ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS SUPPORTING COMMUNITY COLLEGE PRESIDENTIAL STABILITY: A CASE STUDY

A thesis presented
by
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to
the School of Education

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

In the field of
Education

College of Professional Studies
Northeastern University
Boston, Massachusetts
February, 2018
Acknowledgements

My thanks to my advisor, Dr. Shannon Alpert, for her timely feedback and endless encouragement throughout this project. In particular, the community she built for her advisees, spread around the globe, provided me with much needed structure and connection to continue to move forward. Writing can be a lonely endeavor but I was buoyed by classmates Laura Rasar King, Lisa Piccolo and Caroline Wood who read countless drafts and helped me get “unstuck” when I was the most frustrated.

Balancing school with a demanding job was not easy. However, the administration of Howard Community College and in particular, my supervisor, Dr. Cindy Peterka, remained committed to my successful completion. Their backing was invaluable.

I am deeply grateful to the participants in this study who were exceptionally generous with their time and sharing their experiences. While cloaked in pseudonyms in this document, their individual generosity will remain with me. From initial interest through my visits and data collection they were giving with their time and welcomed me to their campus. When given the opportunity, I hope to follow their example and support future community college scholars with the same level of enthusiasm.

My thanks to my friends and especially, my family, for understanding the demands of this program. They have cheered me on, been unfailingly patient and reserved only the easiest potluck tasks for me for years.

And finally, to Mark, who has been by my side from the beginning. He never cared when our living space transformed to student workspace with books, articles and papers covering nearly every surface. His steady and calm voice never wavered in reassurance. Thank you seems so inadequate but those are the only words I have.
Abstract

The American Association of Community Colleges predicts that by 2025, over 880 of the nation’s community colleges will be led by a new president. Simultaneously the average tenure of presidents is shrinking. At a time of high demand the pool of qualified candidates is shrinking which has led to this being termed a “leadership crisis” by scholars and practitioners alike. Retaining strong presidents once hired will be critically important to this sector of higher education. The central research question was: What organizational characteristics influence community college presidential stability in an East Coast community college? Since the question of community college presidential stability had not been previously examined in the literature, a case study methodology was used. The case site was a regionally accredited comprehensive community college located on the East Coast. The college’s president had served in that role for more than fourteen years. Four themes emerged from the data collected as relevant organizational factors that support presidential stability at the case site. They include: 1) stability as an organizational value; 2) personal satisfaction; 3) Board supporting the president’s vision; and 4) significance of state and local politics. The findings from the study led to five recommendations for practitioners: 1) align personal and organizational values; 2) weigh the impact of the existing Board structure; 3) maintain political neutrality; 4) implement governance best practices; and 5) immerse a new president in the local community. Four areas of future research were identified. They include: 1) the role of faculty in presidential retention; 2) the elements of presidential job satisfaction; 3) the role of culture in higher education retention; and, 4) the impact of performance based funding on shared governance structures.

Keywords: community college presidents; community college boards; community college leadership; presidential retention.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

America’s community colleges are in the midst of an unprecedented leadership transition. Between 2010 and 2012, over 10 percent of community colleges hired a new president (Jones & Jackson, 2014). The rate of transition is only expected to increase (Weisman & Vaughan, 2006; Crisis and opportunity, 2013). The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) predicts that by 2025, over 880 of the nation’s community colleges will be led by new presidents (Phillippe, 2016). Simultaneously, the average tenure for a community college president is shrinking. During the 1980’s, the average tenure of a community college president was ten years (Wyner, 2014). Today, that number has been cut in half, as it is now down to five years (Tekle, 2012). While much of the turnover is due to the retirements of an aging workforce (Weisman & Vaughan, 2006; Nevarez & Wood, 2010), there is an increase of exits due to failure to renew presidential contracts (Mize, 1998). The shrinking pool of qualified presidential candidates has led scholars and practitioners alike to dub this a “leadership crisis” (Shults, 2001; Boggs, 2003; Crisis and opportunity, 2013; Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Vaughan & Weisman, 2003) for the nation’s community colleges.

