have been] trying to figure out what are our accreditation efforts.... It wasn't that they're not actually happening, but they're not happening in a way that everybody can look at it and say that this is all part of our accreditation efforts, our AQIP effort.

Darby does not think that what is happening with AQIP is obvious to everyone, and thinks that lack of understanding may be due to lack of communication about those efforts.

Jordan raises the question again whether the concern is AQIP itself or the lack of communication about AQIP:

Jordan: I'm trying to decide: is it AQIP itself or is it the method of communication that went on within the institution?... Was there a better way to work with it? Like I said, it seemed like we were kind of really rolling with it at first, and then the ball's just kind of disintegrated. Okay, I hear AQIP once in a while but what's going on with it?... So I can't say that it's AQIP.... I'd ask you that: is AQIP really the problem, or could it be the communication process or the work process?

Jordan is unsure if it is AQIP that is ineffective or if it is a lack of communication or the work process itself around AQIP. As was noted earlier, s/he sees AQIP as "petering" out and thinks it is no longer apparent in the organization.

Darby thinks there is a solution for making AQIP more of an imperative for those who perceive it as not valuable:

Darby: I think that we have yet to frame this accreditation concept in a way that has true meaning for the average employee. It's like it really doesn't matter to the employee that if we don't get accredited, we won't be able to have students and financial aid and all of that.... It has to be this vested interest and you only are going to get people invested in it if you can re-frame why it's important to them. And because it's for an accreditation purpose, it's not important to them. I mean, it is. Of course, they want to be accredited, but it's not motivational to them.

Darby returns to his/her previous concern about doing AQIP the right way first, then reporting it. S/he is explaining that not only is there a lack of understanding about AQIP, but there is also the perception that being involved in AQIP has not really resulted in any

improvement. So, if the improvement is targeted and implemented in a way that also creates investment and empowerment for employees, they would be much more enthusiastic about participating in AQIP.

Montana thinks that it is harder to get people involved because there is a fatigue regarding the topic of AQIP:

Montana: The very first AQIP was exciting. We had all college meetings on it... We had categories where we could resolve low-hanging fruit. And people were excited to really be able to do something. And then after, we went through that first accreditation, and ... then it turned out to be just too much work to get people together, and they were sick of hearing about AQIP and low-hanging fruit and now it's just like, "We don't want to hear about AQIP anymore."

Montana conveys the frustration of staff who initially got involved in AQIP and were excited about it, but are now tired of it. It involves a lot of work, and Montana has explained previously that the people in his/her area are already very over-worked and stressed. Under these circumstances, and because there is little perceived value or impact of the work involved, AQIP does not seem like a priority.

Continuation of AQIP.

The staff interviewed were generally supportive of AQIP involvement on the part of the College, even if they themselves or their departments had not been part of it lately. Darby thinks the ongoing aspects of AQIP are important, but does not think that Riverland is operating the way AQIP intends. Darby comments:

Darby: The way that it almost works is ... every 10 years and you do your study. It's like every ... five years we're doing our study, because we're not continuously [working on it]... Because, to me, if I understand the way that it should work, when it's time to do your system update or your Portfolio update you should just be updating on these things that are already operating... I think that they're trying to figure out, "What can we put in the report?" Because when they're doing these things, they're not overlaying the accreditation piece on it, so that they know from the beginning that this is going to

connect to this [and so on].

Darby believes the intended way of operating under AQIP would be to keep updating the Systems Portfolio as change occurs. Otherwise, the AQIP effort is really a PEAQ type of accreditation every five years when the Systems Portfolio is due. Keeping the structure of AQIP accountability and the Systems Portfolio in mind as improvements are implemented and having a Systems Portfolio always in progress would be reporting on changes, not the report driving the change. Kiley expressed a very similar opinion while noting that because there is constant change, only evaluating every 10 years, as in traditional accreditation, would be too long.

Montana believes the College should continue with AQIP, but with some new conditions in place:

Montana: I would say that we absolutely should continue with AQIP, but I think that we need to adopt more of their decision-making, and I think that we need to listen to them. I mean, you know all the exercises you go to while you're at the Strategy Forum on how to nail down what an Action Project should be. We left that ... [at the Strategy Forum].

Montana thinks that the College should adopt a decision-making model more suited to AQIP implementation and listen to the critique by the Portfolio reviewers. S/he says that the last Strategy Forum planning was all left at the conference.

As noted previously, Dakota feels as though s/he is alone on a work island and would like more involvement with the College as a whole, including AQIP. S/he would like to know more about AQIP and what his/her supervisor thinks of it. Skylar is also interested in AQIP involvement, but does not feel as though s/he and his/her area have been included. Skylar notes:

Skylar: The benefit I see to AQIP is the possibility of involving more people from all aspects of the College, in a real way, contributing way, and I don't know in the standard or traditional method if that's possible, or if that happens in the same way or could happen in the same way.... And then there would be the same individuals probably responsible for writing, for evaluating.... I pretty much have only known AQIP.... What I've seen and what I know about it, I think is awesome. I wonder, though, if it is more burdensome on the College as a whole, when you're talking about resources in terms of

people, human resources as well as financial resources.

Skylar would like to see the entire College participating in accreditation efforts and isn't sure if that is possible with PEAQ. As noted previously, s/he is very enthusiastic about being involved with AQIP and thinks that others from around the College would feel the same way. S/he also thinks that there would be the same, limited number of people writing and evaluating for PEAQ as is happening currently in AQIP. S/he thinks AQIP is "awesome," but wonders if it consumes more resources than the more traditional way of accreditation.

Blair sees a drawback of AQIP involvement and thinks it is still evolving:

Blair: One of the things that has happened over the years is that AQIP itself is sort of evolving how they wish to be doing that and they are not necessarily as forthcoming with the information as they structurally deal with what we should all be working on and what's important.

Because AQIP as a process is always undergoing improvement, the requirements and structure of AQIP keep changing, too. Blair sees the lack of information on these changes as impacting the effectiveness of AQIP.

Jordan, on the other hand, does not understand why the College is still involved with AQIP:

Jordan: We've lost [track of] why AQIP? Why is AQIP ... used here? What is the benefit of using AQIP?... I think that's completely lost. I know it is to me, as opposed to some other way of meeting your accreditation criteria ... because it seems really cumbersome.... What other ways are there to get accredited besides AQIP that maybe is more user-friendly for everyone in a facility or in an institution to follow?

Jordan thinks that the benefits of AQIP have been lost and that a less "cumbersome" way of meeting accreditation criteria would be more beneficial. Jordan thinks the College should seek a more "user-friendly" method of re-accreditation.

Darby, as noted previously, is enthusiastic about the possibilities for positive change with AQIP. S/he says:

Darby: It's about framing whatever's happening and then it's about building social capital ... for this to continue. It can't just be one person's responsibility to get the report figured out and to get the stuff done.... But if what we've worked on had meaning for the employee and they could see it as a way to actually improve the college ... we would work on it, and they could invest in it and they had authority to make decisions about it and they could make changes and be empowered and have their enthusiasm nurtured. Then, I think, we could make strides forward, and gee, we could just report it with our AQIP stuff.

Darby thinks that the College must "frame" what is being done to involve individual employees and in that way build the social capital necessary. That capital would involve all employees as part of the decision-making process to make changes, which would be empowering and generate enthusiasm. Then, real change and improvement would be happening, and that would go into the report. Darby sums up the lack of power and involvement most of the staff have discussed experiencing, and offers a solution right out of the AQIP playbook that would address many of the concerns expressed.

Faculty Perspectives

As with staff, the faculty interviewed had diverse views of AQIP as the method for re-accreditation and diverse perspectives on its uses, effectiveness, and concerns relating to it. The emergent themes from the data analysis of the faculty interviews included the view that accreditation is a real priority, but the faculty were divided on whether or not AQIP is necessary, important, or has had a significant impact on the College. Faculty thought the AQIP efforts for assessment and linking planning to budget were important, and they also thought more progress had been made in these areas than with data-driven decision-making. As with the staff perspectives, the faculty perspectives are presented in the following categories: (a) the importance of AQIP, (b) AQIP-required improvement, and (c) concerns about AQIP including AQIP leadership and communication and the continuation of AQIP.

Importance of AQIP.

When addressing the question of whether AQIP is a real or just a stated institutional priority, faculty had differing views of how AQIP is viewed by the institution. Taylor, Kai, Bailey, Tristan, and Drew agree that it is a real institutional priority. Taylor believes that continuous improvement is encouraged and valued. S/he gives an example of how s/he knows it is real:

Taylor: I don't think it's just a stated institutional priority, but I think that we could strengthen how we support it as an institution.... I think that the purpose is good. I think that we try to encourage continuous improvement. I think that we've done some good things with that. I'm glad that we focus some of our duty day time on AQIP so that it's continually present. I wish everyone would have the chance to go to [the Strategy Forum]. But I think that comes from administration ... and forcing the importance of everyone being involved in AQIP.

Taylor thinks AQIP is a real priority, but that there are ways that the College could strengthen it. S/he is happy that faculty "duty day" time has been used to foster the AQIP effort, and that the administration sees the importance of involving everyone in AQIP. Kai agrees that AQIP is a real priority for the institution and explains why:

Kai: I think it is a priority for the college.... We got involved in AQIP fairly early into my involvement here at Riverland. But in terms of other institutions I was at or are familiar with, I think it is much more real, I guess, than traditional accreditation process where once every ... ten [years], you go through this mad rush to assemble everything and then it seems like just a year or two on either side of that goal is the real focus and then most institutions, I think, tend to say, "Whew! Thank goodness that's done now, we can relax again for a while and not deal with this stuff."... I think ... that it's a real value for the institution.

Kai believes the evidence of the priority of AQIP is the constant involvement in accreditation activities. S/he compares it to other places s/he has worked, where accreditation activities revolved around just the ten-year self study process. Bailey also thinks that AQIP is a real priority for the institution. S/he says the evidence is that there is always work to be done:

Bailey: I think it's real ... because we always have things to do. Always. There's

always a chore.... We have assignments that have to be done to meet the AQIP standards and to continuously improve.... I think that that has been stepped-up more since 2005, when administration [changed] ... which is good that leadership believes in it.... But, I do think that it's been stepped-up. There's talk about it across curriculum and across programs and, more recently, with program accreditation.

Bailey cites the fact that there are always “chores” to be done that relate to the AQIP standards. S/he thinks the effort has been increased since 2005, which is in contrast to staff like Skylar, Darby, Montana, and Blair who perceive that they were more actively involved prior to that time. Bailey also says that s/he thinks the leadership believes in it. The assignments or “chores” referred to occur across the curriculum, programs, and most recently, the push for program accreditation.

Tristan and Drew also believe that AQIP is a real priority for the institution, but Tristan notes that not all areas of AQIP have the same level of priority. S/he says:

Tristan: I think it's a real priority, just because you have to be accredited.... So, it's real because it's something that you really need to do. I think that there are areas with AQIP that are real and I think that there are areas that it's a stated [priority]. Like, I don't feel like every priority in AQIP holds the same level of priority.

Tristan sees accreditation as a priority and believes that priority is real. However, s/he also thinks some areas of AQIP are only a stated priority and others are real. In an earlier discussion, s/he noted that academics and assessment are given priority. Likewise, Drew thinks it is a real priority because s/he sees the work that goes into it through his/her involvement in AQIP, but does not think that all faculty members would agree with him/her.

By contrast, Kelly, Cameron, Jesse, and Parker believe that although reaccreditation is a real priority, AQIP as a way to meet that need is not necessarily a real priority. Kelly does not think that AQIP has produced real change and so is not sure it is the right choice for accreditation. S/he sees it as simply a “stated” priority:

Kelly: It seems as though it's more of a stated one, not necessarily real and the only

reason I would say that is because ... it's not a high enough priority or it's not talked about, I don't think, on a regular basis.... I don't know if people would look at AQIP and say, "Yes, we made the right decision back in 2001 and that was a good thing and we're going to keep doing it." Or if people would say ... if you had to weigh between the two, if the weight is actually more on the positive side for AQIP or not. I don't know if it's influenced us or changed how we do things so dramatically and positively that we should keep it.

Kelly does not see evidence of AQIP being a real priority, and does not think there would be positive affirmation from others that it was the right choice. S/he does not know of any evidence of positive influence or change to support the choice of AQIP. Parker agrees with Kelly's assessment of AQIP and made similar comments.

Cameron affirms Kelly's view of AQIP being more of a "stated" priority and not an influence for change. Cameron says:

Cameron: The discussions I have with faculty, which is again only a sample of the faculty, I think to faculty it seems to be is primarily a stated thing.... Obviously it has to be done, but is not to be taken very seriously ... in the sense that they don't expect to see change particularly because of AQIP, and ... as far I could tell, I don't know anybody that thinks that they could see AQIP as a way to make any particular change that they would like to have.

Cameron does not think the faculty take AQIP seriously. As s/he expressed earlier, s/he does not think others expect to see any changes because of AQIP, and also does not think others would believe they could bring change about using AQIP. Jesse thinks AQIP is only a "stated" priority because of the lack of faculty buy-in:

Jesse: I think it's just a stated priority because ... there are several faculty, new faculty that have no idea AQIP exists or what it was intended for. There's faculty that have been here a long time that have no idea what AQIP is really supposed to accomplish.... Some of them don't even know what accreditation is anymore, kind of thing, and if that's all the effort they can put into getting that information out and getting faculty buy-in, then it must not be a priority.

Jesse says there are new faculty who are not acquainted with AQIP, and long-term faculty who also do not know what AQIP is intended to accomplish. S/he thinks if all the effort

administration can exert still does not acquaint faculty with the goals and purposes of AQIP, then it must not be a real priority.

The faculty interviewed all discussed the importance of AQIP, but were divided as to whether AQIP was the best choice for re-accreditation. All of them knew that it is for re-accreditation and that re-accreditation is mandatory. However, the attitudes toward AQIP as the specific re-accreditation method varied. Faculty also had different views on whether or not AQIP had made any real impact on the College, and whether or not it could or would.

Taylor sees the value or importance of AQIP as helping the College identify areas of improvement:

Taylor: I think that's what AQIP does is to help us identify what's new and what do we need to work on? Well, if we're all working on different things, to try ... for the end goal, which is we need bodies and we need success. But, there are lots of pieces that I think we could work on collaboratively to help us achieve our goals much more effectively.

Taylor believes AQIP helps the College focus on new concerns and what needs to be improved. S/he thinks that although there may be a common end goal, it would benefit the College if there were collaborative work on the "pieces" to reach the goal of enrolling students and success for those students.

As s/he said previously, Drew also thinks that being involved tends to reveal a bias toward what s/he thinks is important. S/he is concerned that others do not think it is important:

Drew: Unless they're really involved, I think [people] have a sense of apathy about it, and that's something that we brought up at the Strategy Forum and everybody, every school that was there said the same thing. You know, if we're not talking about this all the time, or if we're not feeling like we're shoving it down somebody's throat, people are saying, "Who cares?" and we're like, "We care! And we need you to care! And we need you to be involved!" And they're saying, "I've got enough stuff to do."

Along with many others from the College, Drew has attended an AQIP Strategy Forum. S/he says that the other colleges were also concerned about the "sense of apathy" that s/he has

observed in other Riverland employees who are not as involved. Drew thinks that unless AQIP is constantly being promoted, other employees will not care about it and feel too busy to get involved.

Cameron says that s/he initially thought AQIP could spark creative change in the institution:

Cameron: My picture of it in the beginning was that ... I used to have a metaphor: it was going from a royal pain in the [rear] to a series of episodes of hemorrhoids stretched out over time. I saw it really favorably as an opportunity to, well, partly to not go through ... what we always went through in accreditation. But also, I thought it really would offer some opportunities for some kinds of creative changes along the way ... because we would have time, at least, to do that. We wouldn't have this one thing hanging over our heads. Now that there would some opportunity for people to maybe do [for instance] the honors thing that we never got around to here, and things of that kind.

Cameron also thought AQIP would spread out the “pain” aspect of re-accreditation requirements and would give time for creative changes to be developed and implemented. S/he says this was his/her initial impression of the value of AQIP, and goes on to discuss the results s/he sees now:

Cameron: Most people don't really want to make very much change anyway. I think, “Well, maybe I had some illusions initially,” because I thought, “Well, maybe this is a means ... if a few areas really want to make a particular change, they'll be able to use AQIP as a leverage and way to do that.” But I don't know of anybody that holds that view now. If you asked me what part did AQIP play ... then I would find it difficult to specify ... whereas that would've been the case with where AQIP would fall in there.

Cameron now thinks that s/he had “illusions” about the initial impressions of AQIP's value, because s/he thinks most people do not really want to change. Cameron originally thought AQIP would be used as “leverage” to make a change, but does not think that anyone now would say that has been true of AQIP. S/he does not think it has had impact or could be seen as having sparked creative change in the College. As discussed previously, Kelly also does not see AQIP as having had a significant impact on the College.

AQIP-required improvement.

Student learning outcomes assessment.

As noted previously, SLO assessment is an ongoing Action Project for every institution in AQIP. It is also a mandated area of improvement at Riverland, especially in regard to documentation. Faculty who commented on it agreed that there is an increased emphasis and activity level in this area. Bailey, Kai, Lee, Tristan, and Taylor all agreed that there is additional institutional effort directed toward outcome assessment.

Bailey listed the progression of projects that have all been developed by the Student Learning Outcomes Assessment Project (SLOAP) at Riverland since 2007, as well as the AQIP effort:

Bailey: First, we did Master Course Outlines and then we have strategic planning and we have Learning Outcomes and we have program accreditations. And some of us have Program Outcomes and we have the Student Learning Improvement Plans, or the new acronym, SLOAP. And we have Quality Improvement Leadership Team and, everything is about the improvement, which AQIP is supposed to be about.... We had a lot of our administratively assigned faculty “duty days” go toward that, go toward learning about it.

The SLOAP effort began with the Master Course Outline Revision Project to revise all common course outlines to include measurable outcomes. The career and technical faculty developed program outcomes, and the liberal arts and sciences faculty adopted Associate of Arts degree outcomes. Every year for the last five years (2007-2012), each faculty member or department submitted Student Learning Improvement Plan and Response designed to incorporate one learning improvement and report on the outcomes. The QUILT meets to consider and implement quality improvement initiatives, and the SLO assessment team meets to coordinate the SLO outcomes assessment effort. In referring to all these efforts, Bailey is affirming that there is a significant College investment directed toward improving and documenting SLO

assessment. Bailey also explains that many of the contractually-assigned faculty “duty days” were devoted to the SLO assessment effort.

Kai also discusses his/her perceptions of the SLO assessment effort:

Kai: We moved on to another [AQIP] area, obviously now assessment and the different levels of assessment. We’re focusing on them ... I guess we’ve talked about a hundred times we all as faculty, we are always assessing and it’s just a matter of formalizing and I think that’s a very good thing because no matter if you’ve been teaching for thirty years or whatever there’s always room for improvement in how we’re teaching. And I find assessment – that was the whole reason I got involved in this AQIP business anyway because assessment is something I believe in – I think it’s one of the most valuable things in my teaching. It tells me a lot about what I’m doing as well as about what the students are doing. It just ... makes me think of better ways of teaching, presenting material and so on.

Kai believes that faculty are always assessing, and that what has not been done to the accreditation standard is documenting and “formalizing” these assessments. Kai says s/he is involved in AQIP because of the emphasis on assessment, and that it is a very valuable part of his/her teaching. It gives him/her feedback on teaching, as well as what students are doing.

Lee was initially unhappy about the extra work of assessment, but now thinks it is worth it. S/he observes:

Lee: Yes, it has certainly added more work because the master course outlines have come out of that. And now, what’s the latest?... The student learning outcomes.... Once ... I understood what we needed, it actually was sort of interesting matching the assessment tool to the outcome to the objectives.... You kind of have to force yourself, and you moan and groan, “Not another thing.” But once you actually do it, I think it’s been sort of interesting. And I think it helps with our department, proving that we are viable. And that the teachers are strong and that we’re able to show this in step by step progression.... I just think that it is worthwhile. Do we like to do it? No, of course not. Nobody likes to do it.... It is extra work. But, is it valuable? Yes.

Lee also details the progression from master course outline revision through developing assessments for the outline outcomes. Now that s/he has gone through the process, s/he finds it interesting, worthwhile, and valuable, although like everyone else, s/he does not like the extra work involved.

Planning and budgeting process.

Drew commented on the PBI mentioned previously in the staff category and in the organizational structure section. Drew thinks the process is a good example of implementing the AQIP philosophy:

Drew: I don't like doing budgeting and planning and things like that, but I think that makes things a lot cleaner. And I think it makes things easier when you're writing the Portfolio to put, "How do we do this? What's our process? What does it look like?" So I think there have been things with the AQIP philosophy of things that it has really moved things ahead. So I think that it's good.