Competition for qualified community college presidential candidates may increase, as there are more searches and a shrinking pool of qualified candidates. Retaining strong presidents once hired is of critical importance to the field. The purpose of this instrumental case study will be to describe the ways in which the structure, politics, human resources and culture at an East Coast community college support to a low rate of presidential turnover and consistent leadership.

This chapter begins with an overview of the context and background of the problem of practice, followed by a discussion of the rationale and significance of the study. The research problem and statement of purpose with research questions follows. Definitions of key terms will
be identified. The chapter concludes with a discussion of Bolman and Deal’s four-frames framework (2013), the theoretical lens through which the study was conducted.

**Context and Background**

**The community college.** A uniquely North American institution, community colleges from the outset have focused on college-level workforce training. The oldest community college in America, Joliet Junior College, was founded in 1901 to meet the needs of the emerging technical workforce of the early twentieth century. By the 1960s, community colleges evolved into the contemporary, comprehensive community college, providing students pathways to transfer to a four-year baccalaureate program; non-credit enrichment programs; vocational and career education and training programs for business and industry (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005). Nearly one million baby boomers, the first American generation to view college as a necessity, attended community colleges in the 1960s and 1970s, sparking an unprecedented increase in the growth rate of nearly one new institution per week (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005). Today, community colleges educate more than 40 percent of American college students and have grown at a faster rate than four-year institutions (*Crisis and opportunity*, 2013). Given a historical commitment to open access, they also educate a disproportionate percentage of minority and first-generation students (*Crisis and opportunity*, 2013). Phillippe and Sullivan posit, “most Americans have a community college, brand campus or extension center within an hour’s drive of their homes, and they turn to their local college whenever they have learning needs over the course of a lifetime” (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005, p. 3). This high level of service to a local area and the focus on the local community is a unique aspect of these institutions (Vaughan, 1986).

**The leadership crisis.** The nation’s community colleges are in the midst of a leadership crisis (*Crisis and opportunity*, 2013; Boggs, 2003; Vaughan & Weisman, 2003; *Reclaiming the
American dream, 2012; Eddy, 2010; Shults, 2001). In 2015, the American Association of Community Colleges predicted a dramatic turnover in presidential positions with an estimated 50 percent (Hockaday & Puyear, 2015) to 80 percent (Phillippe, 2016) of existing community college presidents leaving office by 2025. Traditionally, the most common pathway to the community college presidency has been through leadership in academic affairs (Weisman & Vaughan, 2006). However, chief academic officers are also retiring at an increased rate (Weisman & Vaughan, 2006). Increased presidential turnover has exacerbated the challenges brought by the tsunami of generational retirements. In the most recent CEO survey conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges, the median tenure for CEOs was five years (Phillippe, 2016). This marks a decline from a median tenure of ten years in the 1980’s (Wyner, 2014) and 7.5 years in 1996 (Sullivan, 2001). Leadership turmoil arrives at a time when the sector requires strong change agents who can address the challenges outlined below.

**Additional community college challenges.** Contemporary community colleges face a number of immediate challenges, in addition to dramatic leadership turnover, that contributes to a sense of crisis in the sector. Primary among these is a reduction in funding (Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Eddy, 2010). The tight relationship between a community college and its community means that college funding models vary widely (Phelan, 2014; Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005). While there is some federal funding for institutions, the bulk of financial support comes from the state and local municipality, which can lead to unstable funding (Phelan, 2005). During the recession of the early 21st century, community college enrollment grew by 13.2 percent as unemployed or under-employed workers returned for career advancement and traditional-aged students sought a less expensive start to a baccalaureate degree (Phelan, 2014). At the same time, state and local support fell dramatically (Phelan, 2014). Even without a single funding
model, more states expect community college tuition and fees to cover a greater proportion of operating expenses (Phelan, 2014). This marks a dramatic adjustment in the historic mission of almost all community colleges, which places great emphasis on the community college as a low cost, educational alternative (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005).