Drew does not like the extra work of linking planning to budgetary allocations, but thinks it will help with reporting on how Riverland is complying with the AQIP directive. S/he believes that doing this moves the College in the right direction. Kai agrees that the PBI is a good idea, and commented on it in a previous section. S/he further explains that the budgetary process ties all College expenditures into strategic planning:

Kai: I think that the Executive VP makes a concerted effort to tie a lot of this stuff into AQIP. Again, everything from me wanting to buy a new computer for the department to almost every decision that's made that's traceable. I think he's trying to really show that there is a plan in place and that we are focusing on things that we ourselves identify in the AQIP process and that he helps us identify.

Kai sees an overall planning process in place that links all resource allocations to meeting goals. S/he also sees the Executive VP as the administrator who is trying to develop this initiative along AQIP guidelines and assist College employees in complying with it.

Data-driven decision-making.

Faculty did not discuss the College's efforts to document data-driven decision-making in as much detail as Blair. Blair is more familiar with College efforts in this area and, as noted

earlier, concluded that the College does not have a clear direction or comprehensive plan that examines which data are to be collected, when, why, and for what purpose it will be used. Drew and Kai comment affirmatively on the efforts, but no clear picture of a College plan emerges, unlike in the previous two categories. Drew is also concerned that this seems to be an area of deficiency that is not currently being adequately addressed:

Drew: When you report in that Portfolio, there's so many concrete things that you have to do, and so going through it means that we have to make more of our processes more concrete and then you can see it.... I think it's good to look at other institutions, and it's forced some research, but we need a better researcher, a qualified researcher to do that, to do the studies about a bunch more ... to realistically look at other institutions and compare our institution against [them]. But I just think we need somebody more qualified in that position to do a better job so it accurately reflects in the Portfolio, because that's why we get dinged.

Drew believes that the AQIP Portfolio process is directing a number of areas that need to be addressed in this category. S/he says the College is starting to address it, but needs a qualified institutional researcher to help develop and implement a plan, including benchmarking to other institutions. S/he thinks the College keeps getting “dinged” because of that deficiency.

Kai sees an increase in required documentation and thinks it is a step in the right direction:

Kai: AQIP has been responsible for some of the change that has taken place, certainly in terms of documentation of ... a variety of things, but also just putting a lot of this stuff on paper or electronic form or whatever, but just sitting down and putting it in writing, I guess, in one form or another.... I think AQIP really has made a difference for us in our institutional functionality and it seems a way of us as an institution to keep focusing on improvement in different areas.

Kai believes AQIP is responsible for the requirements for documentation, and sees the common ground as articulating and recording process and results. S/he thinks this requirement reflects an increase in institutional functionality and of keeping the focus on improvement.

Concerns about AQIP.

AQIP leadership and communication.

Several faculty wanted to discuss AQIP leadership. Taylor sees the Executive VP as the primary administrator for AQIP efforts and says, “I feel like [the Executive VP] has been the one pushing AQIP from an administrative perspective and maybe I’m wrong. I guess that just seems freshest to me.”

Depending on the circumstances, the term “AQIP leadership” could variously be interpreted as the Executive VP, the dean who is the AQIP liaison, the Quality Improvement Leadership Team (QUILT), or the QUILT Faculty Chairperson. Kai discusses his/her perceptions of the overall leadership of AQIP:

Kai: In terms of the overall leadership of the AQIP thing ... from my perspective, it’s another one of those things. It keeps feeling like it gets tossed around from one administrator to another and it’s always this giant learning curve and so, about the time one person gets it figured out, then it’s moved to someone else. You know, like when [one dean] left, she seemed to be just getting it figured out and then [another dean] left and that upheaval, and now [it is] with The Dean of Extended Learning.

Kai thinks the changeover between deans and the “giant learning curve” involved has slowed the progress of AQIP.

Note to the reader: In its 11-year history at Riverland, AQIP has had a revolving door of leadership. Since 2006, there have been three deans designated as AQIP liaisons, while the primary decision-making and initiatives have largely been under the auspices of the Executive VP. The President has also participated to some extent in various ways. The QUILT has some oversight functions in its role descriptions, but is chaired by a faculty member and has other faculty, deans, the Executive VP, and President as members.

Drew also thinks that leadership for AQIP has been problematic, and discusses the administrative leadership and how this affects the QUILT function and the work of AQIP. S/he comments:

Drew: We've got a Portfolio that's coming up and we've got things that need to move, and [QUILT] spent the last year doing program review, so we didn't spend a lot of time on the Portfolio.... The Dean of EL thinks that, "Oh, we can just write this Portfolio, and [do it later]."... I think the faculty, is like, "Hey, we need to [be working on things right now]," and so there's been a bit of opposition. So, I think [they have] narrowed down the committee.... Well, I think faculty [on QUILT] are much more action-oriented and, "Here's what needs to be done, let's make a list, let's get it done, let's tackle it and make sure that it's good and accurate," and I think that we've got some administrators on that team that are more philosophical, they want to see how things look, they want to not do the work. They just want talk to about it. Well it's not fluff and stuff, this is meat and potatoes.

Drew is describing the struggle for leadership and differing philosophies of the faculty and administration on QUILT. The faculty, which Drew describes as being more "action-oriented," are anxious to lay the groundwork and work on this next Portfolio submission. Drew's perception is that the administration would rather talk about approaches and philosophies, which s/he calls "fluff and stuff." The faculty want to organize and tackle the work to be done, which s/he calls the "meat and potatoes" of AQIP. Drew says this has made him/her wonder what the administration and faculty roles should be in the AQIP effort and on QUILT.

S/he notes:

Drew: [We're] just getting people to be on the same page, and there's a few people on the committee that totally went off in different directions and then had to be reined ... back in. They thought they were supposed to develop all their actions projects and do their own thing, and it's like, "No, no, no." Is that really supposed to be an administrator's role, or is that supposed to be a faculty role? And then I think there's boundaries that ... come with that.... So there's been a few heated discussions in the AQIP meetings about what needs to happen, but then there's also been support saying, "Yes, we need to get moving, we need to get things done," and so [the] goal now is to get that software package [set up and running] that is going to be so helpful in writing the Portfolio.

Drew is describing a conflict on the committee about approaching Action Projects and AQIP efforts. S/he says it has been resolving and there is agreement that there needs to be progress. QUILT is now focusing on implementing the software package described earlier that will document the re-accreditation efforts. Overall, Drew is describing an improvement

committee that is embroiled in conflict over the best way to move forward with the AQIP process, and ends with the hope that accreditation-tracking software will help.

Tristan sums up confusion about what AQIP priorities are and where AQIP is currently headed:

Tristan: I think that when we started [AQIP], I think more people were involved. AQIP, I know what it is, but I feel like – I don't want to say this in a negative way – but I feel like it's there, but I don't know who's doing what... Like when it first started, everybody was involved, it seemed like, and you knew what the priorities were, and you knew what direction it was moving. But I feel like now AQIP, it's just out there and I can't tell you who would be involved with whatever priorities or what's happening.

Tristan is describing from a personal perspective the kind of confusion that Drew and other staff have described. Although both Drew and Tristan think AQIP is valuable and a real priority, they are concerned about the lack of directed focus and having clear leadership for the AQIP effort.

Continuation of AQIP.

All of the faculty interviewed were interested in discussing the relative merits of remaining with AQIP or reverting to PEAQ, which is the traditional re-accreditation route.

Cameron, Taylor, Kai, Tristan, Lee, Drew, and Bailey advocated for remaining in AQIP, albeit given certain considerations. Cameron, who in the first section had expressed his/her disappointment with AQIP, still thinks Riverland should stay the course with AQIP:

Cameron: If a few things could be done that would be worth doing and would be tied to AQIP, I think that would be advantageous to the process that goes on. Now, if at some point somebody said, "X, Y or Z, this is a good thing to do and we can do it as part of our AQIP project," then I think ... that would make a better standing for AQIP and obviously it would benefit the institution. So that kind of opportunity [should be used] ... because as far as I can tell, those opportunities are there but nobody's very much motivated to take them, so it just becomes a process that you just do.

Cameron thinks making a change would be very problematic, and should not be

undertaken unless there is a very compelling reason for the College to do so. S/he thinks there is still potential for creative change with AQIP, but does not think anyone has utilized it. Cameron believes it has become a policy to simply comply with, but it could be a process that really benefits the organization. AQIP could present opportunities for this beneficial change if someone was motivated to utilize them.

Taylor also thinks Riverland should stay involved in AQIP because s/he thinks PEAQ was done by only a few people, and AQIP involves many more people in the process. S/he observes:

Taylor: I went through the self-study process when I was first at the College ... and it's a huge undertaking. But I also remember it being a few people who were responsible for ... pulling it all together, and I think AQIP attempts to make more people at the institution feel involved in the process, offers us more involvement in the process. I still think we could do some more to make that collaborative across the staff and faculty and administration, but I think that it would be unfortunate if we didn't do AQIP.... I don't think that that ... [PEAQ is] as valuable.

Taylor would like to see the AQIP process be more collaborative and thinks it would be very "unfortunate" to go back to PEAQ. S/he saw PEAQ as only involving a few people. Taylor is passionate about creating collaborative opportunities for faculty, staff, and administrators to work together, and believes AQIP offers that. Lee also likes "the AQIP way" and wants it to continue, which echoes Taylor's comment.

Kai also sees AQIP as being more valuable to the College than PEAQ:

Kai: I think it's much more valuable for the College than [PEAQ], from my perspective, because I don't know that a lot of ... the positive changes that have taken place here, I don't know that they would have happened unless they were forced by AQIP ... to really address some deficiencies, rather than just that 10-year cycle of flurry of paperwork to put it together.... I think it keeps us accountable, obviously, and keeps us focused on [improvement].

Kai believes that AQIP has been responsible for many of the positive changes at the College. S/he does not think the 10-year self-study process has the level of accountability that

AQIP requires. Likewise, Tristan thinks that although PEAQ might be less trouble, AQIP is still the better choice. Tristan and Drew think the constant presence of the AQIP process and projects are a better choice for the College. Drew does have a concern that the AQIP process is always changing, and so trying to keep in the loop and wait for needed feedback from the AQIP reviewers are both somewhat frustrating. Blair also expressed this concern previously.

Bailey sums up the process of AQIP as being comparable to taking care of one's health:

Bailey: I think quality improvement is just something that everybody should do.... I'll equate it to personal, like you take care of yourself because you take care of yourself. You keep your teeth checked and your health checked because you're supposed to. You continue to improve or you continue to try to do things to improve. People do personal improvement. I don't see businesses any different, [and I think] that they should continue on this quality improvement program.

Bailey thinks AQIP is important to be involved in because it helps everyone improve.

S/he thinks everyone at the College should be involved in order to either improve, or risk closure. S/he acknowledges that it is a lot of work, but believes the College is invested in it and needs to remain with it.

As noted previously, Kelly, Parker, and Jesse each had reservations about remaining in AQIP, and said they would be willing to revisit the alternative. Kelly expressed a view that whatever method was most effective should be the one used. Parker thinks AQIP is too labor-intensive, and as noted in the section on apathy, has lost enthusiasm for it. Jesse also thinks that reverting to PEAQ might be a better idea and would be willing to go back to PEAQ if there were no negative consequences for the College. Jesse also says s/he has not seen any benefit to AQIP, that it is more expensive than PEAQ, and s/he thinks the cost-benefit ratio for AQIP is too high.

Cameron notes that s/he thinks AQIP is evolving to look more like PEAQ anyway. S/he thinks that although AQIP may be structured differently, and arranged differently in time, it looks a lot like what accreditation has always looked like. This reminds me of the expression "If

it looks like a duck, walks like a duck, and quacks like a duck, it is probably a duck.” In this case, the duck is PEAQ, and AQIP in essence is really PEAQ, according to Cameron. This is similar to Darby’s view that the Systems Portfolio is being managed like a five-year PEAQ self-study, instead of a continuous improvement process. Cameron says this comes down to required paperwork completed by a small group of people.

After more than 11 years of an unclear process with constantly changing leadership, there is a fatigue or apathy that some faculty are experiencing related to AQIP. This apathy is similar to Montana’s observation about how s/he perceives some of the staff to be feeling. Likewise, Jesse notes:

Jesse: To be honest, I have purposely not been aware of what’s going on with it.... It’s accreditation. It needs to be done, but that doesn’t mean I have to like it. It doesn’t mean that I have to be as involved as I was when we wrote the first Portfolio. It needed to be done, but there are other people that can do it too, and I just haven’t been paying much attention to it because, “Just tell me what I need to do for accreditation, let’s keep the accreditation and get on with things.”

Jesse has been very involved with AQIP in the past, and now wants to simply do his/her part for accreditation. S/he does not want to have to pay attention to the AQIP effort, and does not enjoy doing what needs to be done for it. Jesse described earlier his/her high level of involvement in a variety of areas for the College, so this low energy for AQIP does not seem characteristic for Jesse. As noted earlier, Parker also reported being apathetic toward AQIP. Parker wants to be able to focus on his/her teaching, and not spend time on AQIP efforts. S/he acknowledges it needs to be done, but like Jesse, does not want to be involved with it any longer.

Although Taylor does not feel apathetic about AQIP, s/he mentioned previously that there are changes which need to be made. Taylor says, “We hear about it, we see those newsletters. I mean, they’re making attempts, but if it’s not working then we need to change the way we’re ... communicating about it and getting people involved in it.” Taylor thinks that

although there may be attempts made at communicating about AQIP like the True North Newsletter, they are not working. S/he thinks changes in communication may provoke interest and involvement, and the apathy toward AQIP efforts noted by Jesse, Kai, and Parker might be transformed.

In conclusion, the views of the staff and faculty were quite diverse in this section on AQIP. In analyzing the importance of AQIP, the staff were divided on whether or not AQIP was a real priority, a stated priority, or a priority only when a deadline was near. The staff generally did not believe that AQIP has had a positive impact on the College, and especially not on their work area or climate. Faculty were also divided on whether or not AQIP was a real priority, and its impact on the institution.

Although faculty did not agree on whether AQIP has impacted the College overall, there was affirmation of some progress on the AQIP-required improvements. The faculty generally agreed that a necessary improvement that could be attributed to AQIP was progress on the SLO Assessment Project. The staff had less familiarity with the AQIP-required improvements, and generally commented in this section and previously that AQIP seemed to be focused on academics. There were fewer comments on the PBI, although that was also discussed previously in the section on Organizational Structure and Its Players. One staff member commented that although a process was in place, the data captured from it is still a work in progress. The faculty were more positive about the value of the PBI effort, but one interviewee commented on a negative perception of it. The data-driven decision-making effort was also not discussed by most staff or faculty. A knowledgeable staff member discussed it at length and believes it is in a fledgling stage, and the faculty member who commented on it also agreed that the initiative is just beginning.

All employees understood and confirmed the need for re-accreditation, but both of the staff and faculty groups were divided on whether or not AQIP should be continued, or whether it should be abandoned in favor of a return to the traditional (PEAQ) process. While both staff and faculty members who were interviewed spoke at length about AQIP, the positive and negative energy and passion was absent when compared to the discussions regarding the staff and faculty groups, climate, and organizational structure sections. In general, the AQIP effort seems to be of concern to fewer individuals, which is something that one of the faculty observed. There were also comments made by both staff and faculty alike about an AQIP apathy or fatigue, which was attributed to the long-term nature of this improvement effort and the amount of work and lack of change associated with it.

Several staff and faculty commented on having had high hopes for real change through AQIP in the beginning. Some acknowledged that while it might still be possible, AQIP was not producing any of that type of change currently. Others still retained enthusiasm, energy, and hope for AQIP. This type of division characterized both the staff and faculty groups on most of the issues surrounding AQIP. Virtually all staff and faculty who discussed it agreed that AQIP has suffered from a lack of effective leadership and a lack of organizational communication. Also, there were staff and faculty who discussed the need to treat AQIP as a quality improvement effort to work for real changes instead of focusing on just the reporting. Another observation articulated by members of both groups was that the entire institution needs to invest in and collaborate on the AQIP process.

In the next section, the quantitative data on the climate surveys that helped to shape this research study are presented.

INSTITUTIONAL CLIMATE SURVEY RESULTS

Survey Background

When the Riverland Community College Institutional Climate Survey is presented to employees every two years, the literature that accompanies it refers to “climate” as atmosphere, mood, environment, and tone. It also states that the overall objective of the survey is to gather ideas and opinions from employees which can be used to improve the operations of the college, including meeting standards for internal controls. Specifically, the overall objectives are to assess the current working environment and employee attitudes, compare the results of the current survey to those of the previous surveys in order to identify areas where employees had less favorable responses than in previous years, and identify opportunities for improvement based on current responses and comparative analysis. In 2002, Riverland piloted its first employee survey to assess employees’ perceptions of atmosphere, environment, mood, and tone at the College. The 2004 survey had objectives which were similar to the 2002 survey and was a mechanism to provide a benchmark for the new president who began in 2003. The 2006-2012 surveys were also administered as follow-ups to each previous survey.

The six climate surveys reviewed in this dissertation were administered over a ten-year period in the years 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012, each time in either January or February. In 2006 and 2010, retrospective analyses of the previous three surveys were also done, so there is a summative evaluation of the 2002, 2004, and 2006 surveys that was done by the MnSCU Office of Internal Auditing. A summative analysis of the 2006, 2008 and 2010 surveys was completed as a result of the College’s contract with the Hanover Research Council, a firm that contracts its services for data analysis and benchmarking. Each of these

summative analyses identified positive trends and areas for improvement.

The first four surveys (2002- 2008) were developed through the cooperative efforts of the Riverland administrators and the MnSCU Office of Internal Auditing. Administrators at the College worked with another MnSCU entity, the Organizational Effectiveness Research Group (OERG) at Minnesota State University – Mankato (MSU-Mankato), for the last two surveys in 2010 and 2012.

Survey administration.

The survey has been administered in various ways over the years and with changes in technology. The 2002 survey was administered with pencil and paper, the 2004 survey was administered through the Riverland website, the 2006 survey was offered to employees through an independent, web-based survey tool called Zoomerang, the 2008 survey was administered through a website set up by the MnSCU Office of Internal Auditing, and the 2010 and 2012 surveys were administered through an independent website set up by the OERG at MSU-Mankato.

In each survey, Riverland employees were supplied with information about how anonymity and confidentiality would be maintained regarding the climate surveys. In the 2004-2012 surveys, employees were assured that no one other than the administering external agencies would have electronic identity access which would be a secure code or password related to the employee's web link to the survey.

Survey questions.

In all six administrations of the climate survey, most of the survey consisted of a

group of statements which respondents were asked to rate using a five-point Likert scale. A section on diversity was added to the 2004 Climate Survey, and those questions were retained in the successive administrations of the survey. Additional sections on service to internal and external customers were added to the 2006 Climate Survey, and those questions were also retained in the successive administrations of the survey. Question 26 which states “Positive changes have occurred at the College since the last survey in January XXXX” was added in 2008 and questions were re-numbered at that time. By 2012, respondents were presented with 101 statement questions which they were asked to rate, and were given the opportunity to respond to nine open-ended questions. The entire survey as it was administered in 2012 can be found in Appendix E.

Each time the survey was given, the first six questions were regarding the demographics of participants and included: (a) gender, (b) employee group, (c) primary work location, (d) current employment status, (e) number of years employed at Riverland, and (f) number of times participating in the survey. When the demographics results are compared, it is clear that the samples are comparable with respect to most demographic variables, thereby enabling comparisons across years (Appendix I).

As previously noted, by the third administration of the survey there were 101 statement questions for respondents to rate. Most of the statements were worded “positively” (e.g., “College property and equipment are protected adequately”), while a few were worded “negatively” (e.g., “I rely primarily on ‘grapevines’ for my information”). For the positively worded questions, a higher score indicates more positive outcomes, whereas for the negatively worded questions, a higher score indicates more negative outcomes.

Survey rating and survey demographics.

From 2002 -2008, each category of questions in the survey contained roughly 10-12 statements which respondents were asked to evaluate using the following scale: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Mixed Agreement, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree and NA=Not Applicable. In the 2010 and 2012 administrations, the scale was changed to: 5=Strongly Agree, 4=Agree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 2=Disagree, 1=Strongly Disagree, and no NA rating was available to use.

Demographic information was recorded for each of the surveys. With the exceptions noted regarding additions up to 2006 and the change in the NA rating in 2010 and after, the survey was consistent during the six administrations of it. This provides an opportunity to compare the results of the six climate surveys for overall themes and trends. It should be noted that there has been a decline in the number of respondents over the years, which represents a correspondingly lower number of employees at the College. However, this trend should not impact the analysis in any meaningful way, according to the MnSCU Office of Internal Auditing, OERG, and the Hanover Research Council.

The demographic information provided in Appendix I is helpful when comparing the six Climate Survey administrations. However, it does not give a complete picture of the overall employment at Riverland during that time. This information is presented in Table 4.1 and shows full-time and part-time employees organized by employee type at the College during the survey years.

Table 4.1. Employee Totals in Climate Survey Years

	FY 2002	FY 2004	FY 2006	FY 2008	FY 2010	FY 2012
Full-Time						
Staff	77	86	92	91	91	86
Administrators	11	12	12	11	9	10
Faculty	104	106	94	89	90	80
Part-Time						
Staff	26	20	20	20	16	8
Administrators	0	0	0	0	0	0
Faculty	49	72	88	74	63	29
Total	257	296	306	285	269	213

Note: The total employment figures were obtained from the Institutional Climate Survey Demographic Tables and the numbers of full-time employees in each category were obtained from the Human Resources Department at Riverland Community College. Because the department was unable to confirm the number of adjunct/part-time faculty estimated from the total number of employees, these numbers should be considered estimates.

Overall survey categories.

Except where noted, the Climate Surveys (2002-2012) contained questions in the following seven categories:

1. **Organizational Culture and Structure** pertains to formal roles and responsibilities, as well as beliefs and attitudes of employees.
2. **Goals and Management of Change** pertains to the College's vision, mission, and planning process that help set priorities and adapt to changes.
3. **Policies and Procedures** pertain to formal written guidelines governing work activities. Sources of these formal written guidelines are state and federal laws and regulations, the MnSCU Board of Trustees' policies, the MnSCU Chancellor's procedures, union rules, and the College's policies and procedures.
4. **Information and Communications Links** pertains to computer and manual systems used for collecting and processing information and the methods for communicating essential information throughout the College.
5. **Evaluation and Feedback** pertains to the methods used to find out whether the school is functioning effectively and includes the means of detecting and resolving issues in a timely manner and providing constructive support for the College's operations.
6. **Diversity** (added in 2004) pertains to the College's practices to maximize the potential of all employees by valuing diversity

- interpersonally and institutionally.
7. **Perceptions of Service to Customers and Stakeholders** (added in 2006) pertain to employee understanding of internal customers, external customers and stakeholders, and requirements of those customers and stakeholders and also refers to working relationships and approaches to improving services. There is one question on service to internal customers and one on service to external customers.

Organizational Climate Ratings

While there are many ways the climate survey responses could be organized and presented, I will summarize trend data and statements which have significant rates of disagreement and/or mixed agreement. I also discuss the potential relationship of these to organizational climate because they formed the basis of selection for the employee interview questions.

Table 4.2 presents the overall statements and ratings for each of the categories surveyed over the six administrations of the Institutional Climate Survey from 2002-2012. It is important to note that although the first category in the survey is referred to as the “organizational culture and structure category,” the questions chosen for further study in this dissertation would be more accurately described as “climate” questions. In most instances, the Institutional Climate Survey Reports incorrectly refer to “organizational culture” when the term “organizational climate” would be more accurate. Organizational culture typically refers to formal roles and responsibilities while organizational climate refers to beliefs and attitudes. Organizational culture and organizational climate are both discussed and defined more fully in Chapter 2.

Table 4.2. Overall Statement Ratings

Question	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
23. Overall, I am satisfied with Riverland Community College's existing organizational culture and structure.	3.59	3.70	3.73	3.84	3.51	3.27
35. Overall, I am satisfied with Riverland Community College's goals and management of change.	3.59	3.79	3.86	3.86	3.60	3.28
48. Overall, I am satisfied with Riverland Community College's existing policies and procedures.	3.66	3.87	3.90	3.88	3.69	3.53
53. Overall, I am satisfied with the information and communication links at the college.	3.58	3.83	3.78	3.77	3.51	3.12
73. Overall, I am satisfied with Riverland Community College's evaluation and feedback methods.	3.39	3.64	3.57	3.56	3.36	3.09
85. Overall, I am satisfied with the college's climate related to diversity issues.	N/A	3.82	3.93	3.92	3.84	3.85
100. Overall, I am satisfied with services my department provides to INTERNAL customers.	N/A	N/A	4.10	4.14	3.91	3.73
101. Overall, I am satisfied with services the college provides to EXTERNAL customers and stakeholders.	N/A	N/A	4.05	4.01	3.81	3.50

Note: The N/A ratings indicate that the question was not included in that year's survey.

The summary statements in the first five categories are labeled as existing organizational culture and structure, goals and management of change, existing policies and procedures, information and communication links, and evaluation and feedback methods. These bear more scrutiny, as each of the categories contains statements that are linked to organizational climate. As previously noted, several of the items in the first category, organizational culture and structure, are actually more pertinent to organizational climate and structure.

When examining Table 4.2, it should be noted that the 2012 ratings in these categories dropped to the lowest levels of all years surveyed, and generally peaked at higher levels in the 2004 - 2008 administrations of the survey. The lowest level of agreement in all of these categories each time was satisfaction with the methods of evaluation and feedback. In 2012,

the four summary statements which were rated lower than 3.25 were organizational culture (climate) and structure, goals and management of change, existing information and communication links, and evaluation and feedback. College policies and procedures and the services the College provides to external customer had ratings in the 3.5 range. The highest mean ratings were associated with the climate related to diversity issues, and the services the College provides to internal customers.

Selecting Climate Survey questions for further study.

In considering the categories with the lowest rate of agreement, there are individual questions that have lower mean rates of agreement or higher mean rates of disagreement which merit further analysis. When the employee interview questions were chosen in the fall of 2011, the results of the 2010 Climate Survey were the latest available. The questions in Table 4.3 had the lowest ratings of the statements that were reflective of organizational climate over five survey administrations.

In both the MnSCU summative analysis of the 2002-2006 surveys and the Hanover summative analysis of the 2006-2010 surveys, an average rating of 3.5 or lower was considered to be an indication of mixed agreement or higher level of disagreement, while average ratings of 4 and above were considered to be indications of agreement. I chose the questions in Table 4.3 for further exploration in the employee interviews because of their relationship to organizational climate and their low average ratings (below 3.25). Table 4.3 contains mean response values for the questions selected according to the criteria. It is important to note that the means presented in the tables that follow exclude the “NA” responses wherever those were an option.

Table 4.3. 2010 Survey Questions with Low Rates of Agreement (<3.25)

Question	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
12. Inappropriate behavior is dealt with consistently and promptly and necessary disciplinary action is taken, regardless of an employee's position.	3.31	3.22	3.21	3.08	3.01	2.76
14. An atmosphere of mutual trust exists throughout the college.	2.99	3.27	3.35	3.35	3.10	2.68
18. There is opportunity for advancement.	3.19	3.53	3.41	3.36	3.17	2.98
26. Positive changes have occurred at the college since the last survey.	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.63	3.17	2.94
30. Riverland's budget supports its strategic direction.	2.88	3.28	3.58	3.57	3.15	3.12
32. New employees are provided with adequate orientation and training to become effective team members.	3.06	3.70	3.38	3.47	3.21	3.16
63. People can communicate openly and honestly at Riverland Community College.	3.27	3.44	3.43	3.45	3.11	2.67
68. An effective method exists for employees to report suspected improprieties without fear of reprisal.	3.13	3.36	3.36	3.35	3.14	2.79
70. The Administrative Council has an accurate perception of what is happening at the College.	3.18	3.37	3.45	3.40	3.18	2.81

Note: The N/A ratings indicate that the question was not included in that year's survey.

The lowest mean rating in 2010 of any question was 3.01 (Question #12, 2010), and these nine questions in Table 4.3 had the lowest mean ratings of all questions related to College climate. The 2010 survey was the last available when the Employee Interview Questions for this study were formulated in Fall 2011. Table 4.3 also includes the 2012 results for use in comparison with 2010; in each case, the mean ratings were not only lower in 2012 but were the lowest mean ratings of all questions in the entire 2012 survey. Also, several individual mean ratings in 2012 were the lower than any other individual mean ratings in all years of the survey.

Table 4.4 illustrates the differences in mean ratings on the questions selected for follow-up in employee personal interviews. The differences between 2008 and 2010, 2010 and 2012, and the overall difference from 2008 to 2012 are compared. The 2008-2012 years were selected because of their recency and because they represent the two Climate Survey

administrations that would reflect the combined leadership of the current President and Vice President. When examining the table of comparison of means on these questions, it is apparent that these questions were related to areas of concern for many employees at the College. The changes in means over the four years of comparison represented significant downward changes from the 2004 and 2006 administrations of the survey as well. The OERG defined the standard deviation for the differences between the 2010 and 2012 means as a difference of 0.30 or greater.

Table 4.4. Change in Ratings in Climate Survey Questions Selected for Interviews

Question	Change in Rating 2008 to 2010	Change in Rating 2010 to 2012	Overall Change from 2008 to 2012
12. Inappropriate behavior is dealt with consistently and promptly and necessary disciplinary action is taken, regardless of an employee's position.	-0.07	-0.25	-0.32
14. An atmosphere of mutual trust exists throughout the college.	-0.25	-0.42	-0.67
18. There is opportunity for advancement.	-0.19	-0.19	-0.38
26. Positive changes have occurred at the college since the last survey.	-0.46	-0.23	-0.69
30. Riverland's budget supports its strategic direction.	-0.42	-0.03	-0.45
32. New employees are provided with adequate orientation and training to become effective team members.	-0.26	-0.05	-0.31
63. People can communicate openly and honestly at Riverland Community College.	-0.34	-0.44	-0.78
68. An effective method exists for employees to report suspected improprieties without fear of reprisal.	-0.21	-0.35	-0.56
70. The Administrative Council has an accurate perception of what is happening at the College.	-0.22	-0.37	-0.59

Individual question analysis by survey category.

Organizational culture and structure.

In the organizational culture (climate) and structure category, Question #12 regarding appropriate employee discipline in the College had a mean rating of 2.76 in 2012, down from a mean rating of 3.01 in 2010. This question has had the lowest rating of all questions on the survey in four of the six administrations. In their analyses, MnSCU, Hanover, and OERG all recommended that the College address this perception on the part of employees. The summative analyses in 2006 and 2010 conveyed a strong recommendation that this perception needs to be further addressed by the College. The 2006 MnSCU summative analysis also noted that this question could be confusing and interpreted in different ways.

Also in the organizational culture (climate) and structure category, Question #14 regarding an atmosphere of mutual trust had a mean rating of 2.68, had the lowest average rate of agreement in the previous four administrations of the survey, and had the lowest rating of any question in the 2002 survey. The highest rating for this area, 3.35, was in the 2006 and 2008 surveys, and it has had a steep (-0.67) decline in the last two surveys. Each of the six survey analyses has pinpointed this area as one for further investigation and action on the part of the College.

The third question in this category is Question #18 regarding opportunity for advancement and it had a record low rating of 2.98 in 2012. Although little break-down has been done on individual questions over the years of the survey, in 2008 the responses for this question were analyzed by employee classification. The majority (65%) of MAPE staff employees agreed with the statement, as well as 64% of AFSCME staff employees, while only 46% of administrators and 43% of faculty agreed with it. The mean rating on this question

dropped below 3.00 in 2012 for the first time since the survey began.

Goals and management of change.

In the goals and management of change category, three questions indicative to some degree of organizational climate have had lower rates of agreement, and of these, two have declined in recent surveys but still have higher ratings than the original survey in 2002. These are Question #30 regarding the budget supporting strategic direction and Question #32 regarding the effectiveness of employee orientation. It is interesting to note that the largest decline in the budget question (-0.42) occurred in the 2010 survey, which spanned the time between the January 2008 and February 2010 surveys. Actual budget restrictions reached their highest levels in the 2010-2011 fiscal years, but the survey ratings stayed very similar (-0.03). Thus, it appears that the perception of budgetary limitations were most intense before the greatest restrictions were actually made.

Question #32 regarding the effectiveness of employee orientation was originally included in the interview questions because of its declining rating in recent surveys and possible relationship to climate and the AQIP effort. Employees who were interviewed did not choose to discuss it to any extent so it did not appear in qualitative data analysis. This may be due to the fact that all of the interview participants had been hired and received orientation over ten years ago. Because this question is offered in every survey administration to every employee, regardless of their hiring recency or involvement with orientation, it is excluded from further quantitative analysis as it would not be possible to interpret its mean ratings in any kind of meaningful way. The lack of qualitative and quantitative data for this question excludes it from further discussion.

Question #26 in the category of goals and management of change was regarding positive changes which have occurred in the College since the last survey in 2010, and declined to 2.94. This also shows a steep decline (-0.66) over the last four years (2008-2012), with the greatest share of that (-0.46) in the 2008-2010 timeframe.

Information and communication links.

In the information and communication links category, Question #63 regarding being able to communicate openly and honestly not only had the lowest rating in this category of all six administrations of the survey, but had the lowest overall rating of any question in the 2012 survey, 2.67. It had a significant rate of decline (-0.78) in the 2008-2012 timeframe.

Communication is a complex subject in any organization and is often controversial, especially in human resource-intensive organizations. However, the persistence of this very low rating merits attention and this has been noted as an area of improvement in each survey analysis. Of particular concern is the implication that communicating openly and honestly is not perceived as safe by employees.

Evaluation and feedback methods.

The two questions included from this category over the last two administrations of the climate surveys declined to historic lows in the 2012 survey. This category also has the lowest overall summary mean ratings in each survey. Question #68 regarding employees being able to report improprieties without fear of reprisal had a 2012 mean rating of 2.79. This question has never had a mean rating above 3.50, and showed a decline of -0.56 in the 2008-2012 timeframe. Although there are different possibilities for interpretation (e.g., effective methods

of reporting, fear of reprisal, or both), the possibility of retaliation is one that each survey analysis has noted. The recommendation by the agencies analyzing the Riverland Climate Surveys is that even one employee comment in this section in the open-ended questions and an overall low rating should merit further attention by College administrators, because of the possibility of policy and/or legal violations inherent in bullying, reprisal, and retaliation. There were an increased number of responses to the open-ended questions in this section on the 2012 Climate Survey indicating problems in this area. The comments in this section and a persistently low rating to this question in all of the surveys signal further concern and continuing problems.

The other question in the evaluation and feedback category with a low mean rating was Question #70 regarding the AC having an accurate perception of what is happening at the College. The mean rating in the 2012 Climate Survey was 2.81, which was a significant decline from the last two surveys (-0.59) indicating that negative perceptions of the AC are increasing. The 2012 OERG survey analysis suggests finding ways to improve this perception.

Significance of lower mean ratings.

There is significance in these lower ratings, especially in the seven that have not only declined from 2010 levels but to ratings lower than 3.00. The lowest average ratings in all five climate surveys up to the 2012 administration had only two questions with average ratings of less than 3.00, and those occurred in the 2002 survey. There has been a significant decline over the last two administrations of the climate surveys in the mean ratings of each of the nine questions found in Table 4.4, and particularly in the seven questions relating directly to organizational climate. Selecting these questions from the 2010 Climate Survey for follow-up

in the employee personal interviews allowed further investigation into what may be triggering this decline in ratings.

Related survey questions by survey category.

Among other interesting results of the 2012 survey are the additional related questions that averaged ratings of less than 3.25, and in some cases less than 3.00. The additional questions selected relate to organizational climate and overlap with the questions selected for employee interviews, so an additional discussion of these low-rated questions seems appropriate. The mean ratings on these 12 questions fell below 3.25 for the first time in the 2012 survey and since the survey results were not available until April 2012, they were not included for consideration for the interview questions. These related questions and their ratings from the previous survey administrations are found in Table 4.5 below. Three of these questions are found in the organizational culture (climate) and structure section, three are in the existing policies and procedures section, three are in the information and communication links section, and three are in the evaluation and feedback methods section. Although there are other questions that had ratings below 3.25 in 2012, these 12 items are the ones most closely related to climate and to the qualitative interview analysis.

Table 4.5. Additional Related Questions with Low Rates of Agreement (<3.25) in 2012

Question	2008	2010	2012
8. I understand Riverland Community College’s organizational structure and think it serves the college well.	3.80	3.51	3.18
11. The Administrative Council provides effective direction for employees.	3.47	3.35	3.04
16. There is a feeling of cooperation among departments.	3.58	3.40	3.14
38. Riverland Community College policies and procedures affecting my job are clearly communicated and understood.	3.76	3.45	3.24
39. The Administrative Council is willing to be flexible in re-evaluating its policies and procedures.	3.57	3.34	3.07
40. The College has effective methods for answering my questions about policies or procedures.	3.68	3.46	3.15
54. Faculty and staff are informed promptly and fully about important matters that affect them.	3.90	3.30	2.89
55. Communication methods are sufficient to keep me adequately informed about important matters.	3.76	3.32	2.91
59. Communications across the college allow me to perform my job effectively.	3.68	3.33	3.16
64. Performance measures for individuals are fair and provide a reliable basis for evaluations.	3.52	3.33	3.16
65. My performance evaluations are timely and constructive.	3.59	3.44	3.21
69. Reported problems are taken seriously and resolved appropriately.	3.50	3.35	3.08

Note: Means are averages of scale from 5 to 1, with 5 indicating highest level of agreement.

Table 4.6 illustrates the differences in average ratings on the selected additional climate survey questions whose average ratings fell below 3.25 for the first time in 2012. The OERG defined the standard deviation for the differences between the 2010 and 2012 means as a difference of 0.30 or greater. The differences between 2008 and 2010, 2010 and 2012, and the overall change from 2008 to 2012 are compared. The 2008- 2012 years were selected because they represent the two Climate Survey administrations that would reflect the combined leadership of the current President and Vice President.

Table 4.6. Change in Ratings on Additional Related Questions

Question	Change in Rating 2010	Change in Rating 2012	Overall Change from 2008-2012
8. I understand Riverland Community College’s organizational structure and think it serves the college well.	-0.29	-0.33	-0.62
11. The Administrative Council provides effective direction for employees.	-0.12	-0.31	-0.43
16. There is a feeling of cooperation among departments	-0.18	-0.26	-0.44
38. Riverland Community College policies and procedures affecting my job are clearly communicated and understood.	-0.31	-0.19	-0.50
39. The administrative council is willing to be flexible in re-evaluating its policies and procedures that may not be effective.	-0.17	-0.27	-0.44
40. The College has effective methods for answering my questions about policies or procedures.	-0.22	-0.31	-0.53
54. Faculty and staff are informed promptly and fully about important matters that affect them.	-0.40	-0.41	-0.81
55. Communication methods are sufficient to keep me adequately informed about important matters.	-0.44	-0.41	-0.85
59. Communications across the college allow me to perform my job effectively.	-0.32	-0.32	-0.64
64. Performance measures for individuals are fair and provide a reliable basis for evaluations.	-0.19	-0.16	-0.35
65. My performance evaluations are timely and constructive.	-0.15	-0.23	-0.38
69. Reported problems are taken seriously and resolved appropriately.	-0.15	-0.27	-0.42

Note: Means are averages of scale from 5 to 1, with 5 indicating highest level of agreement.

In considering these questions and in the hindsight of employee interview analysis, there is overlap between these questions, the qualitative interview data, and the climate survey questions previously selected for analysis and follow-up in the interviews. When examining the table of comparison of means on these questions, it is apparent that for many employees at the College, these questions were related to similar areas of concern as those survey questions that were selected for the interviews. Next I discuss these related questions in association with the climate survey questions included in the interviews.

Organizational culture and structure.

Three questions in this category of the survey have low 2012 ratings which are strongly indicative of climate concerns. The greatest drop in ratings (-0.62 in four years) for this category is Question #8 regarding understanding the College organizational structure and thinking it serves the College well. This is interesting as the interview data was rich in reaction to College department and administrative reorganizations, even though there were no direct interview questions related to these events. Dissatisfaction with the Administrative Council also surfaced in the interviews, and in all, there were three survey questions regarding the AC that fell below the 3.25 level in 2012 which were Questions #11, #39, and #70. There was also a significant drop in Question #11 ratings regarding whether the AC provides effective direction for employees.

Question #14 regarding mutual trust elicited discussion in the interviews about trust in different areas of the organization and in relation to administrators. In some cases, the combination of Question #70 regarding the AC and Question #14 regarding mutual trust led to discussion in the interviews of cooperation within and among departments, the competition for jobs, and the frustration with shifting workloads between departments. These discussions were interesting, in light of the rating drop in Question #26 in 2012 regarding cooperation between departments. Interestingly, the rating also dropped for cooperation within departments, but it was not presented in Table 4.5 because it did not drop below the 3.25 level.

Policies and procedures.

Three questions in this category of the survey have low 2012 ratings that indicate organizational climate concerns. The mean ratings for these three questions fell below 3.25 for

the first time in the 2012 survey, so they were not included in the employee interviews. However, discussions relevant to these low-rated items emerged in the qualitative data analysis earlier in this chapter. Question #38 evaluates if College policies and procedures are clearly communicated and understood. Question #39 asks if the Administrative Council is flexible in re-evaluating College policies and procedures, and Question #40 asks whether the College has an effective method for answering questions about policies and procedures. The 2012 lower ratings seem to indicate dissatisfaction about clear communication and understanding of policies and procedures as well as the administrative responses to concerns about them. Both of these concerns are discussed in the qualitative data under organizational structure.

Information and communications links.

Communication, like mutual trust, is and has been a topic of concern in all administrations of the Climate Surveys at Riverland. In the previous survey analyses and the interview questions, Question #63 regarding feeling safe in open and honest communication has emerged as a serious concern. Each survey analysis recommends improving communication and providing safe ways to communicate. The additional three questions on communication with mean ratings below 3.25 in the 2012 survey indicate there are other areas of concern for the College regarding communication.