The reduction in state and local funding has also brought an increased focus on student outcomes and institutional performance (Lahr, Pheatt, Dougherty, Jones, Natow & Reddy, 2014). Initially performance-based funding models allowed state governments to provide small “bonus” incentives to improve outcomes or increase efficiencies (Lahr et al., 2014). In recent years, this has evolved to programs where base funding is decided by key performance indicators (Lahr et al., 2014). This is problematic, given the fact that while access has expanded; graduation rates have not. Community college completion and transfer rates remain less than 40 percent (Wyner, 2014). The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) has gone so far as to state, “student success rates are unacceptably low” while employment preparation “is inadequately connected to job market needs” (Reclaiming the American dream, 2012, p. 9). In short, community colleges “must deliver significantly more degrees of higher quality at a lower per-pupil cost” (Wyner, 2014, p. 2).

Finally, it is important to note that comprehensive community colleges have historically managed tremendous diversity in both course offerings and the student body (Wyner, 2014). Programs that facilitate transfer are often similar to traditional liberal arts programs. Simultaneously, a comprehensive community college also provides adult basic education courses (e.g. GED prep) or vocational training (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005). Rather than having a single mission, community colleges offer highly fragmented product lines that equate, in reality, to one
organization having multiple missions (Wyner, 2014). This division adds increased complexity to the pressure to improve student outcomes while keeping costs low.

Rationale and Significance

This leadership crisis has prompted a significant amount of research into the knowledge, skills and abilities required of the next generation of community college presidents (Vaughan & Weisman, 2003; Hammons & Keller, 1990; McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011; Plinkske & Packard, 2010; Boggs, 2003). Researchers have also considered hiring factors and presidential fit (Gnage & Drumm, 2010). Spurred by the leadership crisis, professional associations have made presidential leadership a top priority. For example, the League of Innovation in the Community College, a consortium dedicated to fostering innovation and organizational transformation, has focused its leadership development efforts on identifying and training the next generation of community college presidents (Hull & Keim, 2007). More recently, the Aspen Institute launched the New College Leadership Project, a research initiative to identify the attributes of college presidents who lead organizations with high student success rates (Wyner, 2014).

Significantly, current research neglects a very critical component. Wyner (2014), writing about the Aspen Prize for Community College Excellence, suggests that at a time when community college leaders must be strong agents of change, longevity is critical. To date however, there has been little consideration given to the factors that support presidential longevity. Finding and developing a new generation of college presidents will, at best, provide only part of the solution. Understanding the factors that support retention may assist Boards of Trustees to adequately assess the organizational landscape at the start of the presidential search. Presidential candidates will also understand the organizational climate that will lead to their
long-term success. Most importantly, executive stability will be vital to meet the challenges community colleges face in the 21st century.

**Research Problem and Research Questions**

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to describe the ways in which the structure, politics, human resources and culture in a community college on the East Coast support low presidential turnover and consistent leadership. The central research question was: What organizational characteristics influence community college presidential stability in an East Coast community college?

**Definition of Key Terminology**

**Community college:** (AACC Definition): “an institution that is accredited (or undergoing accreditation) by one of the six regional accrediting bodies and primarily offers the associate degree as the highest degree. A community college can also be a campus that offers the associate degree as the highest award but is part of a regionally accredited, baccalaureate-granting institution” (Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005, p. 175).

**President:** The chief executive officer of a college or entity.

**Theoretical Framework**

Bolman and Deal (2013) first introduced the concept of frames, or mental maps, in 1983. The four frames provide both a lens to view an organization and, like a map, a tool to navigate organizational terrain. The frames can be summarized as:

- *The structural frame* considers the “social architecture of work” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 66). This includes both the formal structure of an organization as presented in organizational charts and job descriptions as well as more loosely structured entrepreneurial endeavors. The core of the structural frame is built on how the
organization differentiates work by assigning individual roles and then integrates that work as a whole.

- *The human resource* frame focuses on “the relationship between people and organizations” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 135). A strong alignment between the needs of staff and the needs of the organization benefits both. Highly motivated and skilled staff are at the center of inquiry using a human resource frame.