Question #54 asks whether employees are informed “promptly and fully” about important matters that concern them and Question #55 asks if communication methods are adequate to keep employees informed about important matters. These questions seem to be evaluating very similar concerns, and have very close ratings for the last four years. Both ratings fell below 3.00 and were some of the lower-rated items on the entire 2012 survey.

Question #59 asks about communication across the College allowing for effective job performance. There were also questions in other areas that are related to communication e.g. the previously-discussed policies and procedures Question #40 that had low ratings and reinforces the concerns employees have about communications in the College. The combination of the low mean ratings on these questions on communication and the very low rating on Question #63 regarding open and honest communication, along with the communication concerns that surfaced in the interviews, are a strong indication of unresolved problems in this area of the College.

Evaluation and feedback methods.

Three additional questions in this category that are linked to organizational climate fell below 3.25 in the 2012 administration of the survey. The first two, Questions #64 and #65, are linked to each other, and relate to concerns regarding individual evaluations and their fairness, reliability, timeliness, and constructiveness. These ratings are not as low as those on trust, communication, and feelings of safety, but they do merit some attention as they relate to perceptions of being treated fairly in the area of evaluations. The other question in this category with a low mean rating in the 2012 Climate Survey has serious implications associated with it and relates to a similar climate survey question that was included in the interviews. Question #69 regarding reported problems being taken seriously and resolved appropriately fell below a 3.25 rating for the first time. Question #68 was discussed earlier in this section and in the interviews, and asks if there is an effective method to report improprieties without fear of retaliation. This question has had historically low ratings and although it is a complex question with different possible meanings, the interview analyses,

open-ended survey question responses, and the current low ratings on these two related questions all indicate that there are perceived worries with reporting “problems” and/or “inappropriateness” at the College.

Given the way these questions are worded, it is impossible to determine from the rating score alone if the problem with reporting is whether or not there is an effective method to do so, whether it’s taken seriously, whether it is resolved appropriately, or whether there is a fear of reprisal. This has also been noted in previous survey analyses along with recommendations for action on the part of the College administration, especially given the possible association with a violation of policy and/or law.

Results of Climate Survey Questions Rated During Employee Interviews

Table 4.7 presents a comparison of mean ratings which have been calculated from the participant ratings of the nine survey questions presented during the interviews with the overall 2010 and 2012 Climate Survey means. As explained earlier, each participant was presented with the nine survey items and a 5-point Likert scale and asked to rank them, before being given any further information about them. The participant means were calculated for the staff and faculty groups both separately and as a combined mean rating.

Table 4.7. Interview Participant Ratings for Selected Climate Survey Questions

Question	2010 Climate Survey Means	2012 Climate Survey Means	Staff Interview Participant Means N = 7	Faculty Interview Participant Means N = 10	Combined Interview Participant Means N = 17
12. Inappropriate behavior is dealt with consistently and promptly and necessary disciplinary action is taken, regardless of an employee's position.	3.01	2.76	2.29	2.90	2.82
14. An atmosphere of mutual trust exists throughout the college.	3.10	2.68	2.29	3.25	2.85
18. There is opportunity for advancement.	3.17	2.98	2.64	3.50	3.15
26. Positive changes have occurred at the college since the last survey in January XXXX.	3.17	2.94	2.32	3.56*	2.97*
30. Riverland's budget supports its strategic direction.	3.15	3.12	2.86	2.45	2.74
32. New employees are provided with adequate orientation and training to become effective team members.	3.21	3.16	3.07	3.35	3.00
63. People can communicate openly and honestly at Riverland Community College.	3.11	2.67	2.50	3.10	3.03
68. An effective method exists for employees to report suspected improprieties without fear of reprisal.	3.14	2.79	2.07	3.61*	3.06*
70. The Administrative Council has an accurate perception of what is happening at the College.	3.18	2.81	2.29	3.22*	2.81*

Note: *indicates N/A values were not calculated into the interview participant means.

Although Table 4.7 does not represent a statistically significant sample, I chose to include it as a means to note how the interview participants means compared to the 2010 and 2012 Climate Survey overall means on the questions chosen for the employee interviews. I also thought it would be interesting to see if there were differences in how staff and faculty groups rated each question. The interviews were completed between November 2011 and January 2012 and the ICS was open to employees in February 2012, so the time proximity between the two was quite close. As noted in Chapter 3, the participants were given the nine survey items with average

ratings below 3.25 on the 2010 Climate Survey and were asked to rate them. Interview participants were not given any information about the results of the survey or why the questions had been chosen until after they had completed their ratings.

Although the participant's responses to these nine questions were not analyzed to determine statistical significance, there were two general trends which emerged. Staff generally rated items lower than faculty and lower than the overall 2012 Climate Survey composite ratings for the same questions, and faculty generally rated items higher than staff and higher than the overall 2012 Climate Survey ratings. These interview participant means will be discussed further in the next section that correlates the qualitative and quantitative data.

Relevant Results from the Analyses of the 2002-2012 Climate Surveys

In this section, I discuss the overall recommendations of the agencies which administered and analyzed the six Riverland Climate Surveys: the MnSCU Office of Internal Auditing, Hanover Research, and the OERG. The recommendations are based on the Likert scale ratings and the answers to the open-ended questions.

In every administration of the survey, the recommendations from the agencies listed above urge attention to the causes of and solutions for the lower ratings on the atmosphere of mutual trust question. Likewise, in every administration of the survey, the answers to the open-ended question of whether there are significant violations of policy or law at Riverland has similar responses that include references to bullying, intimidation, reprisal, or retaliation. Communication surfaced as a bigger concern in 2010 and 2012, especially concerns about communication and feelings of safety. Reporting inappropriate behavior and disciplinary

approaches are also stronger concerns than previously. The opportunity for advancement also has been consistent as an area of concern and the College budget supporting strategic direction cycles in and out of concern.

In the MnSCU analysis of the 2002, 2004, and 2006 surveys, it was noted that Riverland should incorporate the results of the survey into the College AQIP effort and target the cited areas for improvement. Other concerns noted in the 2010 and 2012 surveys were effectiveness of new employee orientation, communication between administration and employees, and establishing an environment of trust and respect. The 2006 and 2008 survey analysis recommendations included establishing participative decision-making where possible, and establishing better communication about decision-making. Concerns about employee performance feedback also heightened in the 2010 and 2012 surveys.

In general, the items on the climate survey that were discussed in the employee interviews and the concerns that arose with these in regard to AQIP are all mirrored in the Institutional Climate Surveys. These connections will be discussed in more detail in the upcoming chapter summary section.

INTEGRATING QUALITATIVE AND QUANTITATIVE DATA

In this section, I connect the quantitative and qualitative data analyses discussed in the previous sections of Chapter 4. The qualitative interview data, quantitative Climate Survey data, and open-ended Climate Survey responses will be discussed as they relate to each other.

Faculty and Staff: A Workplace Apart

The polarization of viewpoints and differing experience of working conditions of the faculty and staff are supported by the qualitative interview data and the data from the

Institutional Climate Surveys. After the first two interview participants spontaneously commented on perceived differences between staff and faculty, an interview question was added to explore that idea. There is also an open-ended question on the Climate Survey that asks for feedback on how staff and faculty can be supported. The resulting responses to this and other open-ended questions that related to staff and faculty relationships were reported in the qualitative data analysis. The questions containing Likert scales in the Institutional Climate Surveys did not have direct questions pertaining to faculty and staff perceptions of the other group, so there is no direct relationship between those quantitative data and this structure of the phenomenon.

The qualitative data presented discussed the views of staff and faculty as regarding the other group. Staff generally see faculty as a far more privileged group in the institution, with much better working conditions, more institutional power and influence, more protection, more compensation, more autonomy, and as more valued and of more importance in the AQIP effort. Several Climate Survey responses relevant to this topic were discussed, and primarily included comments from staff that they were not treated as well as faculty, and that faculty and not staff needs were considered in terms of development and College conference days. An additional dimension added by the Climate Survey data was that some staff respondents perceived that faculty disrespected them.

In general, other than a few faculty who were close to staff, faculty and staff seemed largely unaware of the concerns and working conditions of the other group. The faculty members who have been staff or work closely with staff commented on being aware of how staff is treated differently than faculty, and that staff feel undervalued and not as important as faculty. The only area related to staff that most other faculty commented on was related to the Climate

Survey item which asks about opportunity for advancement. Faculty generally did not see real opportunity for themselves to advance, but they did see opportunities for staff advancement. Staff generally did not comment on faculty advancement. Faculty also seemed to value staff input into AQIP and assumed that they were still involved with the AQIP effort.

One important concept that emerged from the qualitative data in this structure was the sense of two very different groups who generally lack an awareness of what working life is like for the other group, and who could almost be working in different institutions. The other was the sense that, when staff compare their working conditions to faculty, they perceive that they are treated like second-class citizens and have less influence, power, protection, autonomy, and compensation.

Perceptions of Climate

Several Institutional Climate Survey items which were presented to the interview participants and were extensively discussed in the previous quantitative data section directly related to climate in some way. Participants were also asked direct interview questions relating to their perceptions of culture and climate. These questions included asking the participants for a description of current College climate and culture, and an example of how they experience it. Although they could have discussed either culture or climate or both in response, the participants all chose to discuss aspects of College climate. They were then asked to rate the selected Climate Survey questions, and were presented with the 2010 averages on those questions and asked for comment. Climate Survey Questions #14 on mutual trust, #26 on positive changes at the College, #63 on open communication and #68 on fear of reprisal stimulated the most responses relative to experienced climate.

This combination approach of direct interview questions and considering the Climate Survey questions generally elicited a rich and in-depth commentary on climate from staff and a less-detailed response from faculty. The qualitative data analysis on climate resulted in five categories of responses: (a) overall climate; (b) stress, restructuring, and workload issues; (c) sense of value and recognition; (d) sense of mutual trust; and (e) administration and climate.

Qualitative data analysis on climate from a staff perspective revealed fears of job loss, retaliation, reprisal, and bullying, a marked lack of trust of communication, and fear and mistrust of administrative motives and intent. They did not feel valued or cared about and reported record stress levels and unmanageable workloads. The quantitative data on the four Climate Survey questions listed above all had significant mean rating drops between 2008 and 2012 which were an average of two standard deviations below 2006 levels and ranged from 2.68 to 2.79, indicating significant disagreement with the statements. When the individual participants were asked to rate those four questions in the interviews, their average mean response ranged from 2.07 to 2.50, indicating an overall level of disagreement on these statements also. Overall, there were similarities in the qualitative interview responses, the ICS open-ended responses that could reasonably be identified as contributed by staff, and the quantitative data on the relevant ICS questions.

When presented with the same information and questions, faculty generally had a more positive attitude about climate, about feeling valued and supported, were more trusting, and had more positive relationships with administration. When the individual participants were asked to rate those four questions in the interviews, their average mean ratings ranged from 2.90 to 3.61, indicating an overall higher level of agreement on these statements than the staff group. The faculty interview group also had a higher level of agreement than the overall 2012 Climate

Survey ratings on these statements, which were in the 2.68 to 2.79 range. These higher ratings in the faculty group support the qualitative data suggesting that faculty experience a more positive, supportive, and trusting climate than staff. Responses to the open-ended questions on the 2012 ICS that could be identified as coming from faculty were largely positive as well.

There were two faculty members in the interview group who were not as positive about climate, one of whom works closely with staff. There were also a small number of negative responses to the open-ended questions in the Climate Survey which could be interpreted as originating from faculty. These comments regarded favoritism, faculty not being treated equally, and perceiving a lack of trust of administration. These comments support those made in the interviews by the minority of faculty who were not positive regarding climate and the administration.

Overall, the qualitative interview data, quantitative Climate Survey data, and Climate Survey open-ended response data support the experience of a negative and toxic environment for staff. They describe a climate that is filled with fear and distrust of administration and others in the institution, and a sense of having no voice and being devalued and disrespected. These same sources of data support the experience of a much more positive and trusting environment for faculty. They describe a climate in which faculty feel supported, valued, and heard by administration, and a climate in which they can trust and communicate openly with others in the institution.

Organizational Structure and Its Players

This section examines administrative styles, administrative structures, and organizational function at Riverland Community College. The interview questions that related to the low

climate survey ratings and the employees perception of the reason for those low ratings led to interview discussions regarding the impact of the style and personality of the administrators, the administrative structures of the College, and how those impacted the organizational structure of the College.

Question #12 on inappropriate behavior and disciplinary procedures, Question #63 on open and honest communications, Question #68 on reporting without fear of reprisal, and Question #70 on perceptions of Administrative Council are the questions on the climate survey that provoked the most discussion on these issues. The mean ratings on the 2012 Institutional Climate Survey for these questions ranged from 2.67 to 2.81, which were the lowest scores on any of the Institutional Climate Surveys on any of the items. The staff interview group mean ratings were lower than the overall 2012 Institutional Climate Survey ratings, with a range of 2.07 to 2.50, indicating their overall disagreement with these items. When the faculty participants were asked to rate those four questions in the interviews, the mean response ranged from 2.90 to 3.61, indicating an overall higher level of agreement on these statements than the staff group. The faculty interview group also had a higher mean rating than the overall 2012 Institutional Climate Survey ratings on these statements.

There were also additional questions on the survey related to the other ICS questions used in the interviews and which were discussed in the quantitative analysis section of this chapter. These additional questions related to organizational structure, policies and procedures, information and communication links, and evaluation and feedback methods. The drop in mean ratings on these questions below 3.25 also supported the qualitative analysis regarding the concerns in these areas. The additional survey questions and mean ratings were presented in Table 4.6 and Table 4.7 and discussed in the previous section.

The qualitative data analysis of the staff and faculty responses revealed information organized around their perceptions of: (a) administrators and the Administrative Council, (b) organizational decision-making, (c) organizational communication, and (d) organizational planning and budget. The data in this section are closely connected to the previous sections, since the perceptions about divergent staff and faculty groups and climate relate to organizational structure. There was also overlap between perceptions of administration, decision-making, communication and planning in the qualitative and the quantitative data, as these topics are often intertwined.

Staff views of administration and the Administrative Council were consistent with the concerns and observations emerging from the previous staff sections. Many staff saw the executive team as being hierarchal and authoritarian, without necessarily being well-informed. They believed the President had largely abdicated leadership and decision-making to the Executive Vice President.

The interview data and open-ended responses on the climate survey revealed that staff were most concerned about the timeliness of decision-making, lack of decision-making transparency, lack of communication about decision-making, and not being heard when trying to communicate regarding decisions. Staff were also unhappy with hiring after the reorganization, and disciplinary practices were seen as inconsistent and slow. Top-down communication, lack of communication about decision-making, and lack of trust about communication were the primary concerns noted by staff. Some staff believed that the real information they need to have is not the information they are actually given.

The staff perceptions regarding planning included concerns about the lack of coordination and implementation of strategic planning efforts. One major concern was that

critical efforts like the new student retention effort for at-risk students are not being planned effectively and that creating follow-up reports is the current focus instead. In the interview discussions with staff and the 2012 Climate Survey open-ended question regarding budget, it was noted that there was a \$1 million surplus in the 2011 fiscal year. Staff and survey respondents expressed doubts that budget was planned strategically or was a driver for critical decisions. The quantitative data from the climate survey questions reinforced these concerns of staff in the areas of administration, decision-making, communication, planning, and budget.

Faculty, on the other hand, described administration in much more positive terms, with a positive view of faculty-administration relationships. However, there were exceptions to this positive assessment, both in the faculty interviews and the 2012 Climate Survey comments. As in the area of climate, faculty were generally more satisfied with the current state of affairs with the administration.

Faculty had a range of opinions on the Administrative Council with no real consensus. The interview data and open-ended responses on the climate survey suggest that in the area of organizational structure, faculty were most concerned about the following three areas: a) the timeliness, transparency, and communication of decision-making, and decision making concerning reorganization and personnel practices; b) disciplinary practices that were seen as inconsistent, ineffective, and too slow; and c) policies and processes, especially in regard to threatening students and reporting processes. The quantitative climate survey data reinforced these concerns, as items related to these areas received low ratings.

Faculty concerns about organizational communication were not discussed in the climate section, and so were developed in this section. Faculty comments were related to whether they felt safe communicating, and problems with different types of communication they had

experienced. Similar to the mutual trust category in the climate section, faculty generally felt very safe communicating to peers and upwards, but were not sure if others, especially staff, would feel as comfortable. Faculty had a variety of other concerns regarding dysfunctional communication within the organization, some of which overlapped with those of staff.

The faculty had similar concerns to the staff about planning for at-risk students and student retention efforts. Faculty comments on planning mirrored those of the staff, although faculty did not address planning as extensively. Although budget is mentioned frequently in the 2012 ICS and both faculty and staff interviews, my data analysis revealed that there was not a high level of concern associated with it. Some faculty were concerned about an overall lack of monetary resources, and pointed out that there is disagreement over how money is allocated.

There were also many responses on the 2012 Climate Survey regarding the above concerns. Because many of these comments cannot be attributed to one group or another of employees, they are considered here as possibly originating from any of the groups. One area of open-ended responses that mirrored the qualitative interview data from both staff and faculty groups was concern about disciplinary procedures, the timeliness of decision-making, and decision making concerning restructuring, reorganization, hiring practices, and personnel practices. In the quantitative analysis of the additional related questions that were examined in the 2012 survey, employee evaluation also arose as a topic of concern. It was not a major topic of concern in the interviews, but it did surface in both staff and faculty groups. For example, from a staff perspective, different supervisors had different expectations and evaluated employees differently for similar work. Also from a staff perspective, supervisors and administrators “played favorites” with some and bullied others, which would make evaluations very concerning, especially given the currently-heightened fears of job loss at the College.

Additionally, from both a staff and faculty perspective, doing “360° evaluations” of faculty and other employees seemed inherently unfair when the same opportunity is not provided to evaluate administrators. This was another area where the qualitative data analysis correlates with the quantitative analysis.

There were also open-ended comments in the 2012 survey regarding the need for administration to develop a systematic and transparent approach to decision-making. The 2012 survey also had many open-ended responses which reflected all of the viewpoints that arose in the section on communication. In all, there were more negative comments about communication than to any other open-ended question on the survey. The combination of the quantitative results, the responses on the open-ended survey questions, and the qualitative interview analysis reinforce that there was both a fear of retaliation and a lack of effective methods for communicating or reporting problems. These were perceived to be serious concerns.

There were also several comments on the 2012 survey related to planning for and assisting underprepared students that correlated to the staff and faculty concerns on these issues. A 2012 survey comment was similar to an interview discussion wherein the administration is perceived as using budget as a way of avoiding the real issues with underperforming employees and other problems. The quantitative data from the mean ratings of the climate survey questions were similar to the qualitative interview data analysis and survey open-ended responses, providing additional triangulation of the data.

The academic quality improvement program.

The last section of the interview questions included a section on the participation in and impact of AQIP on Riverland. The responses to these questions and the areas discussed relative

to AQIP were quite diverse. In analyzing the importance of AQIP, the staff were divided on whether or not AQIP was a real priority, a stated priority, or a priority only when a deadline was near. The staff generally did not believe that AQIP has had a positive impact on the College, nor on their work area or climate. Faculty were also divided on whether or not AQIP was a real priority, and its impact on the institution.

Although employees did not agree on whether AQIP has impacted the College overall, there was affirmation of some progress on the AQIP-required improvements. The staff had less familiarity with these and generally commented on how AQIP seemed to be focused on academics. The faculty generally agreed that a necessary improvement that could be attributed to AQIP was progress on the SLO Assessment Project.

All employees who were interviewed reported that they understood and confirmed the need for re-accreditation, but both of the staff and faculty groups were divided on whether it should be through AQIP, or an alternative, such as a return to the traditional PEAQ process. Staff and faculty noted that although investing in AQIP has the potential for genuine improvement, it is not producing real change currently. Most staff and faculty who discussed it agreed that the AQIP effort has been hampered by a lack of effective leadership and poor organizational communication. Some of the staff and faculty discussed the need to treat AQIP as a quality improvement effort that the entire institution needs to collaborate on and invest in real changes instead of focusing on just the reporting.

Because no ICS questions focused directly on AQIP, there was a lack of quantitative data to compare to the qualitative interview data. However, there were several open-ended responses on the 2012 survey that reinforced the interview data analysis, so there is confirmation in these comments of some of the perceptions of AQIP that emerged in the interviews.

THE ESSENCE: THE HUNGER GAMES

When considering the “how it feels to work here” picture painted by the qualitative data in the first part of this chapter, a few memorable terms and phrases come to mind when considering the working conditions of the staff: a climate of fear, a toxic environment, a dysfunctional work environment, bullying, retaliation, reprisal, and threat of job change or loss. When thinking about the faculty in comparison, the “mores” come to mind: more privilege, more autonomy, more protection, more influence with administration, and more job security.

This contrast between what are, indeed, two very different subcultures reminds me in some ways of the citizens of the country of Panem in the book *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins. In this story, a country called Panem, the geographic equivalent of the United States, has a dichotomy between two groups of “citizens.” There are the privileged and wealthy citizens living in the Capitol, and there are the rest of the country’s citizens who live in thirteen “districts” with differing resources. The districts are still being punished after rebelling against the leadership of Panem many years ago, and the people of the districts must work under punitive conditions to gather their districts’ resources and send them to the Capitol while their own basic needs for food and shelter are ignored. Panem is ruled by a dictator who has chosen an elite ruling group which is supported by the “Peacekeepers,” aka the Panem military.

Life in the districts is hard and focused on survival. The districts are ruled by the Peacekeepers and assigned mayors. In each district, this leadership may vary. Some leaders have a more benevolent approach that may include not “seeing” when rules are broken and being part of illegal activities themselves, while in other districts, the leaders are legalistic, punitive and severe. The threat of retaliation against any district is always present, however, and the citizens of the districts live in fear and hunger, and are always looking over their shoulders.

On the other hand, life in the Capitol district, which receives its food and resources from the districts, is much better. Although they are ruled by the same dictatorship, they are allowed to work and keep money, do not need to worry about basic survival needs, and have time and money to spend on frivolous luxuries, personal adornment, and entertainment. They have an easier way of life and do not have to work under harsh and demanding conditions. Most of the citizens of the Capitol have not been to the districts, nor do they seem to understand what life is like there and how different it is from theirs.

The rulers of Panem make the laws, grant favors, and determine how each district is treated, and the President of Panem has absolute power and control. The operations and decision-making of the ruling elite are shrouded in secrecy. There is no acknowledgment by anyone in the Capitol that there are any disparities or differences in treatment between the two groups of citizens. Indeed, the sacrifices of the citizens of the district are often discussed as opportunities for them, a form of “double-speak” that further damages them. They are viewed by the rulers and Capitol citizens as second-class citizens and deserving of the treatment they receive.

While most parts of this allegory that do not apply, the state of the two groups of citizenry is what strikes me as being most analogous to the staff and faculty subcultures at Riverland. Many of the staff at Riverland are more comparable to the citizens of the districts. They work in more demanding conditions and have fewer options, less privilege, and much less autonomy than the faculty. They live in constant fear of losing their jobs, of retaliation if they complain, and in some cases, of a daily work environment of bullying and reprisal that has persisted for years. In short, they are working in a toxic environment. As with life in the districts in *The Hunger Games*, it is better at Riverland for some staff than others, and this seems

to depend on the area worked in, their middle management supervisors, and their proximity to and status with work cliques. The staff interviewed discussed different conditions under different supervisors, and two described the presence of bullying cliques in some departments. When staff as a whole discussed the faculty, they saw them as a group set apart, of “having more,” and of being immune to this toxic environment. Most staff interviewed reported feeling disrespected, devalued and unrecognized by the College administration and leadership.

The faculty, who in this analogy are comparable to the citizens of the Capitol, seem largely unaware of both the climate of fear and toxic environment that the staff experience. Faculty are currently experiencing a relatively stable and nourishing environment, and several report they feel personally valued and recognized by the College administration and leadership. Indeed, this research was enlightening for me because I am personally a citizen of the Capitol and have experienced positive relationships with administration, and feels personally recognized, valued, and supported by them in my faculty, leadership, and assessment roles. Although faculty occupy the same common space as the staff in general, they do not know what working conditions are like for the staff. They also do not know how some of the staff feel disrespected by the faculty, and how many of the staff feel devalued and disrespected by administration. In essence, they are in a bubble of immunity to not only the toxicity that afflicts the staff environment, but are also immune to even an awareness of it.

The leadership of Riverland is more difficult to place in this analogy, but there are a few parallels that I see. One is a seeming inability or unwillingness to truly understand and acknowledge the perception of difficulty that many staff are experiencing in their working environment, or to consider how to change that. Every climate survey for the last 10 years, and especially the last four years, has articulated these differences and had many comments that

virtually shouted that something is very wrong. The recommendations from the agencies analyzing the surveys have become very pointed about the continuing negative comments and declining ratings year after year, yet the ratings and open-ended comments continue to worsen.

Of course, as with any simple analogy applied to the complexities of real-life organizations and relationships, the analogy is an exaggeration, and so breaks down in many places. This lack of application occurs in obvious ways when we consider that the toxic environment at Riverland is an emotional, not physical environment, as described above for the district citizens of Panem. To be effective, thought-provoking literature, the book presents an extreme that is not applicable in any real-life way to a physically safe work environment.

However, the analogy does resonate in some ways. There are staff and faculty who should share at least some common ground as employees of Riverland, like the citizens of Panem should have had common ground. The compelling image that I have after the interviews and data analysis is that of two groups of employees who have such different treatment and such different perceptions of their work environment that they might be working at different institutions, or as in the analogy, as citizens of the outlying districts and citizens of the Capitol. The staff participants reported they and others feel vulnerable and out of control, are mistrustful of communication as they believe there is a secret agenda regarding their jobs. They feel as if no one is listening to them, cares about them, or will be able to intervene to help them. They think any real information about how decision-making works is being kept from them, and as a group, they feel overworked, overstressed, underappreciated and underpaid. They feel they are out in the districts with no influence or voice at the Capitol, and even those who do not feel they are in that position themselves fear it happening to them at some point.

The faculty, on the other hand, are seen as having access to the Capitol, as having

influence and a voice, as having their contributions valued, and as being protected when they question decisions or information. They are segregated from the toxic environment. However, in the story, what happens in the districts ultimately influences and changes what happens at the Capitol. In much the same way, the faculty, students and administration of Riverland are also being affected by the climate perceptions of staff. The College as a whole will continue to be negatively affected if these perceptions and concerns are not addressed and remedied.

Chapter 5: Conclusions

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, AND CONCLUSIONS

This study began as a phenomenological study within an instrumental case study. I wanted to examine the impact of the quality improvement re-accreditation effort, AQIP, on the College. I chose to use two primary methods to do that: longitudinal Institutional Climate Survey (ICS) data and personal interviews with faculty and staff.

Faculty and staff were selected for interviews based on their ability to answer questions knowledgably regarding College management, the ICS, and AQIP. Therefore, all participants had at least ten years of work experience in one or more parts of the College, and many had worked there more than 15 years. Faculty and staff who were chosen also represented different campuses, staff departments, faculty units (e.g., liberal arts, career program, and central services including library and counseling), gender, years of experience, and diverse work experiences within Riverland.

Interview participants were presented with the lowest ranking ICS items and were then given follow-up questions about climate and AQIP. After conducting the first few interviews that alternated between faculty and staff, I was surprised by the results. The qualitative data analysis revealed that there were two distinct climates within the College and that quality improvement efforts were not as relevant as concerns about climate and organizational structure.

My experience working in a higher education environment for so many years led me to believe that faculty and staff had very different working conditions. I thought the staff might see the faculty working conditions as more desirable, but I did not think faculty would believe the

staff conditions were enviable. I did not originally plan to check with each group regarding their perceptions of the other group, as my case study was focusing on the impact of AQIP and relating that to organizational climate indicators. However, the first interview participants discussed their perceptions of the “other” group within the framework of the climate questions on the survey. The data analysis from those interviews indicated a polarity of viewpoints on climate and other perceptions, so an interview question was added regarding those perceptions.

The first four interviews alternated faculty and staff members, respectively, and were complete opposites with surprising differences. The faculty members were largely happy with the College environment and their own job in particular, and these were themes that would be repeated in most of the other faculty interviews. The staff members were not only unhappy, but very, very unhappy, and had many examples and specific reasons why that unhappiness had to do with what they thought was really wrong at the College. This was not run-of-the-mill grumbling about not having their way at work, but a discussion of deep issues that would be reiterated in the other staff interviews.

My perception of all interview participants is that they were interesting, insightful, and took this opportunity seriously. The most striking finding, however, is what I discussed at length in the essence of the phenomenon, this very toxic environment experienced to some degree by each of the seven staff members, and the very different, contrasting environment experienced by most of the faculty. To a person, the staff members wanted to discuss job insecurity and the fear of losing their jobs in reorganization. “It can happen to anyone,” as Darby, Skylar, and others said. Even more disturbing was the fear that several either directly experienced or reported being aware of on others’ behalf and that was fear of retaliation, reprisal, and even ongoing bullying. And if that isn’t enough misery for one workplace, the staff who were not concerned about

reprisal felt they were unfairly burdened with unmanageable workloads. Reorganizations in the last five years have reduced administrative, part-time and support positions, and the result is more work for the remaining employees. So the perceived reward for still having a job has become having an impossible job, with the resulting fear of poor performance and the subsequent consequences.

The staff interview data were compared to and consistent with open-ended comments and declining ratings in the last two Institutional Climate Surveys. However, since those results have not been analyzed by staff and faculty grouping, it has not been apparent from the climate survey results alone whether staff and faculty could be grouped separately based on their sense of climate. The 2012 survey especially reflected a rising sense of discontent as there were unprecedented low mean ratings in the critical areas of trust, communication, and feelings of safety. The interviews with staff provided data for developing the concept of a very toxic climate for staff. The interviews with faculty were primarily focused on the positive aspects of their situation or constructive critique. A small group of the faculty who work closely with staff were not concerned for themselves, but very aware of how miserable the environment feels to many staff and so they discussed that. Based on the qualitative interview data, I believe it is likely that faculty would have rated the questions on the Institutional Climate Survey more positively and staff would have rated them more negatively. However, this is only supported by the small quantitative sample developed during the interviews, so more quantitative analysis of the overall ICS results would be necessary to ascertain any faculty and staff rating patterns.

When all of the interviews were transcribed and coded, the qualitative results presented even more of a dichotomy between the two groups than the impressions I had developed during the interviews. The voices of Montana, Darby, Blair, Skylar, Kiley, Jordan, and Dakota present

a picture of an environment that is so toxic, it is difficult to describe or encompass all of its aspects. As data analysis progressed, it became clear that the participants were not discussing their perceptions of organizational culture. They were discussing their attitudes, beliefs and perceptions, so the focus of the interview participants was on organizational climate. As qualitative analysis was completed, it became apparent that the faculty and staff were coexisting in the same institution but experiencing very different environments.

Study findings and the literature.

There are, of course, boundless amounts of literature on organizational culture, especially over the last 30 years. In Chapter Two, I compared organizational culture to organizational climate in order to develop a basis for analysis and distinction between the two when the ICS quantitative and the interview qualitative data were examined. I presented the theories of Sackmann (1992) and Schein's (2004) work on organizations and others regarding organizational culture in Chapter Two. Less has been written about climate, but there is still abundant organizational literature regarding climate. After developing the comparison on culture and climate in Chapter Two, I noted that many recent works on organizational culture and climate develop the connections between them. Pemberton (2005) and Tatro (2007) create convincing arguments for climate as arising from elements of organizational culture or as a reflection of the elements of organizational culture. While my research was not directed to defining the connection between culture and climate, this is noted as a possible question for further research at Riverland given my findings on organizational climate.

While reviewing the literature on organizational climate, I found a construct and definition that fits well with the data analysis emerging from my study. McMurray (1994) views

organizational climate as “a descriptive construct that reflects agreement among members regarding the key elements of the organization in terms of its systems, practices, and leadership styles” (p. 4). In her study, McMurray (1994) designates several faculty groups which are under different leaders and have different climates as subclimates. McMurray’s findings (1994) considered with the results of this study suggest that Riverland has at least two distinct subclimates of faculty and staff. This study found that these staff and faculty subclimates are related to the organizational elements of systems, practices, and leadership styles. A particularly influential element on both subclimates was the effect of the organizational systems within the College and administrative styles and actions. McMurray (1994) defines organizational climate as “an amalgam of elements from definitions derived from the work of Forehand and Gilmer (1964, Pritchard and Karasick (1976), and DeCotiis and Koys (1980” (p. 20). McMurray (1994) goes on to note that:

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

The results of my study are supported by McMurray’s definition (1994), as the characteristics of the definition are reflected in qualitative data analysis. My study revealed two distinct subclimates among faculty and staff that distinguish them from each other and from other organizations. The perceptions in these subclimates reflect a collective sense of the organization in regard to the dimensions of autonomy, trust, cohesiveness, support, recognition, innovation and fairness.

McMurray (1994) summed her view on the origins of these elements of climate

succinctly: “It is not such a great distance between shared assumptions (culture) and shared perceptions (climate)” (p. 15). McMurray (2003) later confirmed that analysis in her work on the relationship between culture and climate. She notes that the bridge between the two has been crossed and climate is the focus when perceptions of autonomy, trust, pressure, support, recognition, fairness, and innovation are the focus of discussion. McMurray is referring to her interpretation of the work of Koy and DeCotiis (1994) in defining the inductive measures of climate. Those definitions are presented here in Table 5.1, as these are critical to the discussion that follows.

Table 5.1. Definition of Each of the Eight Dimensions of the Universe of Psychological Climate Perceptions

Dimension	Definition
Autonomy	The perception of self-determination with respect to work procedures, goals, and priorities
Cohesion	The perception of togetherness or sharing within the organization setting, including the willingness of members to provide material aid.
Trust	The perception of freedom to communicate openly with other members at higher organizational levels about sensitive or personal issues with the expectation that the integrity of such communications will not be violated.
Pressure	The perception of time demands with respect to task completion and performance standards.
Support	The perception of the tolerance of member behavior by superiors, including the willingness to let members learn from their mistakes without fear of reprisal.
Recognition	The perception that member contributions in the organization are acknowledged.
Fairness	The perception that organizational practices are equitable and non-arbitrary or capricious.
Innovation	The perception that change and creativity are encouraged, including risk taking into new areas, or areas where the member has little or no prior experience.

Note: The Identification and Measurement of the Dimensions of Organisational Climate adapted from The Proceedings of the Academy of Management, by DeCotiis, T.A. and Koys, D.J, 1980. p. 171.

When examining the qualitative interview and open-ended and quantitative ICS data, and

in light of the definitions of the dimensions of climate in Table 5.1, it seems apparent that the data revolve around the dimensions of climate. The interview questions and the discussions they provoked centered around the perceptions of what it feels like to work at the College and the lived experiences and examples of that. AQIP was discussed in relation to its impact on the College as several of the interview questions focused on AQIP. However, it soon became clear that the current story at Riverland is climate and how different it is for the two largest groups of employees, faculty and staff. In fact, AQIP was largely considered by the participants in relation to its lack of overall impact on creating a better climate.

Climate is the primary reflection of the current state of dichotomy between faculty and staff at Riverland. The two groups are experiencing their shared workplace so differently that they might be working in two different institutions. The qualitative and quantitative data analyses centered around their differing perceptions of climate and aspects of the organization and were largely focused on trust, communication, autonomy, support, recognition, pressure, fairness, and cohesion. These aspects of climate, based on shared perceptions, were presented in Table 5.1.

As noted previously, McMurray (1994) discusses how groups in a shared culture may experience differing climate and refers to that as subclimates (p. 5). In her study, McMurray (1994) notes that leadership may exist in subcultures but that the faculty, in different leadership subcultures under different deans, experienced different subclimates. McMurray (1994) also found that the faculty who were in the subcultures of the deans most closely aligned with top university leadership had the most positive perception of their subclimate, based on the measures listed in Table 5.1. The faculty in the subcultures of the deans who had the least amount of alignment or were in conflict with top university leadership had the most negative perception of

their subclimates.

The College faculty and staff, which may bear some relationship to the subclimate experiences of the faculty in the cited McMurray (1994) study, may be experiencing some of the same effects of having leaders aligned or not aligned with the College leadership that were noted in McMurray's study. Perhaps some supervisors, deans, and the people they supervise might have had better or worse situations after the restructuring and reorganization than others. This could be based on the relationships of either the management level or other employees to the Executive VP, as he is clearly perceived to be the dominant decision-maker for most faculty and staff units or departments. For instance, Montana and Darby discussed how they perceived that the Executive VP had protected the positions of two supervisors they thought to be incompetent by restructuring entire departments to give them other positions. Kelly, among others, discussed how the resignations of the VP of Facilities and Finance, the restructure of the VPHR role to VPESA, and the resignation of the Workforce Development Education dean may have been due to problems with their relationships with the Executive VP. The Executive VP was generally perceived by faculty and staff to be very favorable to faculty, and most faculty experienced climate much more positively than most staff.

A troubling result of the qualitative data analysis was the climate of fear discussed by staff. A primary fear was job loss, and this fear was also linked to fears of reprisal or retaliation for "speaking up" or reporting concerns. It is also troubling that the data analysis indicates that this has been a problem at the College for some time, with seemingly little attention by administration. There is a conflict between the stated "culture of inquiry" and the apparent fear many employees have of engaging in inquiry. In the cases of Jordan and Dakota, attempting to report being bullied in the workplace resulted in no apparent progress and even a worsening of

their situation. They discussed their fear of the bullying and retaliation and their frustration with the lack of recourse. These situations did not reflect their relationships with their own supervisors, other than their perception that their own supervisors were aware of the bullying, and were either unable (in Jordan's case) or unwilling (in Dakota's case) to stop it. Both Dakota and Jordan reported bullying by peers, and in Dakota's case, a clique consisting of bullying peers and an administrator and supervisor (not his/hers). Darby and Kelly discussed being aware that some administrators, supervisors, and staff were being bullied by an administrator. Montana felt as though his/her fellow department members were becoming less tolerant and civil than in the past, and Kelly also reported bullying of staff in his/her area. These instances indicate that there may be several different sources of bullying in the College.

Salin (2003) reported that workplace bullying not only has negative consequences for the victim of bullying, but also for the other "non-victims" and "non-bullies" who are aware of it, and the organization as a whole. Salin (2003) says, "Bullying has been shown to be associated with higher turnover and intent to leave the organization, higher absenteeism, and decreased commitment and productivity" (p. 1213-1214). Salin (2003) defines bullying as "repeated and persistent negative acts toward one or more individuals, which involves a perceived power imbalance and creates a hostile work environment," and summarizes bullying as "a form of interpersonal aggression or hostile, anti-social behavior in the workplace" (p. 1214-1215). This seems to describe accurately what Dakota, Jordan, and others are experiencing.

According to Salin (2003), the most common negative behaviors associated with bullying are:

Social isolation or the silent treatment, rumors, attacking the victim's private life or attitudes, excessive criticism or monitoring of work, withholding or depriving responsibility, and verbal aggression.... It is not necessarily what is done or how it is done, but rather the frequency and longevity of what is done. (p. 1215)

Dakota described the silent treatment, verbal aggression, social isolation, and having responsibility without authority and no support from his/her supervisor. Jordan feels great support from his/her supervisor, but is on the receiving end of hostile and aggressive behavior, threats, and attacks on his/her private life and attitudes by a group of peers. Dakota described a situation in which his/her supervisor ignores his/her concerns, and the situation worsened for both Dakota and Jordan when they attempted recourse through Human Resources.

According to Glendinning (2001), ignoring or refusing to address bullying effectively can lead to more problems, because “In addition to being problems in themselves, toxic behaviors create a hostile work environment and can easily escalate to real violence, harassment, and intimidation” (p. 276). Glendinning (2001) goes on to suggest that the real motives for workplace bullying are power and control. Although the employees affected by peer bullying tried to stop it unsuccessfully, no attempts to address perceived bullying by administration were reported. However, Salin (2003) discusses intended and increased attrition in the organization that may indicate workplace bullying. Dakota, Kelly, Darby, Jordan and Blair all discussed instances of employees wanting to leave or who have resigned that they perceived to be related to administrative bullying.

Salin (2003) has developed a more comprehensive theory as to how and why workplace bullying develops, and believes understanding its causes can help to address it. Salin (2003) explains that there are motivating structures and processes, precipitating processes, and enabling structures and processes (p. 1218). Motivating processes include internal competition, reward systems which will benefit bullies, and bureaucracies. Precipitating processes include restructuring and crises, organizational changes, and changes in management and composition of work groups. Enabling processes which lead to bullying when motivating or precipitating

processes are present are perceived power imbalances, low perceived costs, and dissatisfaction and frustration (p. 1218).

Lester (2004) asserts that any shift in power can trigger bullying and that “restructuring, changes in leadership, downsizing, and other crises make employees feel uneasy, leading to increased hostile behavior” (p. 449). Lester (2004) adds to Salin’s (2003) list of bullying behaviors in the workplace and characterizes these behaviors as being “frequent and intense abusive acts of power” and “interpersonal in nature” (p. 447). Additional bullying behaviors include public humiliation, embarrassing jokes and banter, verbal abuse, constant criticism, marginalization, and taunting (Lester, 2004). Glendinning (2001) characterizes bullying as “laughing at, making fun of, belittling ... increased workloads, demeaning and condescending techniques, or whatever [the bullies] have at their disposal” (p. 276). These indicators are a match for the bullying situations some of the Riverland staff described: increased workloads, humiliation, criticism, taunting, and marginalization, to name a few.

Workplace bullying has significant effects on the victim, other non-bullied employees and the workplace overall. Kivimaki, et al. (2003) also documented the results of bullying on the victim including lowered self-esteem, mild to severe health problems such as insomnia, cardiovascular disease, depression, and higher reported levels of stress and anxiety. According to Vartia (2001) employees who witnessed but were not subjected to the same level of bullying behavior as the victim may also experience increased levels of physical and psychological health problems, up to and including post-traumatic stress disorder. Jennifer, Cowie, and Ananiadou (2003) define this new group as the “bullied/non-victim.”