- *The political frame* centers on the ongoing processes of bargaining and negotiation that occur among coalitions competing for scarce resources. Power and conflict lie at the center of decision making in the political frame. Far from being inherently destructive, this competition is necessary for organizational efficiency.

- *The symbolic frame* places the myths and values that mediate the meaning of work at the center of inquiry. Organizational culture, as represented by norms and artifacts, is considered the glue that binds the organization.

Central in Bolman and Deal’s (2013) research is the concept that each of the frames comes from a place of diverse organizational assumptions and leads to different organizational solutions. The four-frame model has been widely used as a tool for assessment in higher education (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Bolman & Deal, 1992; Bensimon, 1989; Thompson, 2000; Sullivan, 2001; Rice & Harris, 2003).

While initially used as a leadership tool and a means to assess leadership effectiveness (Bensimon, 1989; Bolman & Deal, 1991; Bolman & Deal, 1992; Thompson, 2000; Sullivan, 2001), the framework has been used as a tool to assess and diagnose organizations. Building on the concept that the four frames help leaders understand complex situations and organizations. Each frame represents a different set of assumptions regarding an organization, Rice and Harris
(2003) applied the four frames analysis to study a change project within a community school. They moved from using the framework to evaluate leaders to use the framework to assess an organization. For the same reasons that a multi-frame approach helps executives to better lead and manage complex institutions, applying the four frames can help researchers to more fully understand a complex institution like a community college.

More recently, scholars have used the framework as a tool to understand larger educational systems. Hodgman (2014) used a four-frame analysis as a tool to understand the for-profit educational leviathan, the University of Phoenix, and the for-profit higher education sector as a whole. Martin (2014) applied Bolman and Deal’s framework as a lens to complete an exploratory case study to understand the critical factors that support an unusually high number of women presidents at Maryland community colleges. Martin’s research illuminates the four-frame framework as especially well-suited for studying community colleges. Community college research scholars require tools that can assist in teasing out critical factors at complex organizations that meet a multitude of missions. More recently, Robinson’s (2015) case study of the Hawaiian higher education system’s successful implementation of a reverse transfer initiative designed increase community college completion rates by transferring credits after students transferred out focused on using Bolman and Deal’s political frame as the context for the study.

**Critics of Bolman and Deal.** Most criticism of Bolman and Deal’s framework centered on its use as a leadership tool. Fully leveraging a multi-frame analysis is a cognitively complex process. Palmer and Dunford (1996) questioned Bolman and Deal’s position that it is a skill that can be easily taught or broadly used. Palmer and Dunford recognized the frames as a powerful tool for analysis but raised questions regarding the underlying assumption that understanding and
knowledge necessarily leads to action. A leader may fully understand an organization via the four-frames framework, but still be incapable of instigating change or successfully leading.

Bush (2006) positioned the four-frames framework within the broad discourse educational management theory development. Bush argued that Bolman and Deal were strongly influenced by systems theory, and as a result, they assume that organizations are fundamentally stable entities. Bush questions that basic premise as an appropriate basis for a theory of management since organizations are not static objects. However, he supports the four-frames framework as a tool for analysis since he calls on a use of multiple perspectives to understand issues and problems.

Additionally, some critics take issue with some of the most basic theoretical assumptions of Bolman and Deal’s research. Palmer and Dunford (1996) cite the failures of a social constructivist approach, for its emphasis on language and interpretation in constructing organizational life. They see the framework as enabling a situation where, “every problem every constraint potentially becomes a trap of interpretation, images and frames” (Palmer & Dunford, 1996, p. 22). Maxcy (1995) finds fault with the “schizophrenic posture” of the four-frames as a leadership vehicle. For him, Bolman and Deal’s premise that there is such a phenomenon of “real” leadership that can be explained objectively and understood from that explanation is fundamentally flawed starting point. Differences in philosophical assumptions aside, even the most vocal critics acknowledge the framework as a powerful tool to assess complex organizations (Palmer & Dunford, 1996; Bush, 2006).