There are also negative effects on the workplace as a whole, which as discussed previously, is generally already one that has significant stressors. Salin (2003) notes that larger

bureaucracies, weak or ineffective top leadership, tight hierarchal organizational structure, changes in management or composition of the work group, low perceived costs of bullying, high workloads, time pressures, and hectic work environments are reported to have higher levels of bullying (p. 1220). Salin (2003) also comments that organizational power structures and power imbalances, along with a low perceived risk and costs, are core causes of supervisors bullying workers (p. 1219). Jennifer, et al. (2003) report that “Role ambiguity and work relationship conflicts were important predictors of experiences of bullying in the workplace” (p. 494).

The similarities between the literature and the environment described at Riverland in the interviews and Climate Surveys are eye-opening. Unfortunately for Riverland, there appears to be a current “perfect storm” situation favoring bullying. The environment that allows bullying bosses to persist was described by the staff: a tight hierarchy with top-down communication only, the perception of a distant and ineffective President, heavy workloads, high stress, emphasis on bureaucratic processes, restructuring and reorganization, role ambiguity, budget crises, and administrative and management turnover. Glendinning (2001) also reports that in organizational studies, schools may have staff who report being bullied by supervisors, while teachers do not report being bullied or even being aware of bullying, another parallel to the situation at Riverland.

According to Salin (2003) and Glendinning (2001), the effects of bullying in the workplace are reported to be decreased productivity, increased employee theft, and increased employee absenteeism. Glendinning (2001) also notes that “Bad managers tend to infect their departments with bad attitudes. It’s like a disease: they spread anger, despair, and depression, which show up in lackluster work” (p. 274). Additionally, McMurray (2004) showed a strong correlation between a good organizational climate and employee commitment to the

organization, and the converse. Thus, allowing retaliation and bullying to continue unchecked suggests having employees who are less committed to the organization as a result. Blair and Montana both discussed how this could happen.

The data analyses performed in this study suggest that Riverland currently has a number of the motivating, precipitating, and enabling structures and processes that Salin (2003) and others describe as setting the stage for workplace bullying. This may account for the frequency of the open-ended Climate Survey comments about reprisal and bullying, as well as the following types of bullying described by at least four of the interview participants: peer-to-peer, middle management to front-line workers, and administrator to subordinates.

Lester (2004) found that bullying is more commonly reported in technical college environments. The research in this study suggests that the long-term nature of the fear and perception of bullying at Riverland may have originated during the merger and shift from a technical college to a community college in 1995 - 1996. Dakota discussed the merger as a time when people were scrambling to secure the new positions which would be replacing jobs post-merger, and likened the current environment of reorganizations to that merger time.

Additionally, given the many leadership and structural changes since the merger, the “bullies” would have had a low risk of exposure, and low perceived cost for their actions. Dakota, Jordan, and Kelly all discussed their perceptions of the way these kinds of complaints have been dismissed in HR without being taken seriously, and how difficult it is to document the problems. Dakota, Jordan, and the other source who declined to record an interview all discussed the influence of a “bullying clique.”

Research has shown that the victims and the bullied non-victim bystanders feel completely powerless to change the dynamic. Glendinning (2001) also discusses how the “bully

bosses” may themselves feel pressured and insecure, and may have achieved a position without the qualifications typically required for the position. He notes that a common bullying pattern is an under-qualified supervisor and a qualified, or over-qualified, subordinate (Glendinning, 2001). In at least one of the perceived bullying interactions at Riverland, this has been the case. All the literature on workplace bullying notes that it is a complex issue, and it certainly is at Riverland with several different types of bullying interactions reported.

Other findings in this study suggest a strong connection between the qualitative interview data, the ICS open-ended comments, and the ICS quantitative data. The Climate Survey ratings on the nine questions selected for the interviews had dropped significantly between 2008 and 2012, and the employee interview open-ended comments confirmed the increasing concerns of staff with questions related to parity of treatment with faculty, climate, and organizational structure. Faculty interview participants overall rated the climate-related questions higher than the staff, while rating the questions related to organizational structure with more variation.

The additional related questions that were considered in the quantitative analysis provided further evidence that the survey categories linked to the items included in the interviews are indicative of increased organizational concern in the areas of trust, communication, safety in reporting or communicating upwards, participative decision-making, and feeling supported and valued. This study found that many staff perceive these negatively, and although faculty indicate experiencing a more positive climate and view of administration, there are concerns among faculty related to decision-making, communication, and planning also.

Findings on the Research Questions

This study began with the stated intention of relating the results of Riverland College's longitudinal, biennial, quantitative Institutional Climate Survey to the AQIP process over the same ten-year period. In the process of analyzing the employee perceptions of the survey questions and AQIP, it became clear that the primary focus of the participants was not AQIP. It was the perceptions of climate and organizational structure. The qualitative data analysis provided information regarding participant's perceptions of AQIP. However, AQIP in particular and QI in general are not addressed in the Climate Survey questions. There were responses to the open-ended survey questions regarding AQIP which contributed to the data analysis. Findings on the original research questions presented in Chapter One are discussed in this section.

The first research questions sought to examine the history and current forms of CQI/TQM at Riverland, as well as how QI is incorporated into institutional life and processes. The qualitative interview data affirm that the impetus for the adoption of AQIP as a QI process is perceived by both faculty and staff as a means to the end of reaccreditation. Several participants noted that the early years of the AQIP effort gave them hope of real, needed improvement and institutional change. However, the same participants also reported that this has not happened. In fact, some staff discussed an environment in which there is fear of pointing out what isn't working due to concerns about retaliation and job loss. Several early efforts, such as the first Action Projects on decision-making and communication seemed promising. However, those early efforts were either not institutionalized, not adopted by administration, or did not come to fruition.

The qualitative interview data strongly suggest that the current AQIP effort lacks the

leadership, communication, and focus necessary to truly be a force for change in the College. Evidence of this was supported by participants who reported that the current AQIP process is based on compliance and reporting after-the-fact, rather than real improvement in the processes of the College. AQIP is not the collaborative, institution-wide effort that many staff, in particular, would like to see. Blair, Montana, Taylor, and Drew did note the lack of overall organizational planning and cultural integration of AQIP with an example. They pointed out that even the most recent institutional initiatives, policies and processes have not been developed using AQIP principles. Thus, the current importance of AQIP is largely seen as just required reaccreditation, and the impact on change in the institution is primarily viewed as limited to a change in budgetary funding and the last few years of the SLO assessment effort.

The third research question sought to explore any evidence of whether involvement in CI has impacted teaching at Riverland. Many faculty in the study credit AQIP and reaccreditation as the impetus for the current SLO Assessment Project that is currently underway. The project involved all faculty, departments, and programs at Riverland, and there is funding, faculty release time, and faculty involvement in the effort. Paid faculty duty days are devoted to the assessment project each year, so faculty tended to view this combination of funded support as a significant commitment to AQIP from the College. AQIP is considered to be primarily an academic effort by faculty and staff alike, and limited in its institutional scope to this SLO Assessment Project.

The fourth research question set out to determine if there have been any measurable impacts of AQIP on “quality measures or indicators such as employee perceptions, organizational climate, and/or student satisfaction with the college.” The findings in this study suggest that there has been little measurable impact of AQIP on a college-wide basis. Staff

perceptions of College climate are that the climate has worsened over the period of AQIP involvement, while most faculty interviewed perceive that climate is positive or has improved over the last decade.

The final research questions looked at what expectations faculty and staff have of AQIP and whether they actively support it. In this study, staff and faculty both reported having high expectations for AQIP early on in terms of organizational change and improvement, but they have largely been unmet. At this time, staff would support AQIP more if it were focused on real change and improvement and involved a college-wide collaboration. Faculty are divided on continued support for AQIP. Some believe it is valuable and worthwhile, yet others see it as a waste of time, money, and effort. It is apparent from the data analysis that most interview participants would support a genuine college-wide collaborative AQIP effort that is focused on real improvement. However, it is important to note that several faculty do not believe this will happen under the current College leadership.

The analyses of the quantitative Climate Survey data suggest there has been little impact or improvement from AQIP on the nine survey questions chosen for follow-up in the interviews. There were short-term improvements in the mean ratings from 2004-2006, but the questions in this study with the strongest link to climate saw little improvement in those years, and significant declines from 2008 to 2012. This was also true of the additional related survey questions that were considered in the quantitative results in Chapter Four. These questions were also closely linked to climate and all had significant declines in mean ratings from 2008 to 2012.

Finally, the faculty and staff did not extensively address the costs of AQIP or relate cost to effectiveness. Some faculty and one staff member noted the investment in meeting times, faculty release times, and duty days. No participants discussed the direct costs of AQIP to the

College.

Additional Findings

In Chapter Two, I reviewed the literature on QI in general, its adaptation to higher education, and the process of AQIP in particular. I also discussed the definitions of organizational culture and organizational climate and a comparison of the two. McMurray (2003) studied the history of research on organizational climate and culture and found that although organizational climate was studied earlier, the research on culture is more developed than on climate. The studies on organizational climate focus primarily on the development, use, and interpretation of quantitative surveys, while the qualitative studies primarily assess perceptions of change or of particular features of a specific climate (McMurray, 2003). Studies of climate in higher education have almost always been developed around surveys for entire organizations or systems, or focused on faculty and/or management.

After reviewing the field of research, I identified gaps in the literature in the following areas which are addressed, at least in part, by this study: (a) quantitative, longitudinal data analysis of climate survey instruments; (b) organizational climate in higher education studies which are developed to assess staff and faculty by group or subclimate; (c) community college studies considering the relationship between employee perceptions of climate and AQIP; (d) studies comparing longitudinal quantitative data and qualitative interview data on a mature AQIP effort; and (e) studies which integrate analysis of qualitative data from both open-ended survey questions and employee interviews.

The sense of shared climate that emerged from the staff group had more cohesiveness and more uniformity of opinion on trust, support, recognition, and fairness than the faculty group.

The staff views of these elements, as defined in Table 5.1, were generally negative. The faculty had a more diverse range of perceptions of trust, support, recognition, and fairness, although they were generally more positive than staff. The second part of McMurray's (1994) definition of climate regarding member interaction that was cited earlier, combined with the element of autonomy, may account for some of the differences in cohesiveness of perception among the two groups.

For example, this study revealed that staff feel they have less autonomy than faculty, and staff generally have a higher amount of interaction with each other due to the similarity of schedules (e.g., 8am-5pm) and required on-campus presence in most staff assignments. Faculty discussed their sense of autonomy along with feeling more isolated from each other due to the combination of varying class schedules, teaching online, and not having to be on-campus when not fulfilling a class or office hour requirement. The similarities between staff positions may lead to a common interpretation of the organization and climate construct, while the autonomy and diversity among faculty may result in more diverse interpretations of organizational climate.

There were also distinctive attitudes and perceptions reported by staff that were absent in faculty accounts of their subclimate experiences. The marked lack of trust of administration, the fear of reprisal and retaliation, and the susceptibility to fear and job loss, restructuring, and bullying, as well as fear of communication upwards, were present to some degree in all of the staff group. However, they were not present in the majority of the faculty group.

Conclusions.

This study began with the intention of relating the longitudinal results of organizational climate surveys to the QI effort over the same period (2002-2012) at Riverland Community

College. In the process of exploring staff and faculty perceptions of AQIP involvement, the results that emerged from the qualitative and quantitative data analysis primarily related to employee perceptions regarding the differences between faculty and staff. Additionally, results indicated there were radically different staff and faculty subclimates, as well as concerns related to organizational structure and its players including administration, decision-making, communication, planning, and budget.

The study answered the research questions regarding AQIP, but since AQIP has not been influential in altering climate, the findings regarding AQIP were no longer the central focus of this study. As presented in the essence section of Chapter Four, the phenomenon for this case study was the bifurcated sense of climate at Riverland Community College. Two distinct subclimates were defined in this study: a toxic, fearful, and demoralizing environment is being experienced by staff, and a non-threatening, supportive and positive environment is experienced by most of the faculty. Although there were separate identifiable subclimates, within the subclimates there were often differing perceptions on survey questions and opinions on issues noted. However, there were many distinctive differences noted between the staff and faculty subclimates regarding climate perceptions, perspectives on organizational structure and its players, and AQIP.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for the College

There are a number of ways that the College can address the concerns raised in this study by the staff and faculty interview participants on the Institutional Climate Survey.

Faculty and staff relationships.

In the area of faculty-staff relationships, although much of the sense of division between groups seem to be driven by the staff's sense of unfair treatment, there is also the concern that faculty do not respect or value staff. Faculty did not appear to reflect these attitudes toward staff in the qualitative data analysis. However, when discussing *perceptions* of faculty and staff relationships, the staff group was consistent in *feeling* disrespected and undervalued in the College. The source(s) of this belief should be investigated in further research, and depending on the cause an approach should be developed by the College to address it. The sense of unequal treatment reported by staff may also be ameliorated to some extent by addressing other aspects of the "toxic climate," which is discussed next.

Climate.

Faculty were generally positive about climate, but there were some reports that administrators show favoritism to some faculty. This concern should be investigated further and steps taken to address the problem and improve communication regarding faculty equity and opportunities. Staff, on the other hand, raised serious concerns about the "toxic climate." The qualitative data presented here, as well as the survey ratings and open-ended responses, should be a call to action to create a safe environment for all employees. Clearly, whatever has been done up to now to address this has not worked. Since employees reported feeling distrustful of HR's involvement in such a process, an effort would most likely need to be independent of HR and possibly outside of Riverland entirely in order to effect change.

However, this effort to address safe communication, fear of reprisal and retaliation, and workplace bullying must be very carefully and thoughtfully designed, as any more failure on this

front will only exacerbate an ongoing problem. Having an independent, neutral party meeting with an employee task force may be a good start toward developing that effort. It might be helpful to consult with experts in this area to develop and implement a successful approach. It will also be important to establish the prevalence of these reported behaviors and problems, and there are surveys designed for this that are discussed in the literature relevant to this section that may be useful.

Organizational structure and its players.

The staff and faculty concerns in this area were related to effectiveness of and communication with administration, decision-making, overall communication in the College, planning, and budget. Several interview participants were frustrated with hierarchal communication and top-down decision-making. They mentioned that the earlier AQIP effort had a cross-functional team with representation from all areas of the College and made recommendations about decision-making and communication. This team met, they made recommendations, and then the incoming executive team in 2003–2005 did not implement the team’s recommendations. An approach that involves another college-wide team might be effective but once again it has to be empowered and trusted by administration.

It seems clear from the results of this study that employees at Riverland want more clarity and communication about decision-making processes, more involvement in decisions which affect their work, better communication both up and down, and a better-informed and more flexible Administrative Council. Both faculty and staff groups were concerned about the lack of consistent personnel practices, particularly in regard to discipline and reporting improprieties without fear of reprisal. This is another area where a collaborative cross-functional team to

review and make recommendations for improved practice could be very effective. Faculty and staff were also frustrated with a lack of planning, involvement, and development for major college initiatives, such as the at-risk student admission and retention efforts. More up-front involvement by those affected by such decisions might help alleviate the concerns, as well as produce better-designed efforts.

The Academic Quality Improvement Program.

All of the improvement recommendations discussed so far would benefit from an appropriate approach to AQIP. Many of the institutional concerns expressed by employees in this study are the types of issues which can be addressed by AQIP and its Action Projects. Typically, Action Projects such as decision-making, communication, and climate improvement would be considered by a cross-functional team with decision-making power, and a plan for action implemented. As was noted, this has happened in the past at Riverland, but the recommendations were never implemented.

It is clear from the results of this study that the AQIP effort at Riverland needs a comprehensive make-over. It needs to be provided with consistent, committed leadership, and associated with college-wide collaboration. The College must have an improved report by Fall 2013, so committing to these efforts now is important. Improvement is needed in the planning and budgeting areas, particularly in reference to developing a database for requests, responses, and the rationale for both. This would allow the administration and the Administrative Council to review related requests.

There is also a serious lack in the data-driven decision-making area mandated by AQIP. Although there is an Institutional Effectiveness Plan (Appendix G3), and there are sporadic

efforts periodically to move ahead with it, this study found that it does not have institutional “buy in” at this point. Therefore, a review, overall plan, and strategies to implement the plan are important. As part of this overall plan, the improvements needed to collect, store, retrieve, and use data should be clarified. The four recent Action Projects which were submitted to AQIP should be reviewed by a cross-functional team, and strategies for implementation developed and approved for each. Prior to this time, any decision-making and integration of effort has been centralized to administration, and more college-wide collaboration would yield better results and more committed employees.

And lastly, the shared assumptions of AQIP that have been on the Riverland public website for many years and were discussed in the interviews should be implemented, as they reflect the voices of the faculty and staff participants regarding AQIP. Among others, these include an assertion that “we do not have a hierarchy at Riverland”, that “continuous improvement is a process not an event”, that “we must empower as many people as possible at Riverland” and that to “empower people we must communicate effectively.” Implementing these recommendations would address several of the concerns documented in this research.

Institutional Climate Survey results.

The College should also consider implementing changes in the Climate Survey questions to obtain better information. Another area for further action would be to modify the Climate Survey to correct some of the inconsistencies and clarify poorly-written or confusing questions. The new questions would need to be tested and the results assessed. The questions on employee orientation should be limited to new employees. Other questions which assess law or policy violations, such as Question #12, should be reworded so results can be more accurately

identified. The Climate Survey process and results should also be modified to produce more precise information about groups of employees and subclimates within the institution. If the 2010 and 2012 databases are still available, further analysis to address information by employee group should be done.

Recommendations for Further Research

Further research should include interviews of supervisors and administrators, another subclimate, to add their perceptions to the picture. More staff and faculty interviews would be helpful, especially with staff in the departments where bullying is perceived to be taking place. Interviews with those staff could help identify and address their concerns, and would contribute to a cross-section of employee perceptions. Another area for qualitative data analysis would be to include part-time and adjunct faculty in the interviews. From my personal time spent in these positions, I am fairly certain they would reveal yet another subclimate.

Further qualitative research at other MnSCU community colleges about the relationships between groups and subclimates of faculty, staff, and administration could be done, along with connecting that data with available quantitative data, such as Climate Surveys. This would also help to assess whether the climate problems at Riverland are local, or related to statewide or systemic problems. Other directions for future research include further study of the subclimates of faculty and staff within IHE, and what could be done to assist with producing better subclimate experiences, especially for staff.

Most institutions that are engaged in conducting longitudinal employee climate surveys also assess student satisfaction with similar survey administrations. There are questions on the Riverland ICS that have employees evaluate internal and external customer service, and

comparing employee and student perceptions on any questions that overlap would also provide useful information.

PROFESSIONAL PERSPECTIVE

“A funny thing happened on the way to the forum...” Given my background at the College, I was very pleased with the caliber of the employees who accepted my invitation for an interview. This is important to note because the results of the staff interviews were so surprising to me. Had I predicted what the results would be, I would not have been correct. When I selected the staff to interview, I chose staff whom I perceived to be reliable, competent, hard-working and committed to their jobs. In the many years I have known them, I have only known these staff to be committed professionals, committed to both improving the College and themselves professionally, and working hard to serve students and faculty. Again in the case of the faculty, I asked those to interview whom I perceived to be hard-working, competent, and dedicated professionals, and who gave their time freely to help students, sit on committees, and help however they could.

Based on my background at the College, I went into this study thinking that staff might be mildly unhappy about working conditions in general, or at the most, might have a particular problem with someone or a problem they wanted to air. I thought that many faculty would believe that most aspects of the College could improve or be done better or differently.

Because I had worked at the College for so long and had known most of the interview participants for 10 years or more in the work setting, I had to be even more aware and work harder than an outside person in order to keep myself impartial and as objective as possible. However, after having conducted the interviews and analyzed the data, I believe that if an

outside researcher had conducted this type of study, much of what the staff shared would have either gone unsaid or have been worded so very differently that the real meaning would not have been apparent.

Given the quantitative and qualitative evidence regarding lack of trust, open communication, and fear of reprisal, staff especially needed strong reassurances about anonymity and how confidentiality would be maintained as their interviews would be recorded, transcribed, and presented. This caution all reflected the amount of fear of reprisal and retaliation that the staff who were interviewed either felt themselves subject to personally or thought might be possible based on what they perceived had happened to other staff. I think the perceived risk and lack of trust between staff and an outside researcher who they didn't know would have been too risky and they might not have chosen to participate. Indeed, one employee consented to an interview for this study, but refused to allow it to be recorded due to concerns about his/her job security.

This fear was so palpable among staff that it is the most striking impression I have retained from the staff interviews. It was real fear, not disgruntlement, although that was present too due to such a toxic environment, but more a fear of consequences. I found this pervasive sense of fear was very surprising, given my knowledge of their quality of work and value to the College. In fact several of them, when looking at an interview question, would say: "Here's where I get fired for telling the truth".

Of the faculty interviews, the most striking impression was a general "sunniness" about their work, their place in the College, and how they felt about their future there. There were a couple of exceptions to this general positive climate on the part of faculty which were explored thoroughly in Chapter 4. These were faculty who were close enough to staff and the staff

situations to be affected by the staff climate and working conditions, even though they felt their own situation was different. Generally speaking, though, the overall sense I came away with in all but one faculty interview was “it’s all good, or at least most of it is.”

I knew from the declining means in the Climate Surveys, and of course, from working in the environment and in faculty leadership, that there were increasing problems. However, in 2010-2011 I had been away on sabbatical, and was then not involved in faculty leadership until Spring 2012, after my interviews were largely completed. My teaching assignment was all online, so I did not have daily immersion in the environment. Also, five years ago, my department was moved to a more isolated area of a different building, and so my daily faculty and staff contacts are often more limited than was typical earlier in my career. In hindsight, that distance from the daily “rumor mill” was good preparation for these interviews because so much of what was discussed in the interviews was new to me and that meant better follow up and less tendency to make assumptions that might have led to a less complete interview or discouraged participants from fully expressing what they wanted to say.

I have been part of discussions between our entire faculty leadership and the administration about the staff concerns suggested by the climate surveys and from other venues (not this research). The faculty leadership have discussed their perceptions that these problems are primarily rooted in the way staff are experiencing their environment, and have relayed their understanding of the reasons for that. These discussions occurred in the time since my interviews, and the staff discontent since has gone from a rumble to a roar. However, the administrative responses were invariably defensive, and do not acknowledge that there is a real problem or that they are part of it and could be part of the solution. They reassert that they are supporting a culture of inquiry and that bullying, retaliation, and reprisal will not be tolerated. I

came out of those discussions with the sense that the top administrators feel they are being falsely accused and not being credited for the good they have done and that they do not really believe there is a problem.

What is so paradoxical about this is that I personally am a citizen of the Capitol, in that I have experienced extremely positive relationships with administration, and feel personally recognized, valued, and supported by them in my faculty, leadership, and assessment roles. We have worked in a genuinely collegial way with each other, and like Bailey said, have respect and liking for each other. It is a perfect example of the radically different subclimate that faculty experience as opposed to staff.

So I have thought long and hard about this as I did this research and lived in these two different worlds for a time, while periodically working closely with another subclimate, that of administration. I know that administrators have difficult and demanding jobs, that there is often more criticism than support in their daily experience, and they are genuinely trying to work for the good of the institution as at least one of their primary goals. So how is it that these “reports from the front lines” as it were, could be so easily disregarded? When faculty leadership discussed faculty issues or opinions, we were listened and responded to, and quite often participated in the resulting decision. It seemed to me that when we discussed these problems with restructuring and combining the HR and SA positions, however, that it was as though a glass wall went up and nobody heard us. It was eerily similar to what Blair and other staff reported. I do personally believe that staff are working in a different College environment than faculty are.

I am not sure why neither staff nor faculty have been considered credible when reporting on low staff morale, fear, retaliation, and bullying and why the Climate Survey results haven't

compelled more action on the part of administration. The only explanations I have developed are that: (a) they have been convinced otherwise in some way that these things are not true or are not happening, (b) they have structured an internal belief system that disallows this as a possibility, or (c) they know and do not care, or know and do not think they can address it successfully or know and are unwilling to take action. I believe the most likely explanation, given my time and experience at the institution, is that the people who are integral to the problem have convinced those who are in a position to make changes (and perhaps believe themselves) that it does not exist or is simply due to perpetual malcontents.

EPILOGUE

As I was completing the final dissertation draft and the defense, Riverland was completing one stage of its organizational life and embarking on another. The President and Executive Vice President both accepted presidencies elsewhere, and an interim President was appointed by the MnSCU Chancellor. The interim President hired an interim Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs (VPASA) and restored the VPESA to the previous position of Vice President of Human Resources (VPHR).

In member checking, one faculty member noted that their concerns about an ineffective President and bullying by the (now former) Executive VP had been resolved with their departure. However, several staff members reinforced that the recurring themes of fear and workplace bullying noted in Chapter Four are still occurring, giving new examples and specifically noting that the departure of the administrative executive team did not offer a solution to their ongoing concerns. In fact, two commented that they were concerned it might worsen, since interim administrators who are unfamiliar with the College might not be informed or in place long

enough to address it. In these discussions, the staff subclimate concerns about peer/cliq-ue-based bullying in some departments, bullying by supervisors, and what is perceived as involvement, or at least collusion (by not addressing concerns or complaints), by the Human Resources department, were all reiterated during member checking. This fear of retaliation, reprisal, and bullying indicates a persistent and underlying problem that has been repeatedly noted in Climate Surveys, especially visible in the most recent (February, 2012) administration of the Institutional Climate Survey.

The interim executive team has identified an ambitious agenda for this upcoming year. An AQIP Systems Portfolio is due in November, 2013, and work had not yet begun on it at the beginning of this year. There are also several required institutional measures and targets which have not been addressed for the last few years. Overdue strategic planning was not completed prior to the departure of the executive team, but the College will await the advent of a new president next July to renew that process.

When the first meeting was held to discuss the upcoming Portfolio, information was shared by some team members that triangulated with interview data regarding the previous process for the 2009 Portfolio. For several of the categories, individuals and teams had worked on the categories, produced the report, and were frustrated that their work and information had not been utilized in the final Portfolio. This echoes the concerns of interview participants who reported that their input was not sought, and if solicited, was not acted upon or valued. The interim executive team has targeted the AQIP Portfolio, the neglected institutional effectiveness measures and targets, and improving and documenting student learning outcomes assessment, institutional research efforts, and climate improvement as primary goals for this year. They have included faculty and staff representatives on the Administrative Council, now renamed the

Administrative Cabinet, and have included broad-based representation on the newly-reformulated Institutional Development, Effectiveness, and Assessment Committee and in writing the upcoming portfolio. Hope for inclusion, change and improvement are in the air!

Although this project taught me much about the hazards of “backyard research”, it has also given me a rare and treasured opportunity to learn more about the College that has been my chosen workplace and source of many learning experiences and career opportunities over the last 26 years. I am grateful for this as well as for the opportunity to be part of the next phase in the organizational lifecycle. My fervent wish for Riverland is that the opportunities that I have had here to learn, grow, and improve are experienced by all students who enter our doors and all the employees who share our common workplace, as so befits an institution of higher education.

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Appendix A

Request for Interview

Staff Request:

Hi, _____! I am interviewing many employees at Riverland for information for completing my dissertation research. I will attach the consent form, research exempt form, and letter of support from [the College President] to give you an idea of what I am doing. I would LOVE for you to be one of the interviewees representing the Riverland staff with your rich experiences and time here. It is important that you know that your identity and our discussion will be kept completely confidential, I can interview on or off campus per your preference; also, the results are collated and not attributed to any identifiable individual in the dissertation. The interview focuses primarily on your experiences as an employee at Riverland, and on your participation in (if any) and ideas about AQIP.

If you would like to participate in an interview on work time, [the College President] has approved my project. Of course, your own supervisor would need to approve participation on work time if you need supervisor approval for your schedule (some have done so already for other staff members). If you would prefer that they not be consulted, we can meet off campus to do the interview at your convenience. Would you be interested in participating, and when would be a good time, if you are? It should take about an hour or a bit more, and I would check back with you for accuracy when I am summarizing and collating data. Thanks much, Pamm

Pamela Anne Tranby

507-292-XXXX or 507-990-XXXX

Include consent form, [the College President] letter, and approval form as attachments

Faculty Request:

Hi, _____! I am interviewing many employees at Riverland for information for completing my dissertation research. I will attach the consent form, research exempt form, and letter of support from [the College President] to give you an idea of what I am doing. I would LOVE for you to be one of the interviewees representing the Riverland faculty with your rich experiences and time here. It is important that you know that your identity and our discussion will be kept completely confidential, I can interview on or off campus per your preference; also, the results are collated and not attributed to any identifiable individual in the dissertation. The interview focuses primarily on your experiences as an employee at Riverland, and on your participation in (if any) and ideas about AQIP.

[the College President] has approved my project. Would you be interested in participating, and when would be a good time, if you are? It should take about an hour or a bit more, and I would check back with you for accuracy when I am summarizing and collating data. Thanks much,
Pamm

Pamela Anne Tranby

507-292-XXXX or 507-990-XXXX

Include consent form, [the College President] letter, and approval form as attachments

Appendix B1

Permission to Conduct Research Study at Riverland



August 31, 2011

Colorado State University
Institutional Review Board
321 General Services Building
Campus Delivery 2011
Fort Collins, CO 80523-2011
Attention: Janell A. Barker, Senior IRB Coordinator

Dear Ms. Barker:

Pamela Anne Tranby, a graduate student in the School of Education at Colorado State University, is conducting a research study entitled "Assessing the Impact of the Academic Quality Improvement Project on the Organizational Culture and Climate of a Comprehensive Community College: A Case Study Approach," and she has shared with me details of the study. I support the study and am confident that participants in this study will be adequately protected. I give Pamela Anne Tranby permission to conduct her research study at Riverland Community College.

I understand that the research in this study involves institutional document and archival review and employee personal interviews. On behalf of Riverland Community College, I request that the identifiers of Riverland employees be kept confidential in the research results. Pamela Anne Tranby has agreed to provide my office a copy of the CSU IRB approval document before beginning recruitment.

If you have any questions, please contact my office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Terrence Leas".

Terrence Leas, Ph.D.
President
(507) 433-0607
tleas@riverland.edu

Appendix B2

IRB Human Subjects Exemption Letter



Research Integrity & Compliance Review Office
Office of Vice President for Research
Fort Collins, CO 80523-2011
(970) 491-1553
FAX (970) 491-2293

DATE: October 14, 2011

TO: Tim Davies, School of Education
Pamela Tranby, School of Education

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Janell Barker".

FROM: Janell Barker, IRB Administrator
Research Integrity & Compliance Review Office

TITLE: Assessing the Impact of the Academic Quality Improvement Project on the Organizational Culture and Climate of a Comprehensive Community College: A Case Study Approach

IRB ID: 118-12H **Review Date:** October 14, 2011

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) Administrator has reviewed this project and has declared the study exempt from the requirements of the human subject protections regulations as described in 45 CFR 46.101(b)(2): Research involving the use of educational tests, survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior, unless: a) information obtained is recorded in such a manner that human subjects can be identified, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects.

The IRB determination of exemption means that:

- You do not need to submit an application for annual continuing review.
- You must carry out the research as proposed in the Exempt application, including obtaining and documenting (signed) informed consent if stated in your application or if required by the IRB.
- Any modification of this research should be submitted to the IRB through an email to the IRB Administrator, prior to implementing any changes, to determine if the project still meets the Federal criteria for exemption. If it is determined that exemption is no longer warranted, then an IRB proposal will need to be submitted and approved before proceeding with data collection.
- Please notify the IRB if any problems or complaints of the research occur.

Please note that you must submit all research involving human participants for review by the IRB. Only the IRB may make the determination of exemption, even if you conduct a similar study in the future.

Appendix B3

Consent Form for Interview Participation

**Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Colorado State University**

TITLE OF STUDY: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF THE ACADEMIC QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PROJECT ON THE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND CLIMATE OF A COMPREHENSIVE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: A CASE STUDY APPROACH

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

DR. TIMOTHY DAVIES, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP, TIMOTHY.DAVIES@COLOSTATE.EDU

CO-PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR:

PAMELA ANNE TRANBY, PHD STUDENT IN SCHOOL OF EDUCATION COMMUNITY COLLEGE LEADERSHIP, PAMELA.TRANBY@RIVERLAND.EDU

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH?

Non-administrative employees of Riverland Community College are invited to participate in the personal interview phase of this research study.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY?

The Co-PI will be conducting this study as a PhD Student at CSU under the guidance of Dr. Timothy Davies. I am also an employee of Riverland and am interested in understanding the dynamics of organizational culture and climate as they relate to quality improvement efforts.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY?

The purpose of this study to gain general knowledge about the impact or effect of a continuous quality improvement effort (AQIP) on the organizational culture and climate of Riverland Community College.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

You will be interviewed in a private office setting at a campus site of Riverland Community College. Your interview will last approximately 60 – 90 minutes each.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO?

When you come to the interview session, you will be seated and asked to answer questions relating to your understanding of the AQIP effort of the college. You will also be asked to look at summaries of Institutional Climate Survey data and Student Satisfaction Survey data and discuss your opinions on those. The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. Your identity will be coded and will not appear in any published or printed form, and will remain anonymous to all but the co-principal investigator in this study (Pamela Anne Tranby).

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are no known reasons not to participate.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

There are no known risks associated with this study. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

There are no known benefits to you for participating in this study. This study will contribute to the literature of general knowledge associated with the topic.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY?

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?

We will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

Your information will be combined with information from other people taking part in the study. When we write about the study to share it with other researchers, we will write about the combined information we have gathered. You will not be identified in these written materials. We may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

Appendix C

Employee Interview Questions

1. What was the college climate and organizational culture like in 2001 before AQIP was instituted? (Or, if you came later, what year did you start working here and what was the organizational culture and climate like when you came to Riverland?)
2. What do you think were the reasons that the College adopted AQIP?
3. What were the processes and results of being involved in AQIP like before the current administration? Since the current administration has been in place (approximately 2005)? Or since you have been employed here?
4. Has the College AQIP effort been an effective use of human resources, cost, and time? Is it currently? Why/why not?
5. Is AQIP a real or just a stated institutional priority? How can you tell?
6. Three of the re-accreditation concerns raised by NCA/HLC at the time of entering AQIP in 2001 were: a lack of evidence linking college strategic planning to college budget, a lack of evidence linking data to institutional decision-making, and a lack of documentation of student learning outcomes assessment. How you think the College is doing in each of those areas now (compared to then, if you were here then)?
7. What is the college climate and organizational culture like today? If it is different than 2001, do you think AQIP has had any effect or impact on making a difference? Positive or negative?
8. Do you think the College should continue with the AQIP re-accreditation effort? Why or why not?
9. Let's turn to the information regarding the employee climate surveys. I would like you to examine each of the nine statements that have been part of those surveys and tell me how you would rank it today on a scale of 1-5 (show scale ratings), and specifically why you would give it that ranking.
10. Now, let's look at the summaries of the employee climate survey with the "average" reaction to the items you just ranked. Please explain your reaction to the summaries of each category, and why, if you ranked it differently from the average, you think it might have been ranked differently by someone else working at the college.
11. Given the information and data I have shown you today on my research on quality indicators and the AQIP effort, do you think the AQIP effort at this college has had an effect on any of the results? Which results and why?
12. Do you think that working here is different for faculty and staff? If so, in what ways?
13. Do you have any additional information or insights you would like to offer regarding the College quality improvement effort and the results of its re-accreditation efforts regarding AQIP?

Table 4.3. 2010 Survey Questions with Low Rates of Agreement (<3.25)

Question	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010
12. Inappropriate behavior is dealt with consistently and promptly and necessary disciplinary action is taken, regardless of an employee's position.	3.31	3.22	3.21	3.08	3.01
14. An atmosphere of mutual trust exists throughout the college.	2.99	3.27	3.35	3.35	3.10
18. There is opportunity for advancement.	3.19	3.53	3.41	3.36	3.17
26. Positive changes have occurred at the college since the last survey.	N/A	N/A	N/A	3.63	3.17
30. Riverland's budget supports its strategic direction.	2.88	3.28	3.58	3.57	3.15
32. New employees are provided with adequate orientation and training to become effective team members.	3.06	3.70	3.38	3.47	3.21
63. People can communicate openly and honestly at Riverland Community College.	3.27	3.44	3.43	3.45	3.11
68. An effective method exists for employees to report suspected improprieties without fear of reprisal.	3.13	3.36	3.36	3.35	3.14
70. The Administrative Council has an accurate perception of what is happening at the College.	3.18	3.37	3.45	3.40	3.18

Appendix D

Employee Interview Schedule

Table B1?? Schedule of Interviews

Pseudonym	Request Sent	Interview Date	Interview Time
Faculty			
Decca	11/2/2011	11/18/2011	10:30a-12:00p
Eleanor	11/2/2011	11/21/2011	11:00a-12:30p
Mona	10/18/2011	10/25/2011	3:30p-5:00p
Noah	10/18/2011	11/18/2011	8:30a-10:00a
Serena	11/2/2011	12/7/2011	10:45a-12:15p
Sibley	11/2/2011	11/28/2011	2:00p-3:30p
Sina	10/18/2011	11/16/2011	8:30a-10:00a
Svea	10/18/2011	11/16/2011	10:00a-11:30a
Thomas	10/18/2011	11/22/2011	12:30p-2:00p
Tripp	10/18/2011	11/9/2011	1:30p-3:00p
Staff			
Beulah	11/4/2011	11/14/2011	8:30a-10:00a
Dick	10/18/2011	11/9/2011	8:30a-10:00a
Dodi	10/18/2011	11/22/2011	11:00a-12:30p
		12/9/2011	11:45a-12:45p
Finley	11/19/2011	12/8/2011	10:45a-12:00p
Fiona	11/2/2011	11/22/2011	2:00p-3:30p
Octavia	11/4/2011	11/18/2011	1:00p-3:00p
Penney	10/18/2011	11/14/2011	10:00a-11:30a

Appendix E

Riverland Community College Institutional Climate Survey Questions

The Riverland Community College Organizational Climate survey was distributed and responses recorded in 2002, 2004, 2006, 2008, 2010, and 2012. The survey was sent to 213 Riverland staff and faculty members via email. Each participant received a unique link that enabled them to take the survey once. Participants who did not respond within the first few days were sent automated reminders via email.

Respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements on a scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

Demographics

Q1: Gender

Q2: Please select the employee group to which you belong.

(MSCF [faculty]; MMA, Manager's Plan, & Administrators; MAPE; AFSCME & Confidential)

Q3: Where is your primary work location?

(Off-Campus; On-Campus)

Q4: What is your current employment status?

(Adjunct Faculty; Temporary Faculty; Part-Time Permanent; Full-Time Permanent)

Q5: How many years have you been employed at Riverland Community College?

(More than 10 years; 3-10 years; 1-3 years; Less than 1 year)

Q6: How many times have you participated in Riverland Community College's Employee Climate Survey?

(More than twice; Twice; Once; This is the first time)

Organizational Culture and Structure

Q7: High ethical values and integrity are encouraged and practiced throughout the college.

Q8: I understand Riverland Community College's organizational structure and think it serves the college well.

Q9: The office of the Chancellor (MnSCU System Office) provides effective support for Riverland Community College to achieve its mission.

Q10: I feel the Administrative Council respects my role at the college.

Q11: The Administrative Council provides effective direction for employees, consistently and promptly, and necessary disciplinary action is taken, regardless of an employee's position.

Q13: I understand my role and responsibilities.

Q14: An atmosphere of mutual trust exists throughout the college.

Q15: I have sufficient authority to do my job.

Q16: There is a feeling of cooperation among departments.

Q17: I feel that I am treated fairly and equitably.

Q18: There is opportunity for advancement.

Q19: My supervisor is well-qualified and motivated.

- Q20: There is a feeling of cooperation within my department.
- Q21: I am proud of the education provided to students at Riverland Community College.
- Q22: I enjoy coming to work.
- Q23: Overall, I am satisfied with Riverland Community College's existing organizational culture and structure.

Goals and Management of Change

- Q24: The college's strategic plan has been adequately communicated and implemented throughout the college.
- Q25: I am aware of the mission, vision, and value statements for Riverland Community College.
- Q26: Positive changes have occurred at the college since the last survey.
- Q27: The college provides a safe working environment.
- Q28: I am comfortable with the overall direction in which the college is headed.
- Q29: My work supports the goals of Riverland Community College.
- Q30: Riverland's budget supports its strategic direction.
- Q31: The college consistently seeks outside consultation to ensure that it strives to be "state of the art".
- Q32: New employees are provided with adequate orientation and training to become effective team members.
- Q33: I receive the training opportunities necessary to keep me abreast of the challenges of my job.
- Q34: The college consistently provides outstanding service to students and puts their priorities first.
- Q35: Overall, I am satisfied with Riverland Community College's goals and management of change.

Policies and Procedures

- Q36: I have opportunities to provide input into the college's goals, direction, policies and procedures that affect me.
- Q37: Riverland Community College's policies and procedures are up-to-date and consistent with organizational objectives.
- Q38: Riverland Community College's policies and procedures affecting my job are clearly communicated and understood.
- Q39: The administrative council is willing to be flexible in re-evaluating its policies and procedures that may not be effective.
- Q40: The college has effective methods for answering my questions about policies or procedures.
- Q41: I understand the state and federal laws and regulations that have a bearing on my job.
- Q42: College property and equipment are protected adequately.
- Q43: College property and equipment are used only for authorized purposes.
- Q44: Work processes and procedures allow me to do my job effectively.
- Q45: My work activities are coordinated with other college activities to ensure efficient operations.
- Q46: Riverland Community College is prepared to respond to emergencies and possible disasters.

Q47: I consistently follow the state and federal laws and regulations that have a bearing on my job.

Q48: Overall, I am satisfied with Riverland Community College's existing policies and procedures.

Information and Communication Links

Q49: The MnSCU computer system and other centralized computer systems are user- friendly.

Q50: Riverland Community College's local computer systems are user friendly and run efficiently.