Rationale. In the fifth edition of Reframing Organizations, the authors suggest, “life in organizations is packed with happenings that can be interpreted in a number of ways” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 307). Each major organizational activity can be interpreted through each of the
four frames. However, multiple lenses are necessary to develop a full and robust picture of a complex organization like a community college. It is a framework that is particularly well aligned with a case study methodology that both enables exploration through a “variety of lenses” (Baxter & Jack 2008, p. 544) and recognizes the importance of context (Stake, 2005). Additionally, Bolman and Deal have a stated goal of contributing to “useable knowledge” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 14) and, therefore, compliment the author’s position as a scholar-practitioner. In much the same way that the author’s research is based on real-life issues facing those in the field, Bolman and Deal are driven by a desire to offer pragmatic tools for educators and leaders alike.

As the literature review in chapter 2 demonstrated, there is a gap regarding community college presidential retention. The four-frames framework provides an avenue in which to approach a broad range of issues related to community colleges from an organizational perspective. This is especially well suited to a qualitative study that strives to uncover new research and address questions not previously examined in the body of literature.

Leadership turmoil arrives at a time of unprecedented change for the nation’s community colleges (Wyner, 2014). The next generation of community college presidents will be called upon to improve completion rates (Reclaiming the American dream, 2012) while being held to an increased level of accountability with new funding models (Eddy, 2010; Wyner, 2014). As open access institutions, community colleges educate a disproportionate number of first generation students and provide a foundation of economic growth and social mobility (Reclaiming the American dream, 2012; Nevarez & Wood, 2010). As the literature in the next chapter indicates, assessing the organizational characteristics that support presidential longevity
and reduce turnover is an important component of meeting the mission of this important sector of the higher education landscape.
Chapter 2: Literature Review Draft

American community colleges are in the midst of a leadership crisis; (Eddy, 2010; Shults, 2001; Vaughan & Weisman, 2003). The American Association of Community Colleges predicts that by 2025, new presidents, due to impending retirements, will lead over 880 of the nation’s community colleges (Phillippe, 2016). Simultaneously, the average tenure for a community college president has fallen to five years (Tekle, 2012; Phillippe, 2016). Leadership turmoil arrives at a time of unprecedented change for the sector (Wyner, 2014; Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Eddy, 2010).

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to describe the ways in which the structure, politics, human resources and culture in a community college on the East Coast support low presidential turnover and consistent leadership. The central research question was: What organizational characteristics support community college presidential stability in an East Coast community college?

This literature review examined the research agenda sparked by the leadership crisis. A survey of the literature regarding the importance of the community college president, the impact of a declining tenure and the factors that lead to turnover were explored. The literature review will conclude with a discussion of the research on retention in higher education.

The Next Generation of Community College Presidents

It is important to position this project within the body of research sparked by the community college leadership crisis. The significant number of looming presidential retirements, coupled with a shrinking pool of qualified applicants (Jones & Warnick, 2012; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Vaughan & Weisman, 2003; Perrakis, Galloway, Hayes, & Robinson-Galdo, 2011; Eddy, 2012), have led community college scholars to focus, primarily, on
identifying the specific leadership qualities community college presidents need in the 21st century. In many ways, the leadership crisis could be viewed as a hiring crisis, as organizations strive to find strong candidates in a highly competitive market.

**Leadership competencies.** The skills needed to successfully lead colleges in the early stages of community college development in the 1950s, 60s, and 70s are not the same skills that are needed today (Brown, Martinez, & Daniel, 2002; Vaughan & Weisman, 1998). Given the budgetary and financial constraints, the next generation of community college presidents must, not only, be knowledgeable and well informed financial managers who are skilled at fundraising and building partnerships, but also have high ethical standards, be risk takers and innovators and be effective advocates and lobbyists (*Crisis and opportunity*, 2013). A successful president needs confidence, integrity, vision, technical knowledge, collaboration and sound judgment (Sullivan, 2001). An effective community college president in the 21st century will have to be an outstanding communicator (Brown et al., 2002).