Q51: Where necessary, the college has developed additional information systems to ensure effective operations.

Q52: In my decision-making capacity, I receive timely and accurate information needed to manage my work.

Q53: The college catalog, web site, and other promotional materials provide a fair representation of the college.

Q54: Faculty and staff are informed promptly and fully about important matters that affect them.

Q55: Communication methods are sufficient to keep me adequately informed about important matters.

Q56: I rely primarily on informational methods such as "grapevines" to learn essential information.

Q57: Riverland Community College projects a good image in the communities it serves.

Q58: Marketing efforts to recruit new students are effective.

Q59: Communications across the college allow me to perform my job effectively.*

Q60: Advancements in computer technology at the college have improved the quality of instruction.

Q61: Advancements in computer technology at the college have improved communication.

Q62: People can communicate honestly and openly at Riverland Community College.

Q63: Overall, I am satisfied with the information and communication links at the college.

**Indicates negatively worded items*

Evaluation and Feedback

Q64: Performance measures for individuals are fair and provide a reliable basis for evaluations.

Q65: My performance evaluations are timely and constructive.

Q66: Riverland Community College has effective methods of evaluating student satisfaction.

Q67: When errors or mistakes are detected, they are brought to the attention of the person(s) who made them so repeated errors are avoided.

Q68: An effective method exists for employees to report suspected improprieties without fear of reprisal.

Q69: Reported problems are taken seriously and resolved appropriately.

Q70: The Administrative Council has an accurate perception of what is happening at the college.

Q71: I feel my contributions to the college are recognized and valued appropriately.

Q72: I am comfortable discussing any concerns with my supervisors and managers.

Q73: Overall, I am satisfied with Riverland Community College's evaluation and feedback methods.

Diversity

- Q74: The college has an environment that supports diversity.
- Q75: Training on diversity issues has increased my awareness.
- Q76: I have attended training and/or taken courses regarding diversity outside that offered by Riverland Community College.
- Q77: Campus events and activities reflect the interests of diverse groups.
- Q78: Riverland Community College is a comfortable and safe place for students and staff from different cultural/ ethnic backgrounds.
- Q79: Riverland Community College is an accessible and safe place for persons with disabilities.
- Q80: I have witnessed incidents of discrimination by faculty or staff toward students or each other.*
- Q81: I have witnessed incidents of discrimination by students toward faculty, staff, or each other*
- Q82: There are clear procedures for addressing instances of discrimination.
- Q83: Riverland Community College should make special efforts to recruit a diverse staff and student body.
- Q84: Riverland Community College collects information and assesses its efforts at promoting diversity.
- Q85: Overall, I am satisfied with the college's climate related to diversity issues.

**Indicates negatively worded items*

Perceptions of Service to Internal Customers and Stakeholders

- Q86: My department has defined its internal customers (e.g., college administrators, faculty, staff in your own or other departments, etc.).
- Q87: My department knows the requirements of its internal customers.
- Q88: My department provides good service to its internal customers.
- Q89: My department has a way of gathering information from internal customers about their satisfaction with our services.
- Q90: My department has a way of gathering information from internal customers about how they value services my department provides them.
- Q91: My department has a method or process for improving services to internal customers.
- Q92: My department maintains good customer relations with internal customers.
- Q93: Overall, I am satisfied with services my department provides to INTERNAL customers.

Perceptions of Service to External Customers and Stakeholders

- Q94: The college has defined its external customers and stakeholders (e.g., students, employers, community groups, foundation board, parents, etc.).
- Q95: The college knows the requirements of its external customers and stakeholders.
- Q96: The college provides good service to its external customers and stakeholders.
- Q97: The college has a way of gathering information from external customers and stakeholders about their satisfaction with the college's services.
- Q98: The college has a way of gathering information from external customers and stakeholders about how they value services the college provides them.
- Q99: The college has a method or process for improving services to external customers and stakeholders.
- Q100: The college maintains good customer relations with external customers and stakeholders.

Q101: Overall, I am satisfied with services the college provides to EXTERNAL customers and stakeholders.

There were also nine open-ended response questions which respondents were able to answer.

Open Ended Items

1. Describe any accomplishments of the college that you are proud of that occurred in the last year.
2. Has there been any activity that represents a significant violation of existing policies or law? If so, please explain.
3. What should be the next steps for achieving the college's goal of “Educational Excellence” to provide high quality, innovative occupational and comprehensive liberal arts education, student services, facilities, and technology?
4. What should be the next steps for achieving the college's goal of “Student Focus” to help individuals achieve their personal and professional goals by enhancing their ability to access, integrate and apply learning?
5. What should be the next steps for achieving the college's goal of “Workforce and Economic Development” to assess and meet the training/education needs of business and industry?
6. What should be the next steps for achieving the college's goal of “Resource Development” to develop and maintain mutually beneficial partnerships that provide resources to support students, faculty, staff and programs?
7. What should be the next steps for achieving the college's goal of “Faculty/Staff Support” to provide faculty and staff with the resources, development opportunities, leadership, and flexibility to meet student needs while maintaining a high standard of accountability?
8. If you participated in the previous employee survey, please comment on whether you think things changed or stayed the same as a result of the survey and why you think this way.
9. Please list any other ideas or issues that were not addressed in this survey.

Appendix F

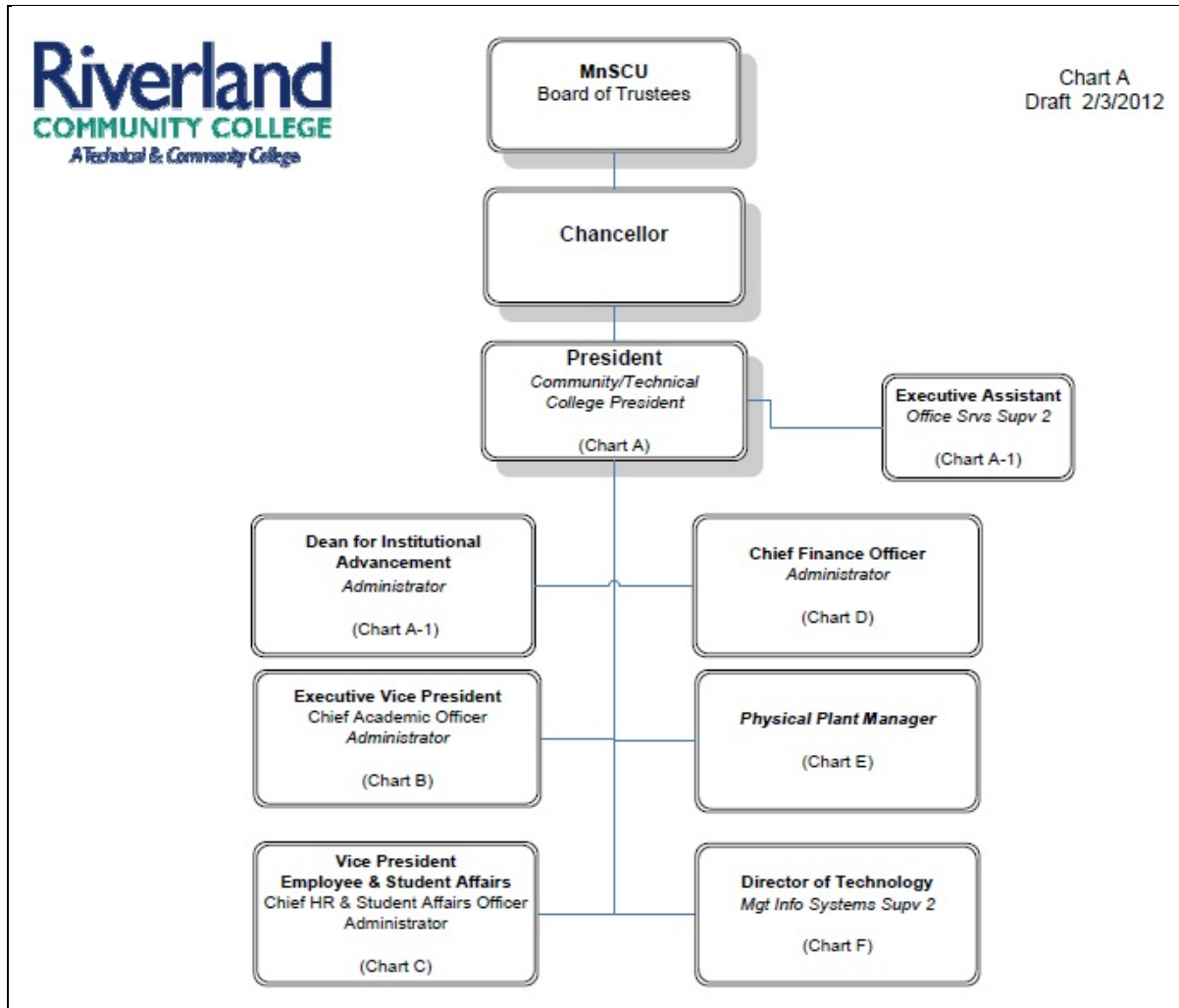
Reorganization and Restructuring at Riverland

The terms “reorganization” and “restructuring” are used frequently in Chapter Four. At Riverland, the meaning of these terms varies by department and area because between 2006 and 2011, there were a large number of these types of changes. Depending on the reference, the following may apply:

1. Administration Reorganization: The Deans were re-titled, moved to different locations, and had changes in their responsibilities and areas of oversight. Two deans were laid off and not replaced, and the VP of Finance and Facilities resigned and was not replaced. The VP/Dean of Student Affairs was also laid off and not replaced, but the responsibilities of the position were instead redistributed to the remaining employees in the area.
2. Department Reorganization: As a result of the administrative shifts, some entire departments and staff work areas were reorganized around the workload, including the areas of Computer Support Technology, Instructional Technology, the Business Office, Facilities, clerical support, the student success center, communications, and faculty and support. In some cases, work and workers were relocated to different campuses. These changes are most commonly referred to as “reorganization.”
3. Student Services Restructuring: When an employee refers to “restructuring,” it is most often the Student Services restructuring that took place in April 2011. This was a large change, with positions and entire departments, including Admissions, being eliminated, and new positions, such as “Enrollment Specialists” being created. In the process, the Admissions supervisor was given a new position as the Director of Retention Services, and the work of Admissions and other Student Services areas were “restructured” into new positions, or was not re-assigned or replaced. The reception services and call centers for the entire College were largely eliminated and restructured into new positions, while some other positions were eliminated.

Appendix G1

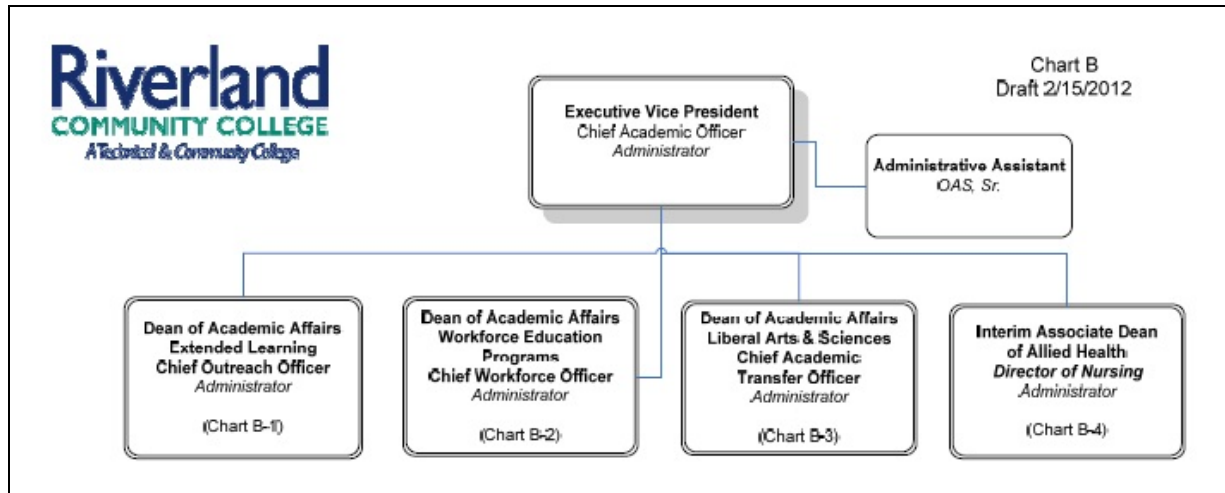
Riverland Administration Organizational Flow Chart



Riverland Community College. (2012). Administration Organizational Chart. Retrieved from <http://www.riverland.edu/administration/Visio-2012%20pres-admin1.pdf>.

Appendix G2

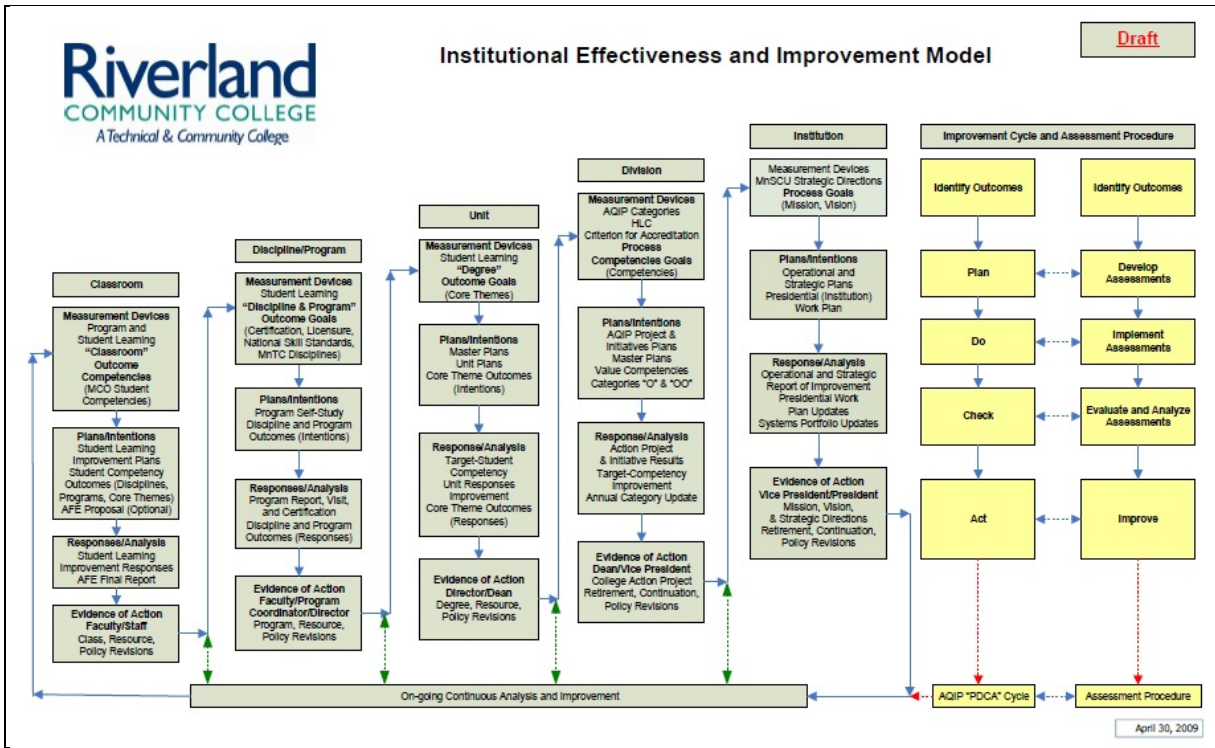
Riverland Academic Affairs Organizational Flow Chart



Riverland Community College. (2012). Administration Organizational Chart. Retrieved from <http://www.riverland.edu/administration/Visio-2012%20Exec%20VP.pdf>.

Appendix G3

Riverland Institutional Effectiveness and Improvement Model



Riverland Community College. (2009). Riverland Institutional Effectiveness and Improvement Model. Retrieved from <http://www.riverland.edu/aqip/pdfs/insteffectiveness.pdf>.

Appendix H

Timeline of the AQIP Process at Riverland

Riverland began its participation in the AQIP reaccreditation process in the 2000-2001 school year. Employees were engaged in the Vital Focus survey in 2001-2002, and three Action Projects were initiated as a result of the survey and participation by a leadership team in the AQIP Strategy Forum. These three Action Projects were decision-making, communication, and student learning outcomes assessment. The Action Projects were worked on by college-wide functional teams. The decision-making team studied decision-making models, adapted one, and recommended it for use, but it was not implemented by the incoming administration or the current President and Executive VP. The communication team developed recommendations for improved methods for external communication which have been utilized, to some extent. The student learning outcomes assessment team largely foundered; an early planning effort was developed but not adopted by the new administration in 2003.

Meanwhile, nine college-wide cross-functional teams were assembled in the 2004-2005 school year to develop and write the first AQIP Systems Portfolio. After that review, another team attended the Strategy Forum to develop a plan to meet the reviewers' recommendations and AQIP requirements. A new SLO Assessment team was formed under the leadership of the current Executive VP, and this team began the Master Course Outline revision project (2007-2010) that oversaw the revision of all common course outlines to incorporate measurable outcomes. This was part of an overall ongoing SLO Assessment Project (SLOAP), which coordinates college-wide SLO assessment strategies. A Planning and Budgeting Initiative was also implemented by the Executive VP in 2007-2008 and still continues.

A second Systems Portfolio was submitted in 2010, and was produced primarily by the Executive VP and a Dean acting as AQIP Liaison in coordinating the AQIP effort. The Portfolio was not well received by the AQIP reviewers, and the College was directed to correct the original areas of deficiency, identified in the earlier PEAQ re-accreditation process prior to merger. Another team attended the Strategy Forum a second time, this time without either the President or Executive VP attending, which as Montana noted previously was unique at the forum and difficult for the Riverland team. The team attending developed recommendations which have not yet been implemented, and two teams have attended HLC/NCA Assessment workshops.

Three new Action Projects were submitted to AQIP in June 2012: Institutional Research, Student Learning Outcomes Assessment, and Student Retention. The next Quality Review, at which time Riverland is expected to have made measurable progress on its goals and correcting its deficiencies, was originally scheduled for November 2012, and has been rescheduled for Fall 2013 at the request of Riverland.

Appendix I

Institutional Climate Survey Demographics

Table I1 Demographics of Climate Survey Respondents

	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
Total Employees at the College	257	296	306	285	269	213
Surveys Returned	179 (70%)	134 (45%)	123 (40%)	156 (55%)	133 (49%)	146 (68%)
Gender						
Female	91 (56%)	78 (58%)	84 (68%)	93 (60%)	86 (67%)	92 (66%)
Male	72 (44%)	56 (42%)	39 (32%)	63 (40%)	43 (33%)	46 (33%)
Employee Group						
AFSCME & Confidential	45 (26%)	33 (25%)	35 (29%)	40 (26%)	31 (24%)	36 (26%)
MAPE	20 (12%)	19 (14%)	21 (17%)	26 (17%)	20 (15%)	27 (19%)
MMA, Managers Plan, and Administrators	14 (8%)	16 (12%)	14 (11%)	14 (9%)	15 (12%)	11 (8%)
MSCF (Faculty)	91 (54%)	66 (49%)	53 (43%)	76 (49%)	63 (49%)	65 (47%)
Primary Work Location						
On-Campus	150 (88%)	127 (95%)	118 (96%)	143 (92%)	114 (88%)	135 (96%)
Off-Campus	20 (12%)	7 (5%)	5 (4%)	13 (8%)	15 (12%)	6 (4%)
Employment Status						
Full-Time, Permanent	146 (87%)	114 (84%)	93 (75%)	122 (78%)	101 (79%)	123 (87%)
Part-Time, Permanent	17 (10%)	10 (7%)	13 (11%)	12 (8%)	6 (5%)	4 (3%)
Temporary	5 (3%)	10 (7%)	17 (14%)	22 (14%)	5 (4%)	3 (2%)
Adjunct Faculty	*	*	*	*	16 (12%)	12 (8%)

(continued on next page)

Table I1 Demographics of Climate Survey Respondents (continued)

	2002	2004	2006	2008	2010	2012
Years of Service						
Less than 1 year ¹	8 (5%)	5 (4%)	10 (8%)	14 (9%)	4 (3%)	6 (4%)
1-3 years	37 (22%)	26 (19%)	17 (14%)	21 (13%)	19 (15%)	10 (7%)
3-10 years	49 (29%)	40 (30%)	30 (24%)	49 (31%)	38 (29%)	42 (30%)
More than 10 years	75 (44%)	63 (47%)	66 (54%)	72 (46%)	68 (53%)	84 (59%)
Previous Survey Participation						
This is the First Time	*	*	21 (17%)	36 (23%)	24 (19%)	21 (15%)
Once	*	*	36 (29%)	*	13 (10%)	13 (9%)
Twice	*	*	66 (54%)	61 (39%)	21 (16%)	20 (14%)
More than Twice	*	*	*	59 (38%)	71 (55%)	88 (62%)

*Indicates question was not asked this year

¹In 2008, this question was stated as "Hired since July 1, 2007"; in 2004, it stated "Hired since Jan. 2003"; in 2002, it stated "Hired since Jan. 2001"