In an often-cited research study in this branch of the literature, McFarlin, Crittenden and Ebbers (1999) tackled the question of how the preparation and selection of community college presidents could be improved by understanding what makes a president exceptional. The authors were driven by a desire to understand if there were “systematic differences between the backgrounds of ‘powerful, effective, and inspirational leaders’ versus the backgrounds of ‘ambivalent, risk-averting individuals” (McFarlin, Crittenden, & Ebbers, 1999, p. 20). They surveyed 975 community college presidents and compared the responses of exceptional presidents to normative presidents.

After surveying the literature on community college presidents, the researchers found nine factors of “exemplary” leadership were identified and included the following:
• an earned terminal degree,
• an academic concentration in higher education or community college leadership,
• a research and publication agenda,
• change agent training and preparation,
• previous career experience,
• a relationship with a mentor,
• a peer network,
• formal leadership training, and
• familiarity and experience with technology.

Based on these characteristics, the authors developed a survey instrument that was mailed to 975 presidents of community colleges and technical schools. Seven hundred and eighteen presidents responded. Using the peer rating method developed by Vaughn (1986) and later refined in McFarlin’s (1997) doctoral dissertation, the authors identified 96 of the respondents (13.4 percent) as “outstanding.” The remainder were labeled as “normative” (McFarlin et al., 1999, p. 21). The researchers found that outstanding presidents had held the position for an average of 13.9 years, which was significantly longer than the normative tenure of 8.83 years (McFarlin et al., 1999).

While much of the literature focuses heavily on the trait discussion, some researchers have extended the concept of presidential leadership. Roe and Baker (1989) distinguished management from leadership and called on Boards of Trustees to move away from presidential evaluations based on “intellectual and cognitive prowess” to an assessment of leadership capabilities (Roe & Baker, 1989, p. 14). Sullivan (2006) continued the discussion of soft skills in research that enumerated several leadership attributes which she called “tools” including:
perseverance, optimism and determination. While the research is clearly evolving to a more nuanced understanding of the complexity of presidential leadership with the inclusion of soft skills, the research remains very heavily focused on individual knowledge, skills and abilities.

In 2005, spurred by the scholarly discussions, the American Association of Community Colleges released the culmination of a two-year effort to build agreement around the key knowledge and skills needed for the next generation of community college presidents. The framework, “Competencies for Community College Leaders” identified six domains critical for leaders:

- organizational strategy
- resource management
- communication
- collaboration
- community college advocacy
- professionalism (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2005).

These competencies were later validated by research (Boswell & Imroz, 2013; McNair, 2010; Hassan, Dellow, & Jackson, 2010; McNair et al., 2011; Duree, 2007; Duree & Ebbers, 2012) and have become the starting framework to consider in hiring community college presidents.

Amey (2005) moved the discussion beyond a narrow idea of leadership centered on the individual. She articulated an approach to community college leadership that was focused on uncovering how administrators see the world and act when faced with challenges. Amey’s approach to leadership is grounded in individual interactions with the organization, inextricably linked with organizational culture. Amey argued that leaders drive culture formation as a deliberate process to establish values and clarify the organizational mission. For her, leadership
is a process and not a set of skills. Community college presidents need to be “cognitively complex thinkers” who know how to learn (Amey, 2005, p. 702). Amey’s research marks the point where leadership and the organization interact and overlap. Her work supports the idea that an understanding of the community college presidential landscape cannot be achieved through the skills of the individual alone. The efficacy of a president can only be understood within the organizational context. Amey’s work supports the approach that was taken in this project of using the four-frames framework (Bolman & Deal, 2013) to understand the nuances of the community college presidency.

**Leadership development.** The number of qualified candidates for community college presidencies is projected to fall short of the anticipated number of openings (Jones & Warnick, 2012; Reille & Kezar, 2010; Vaughan & Weisman, 2003; Perrakis et al., 2011). Therefore, it becomes imperative to train and develop leaders. Once the AACC competencies were validated as a framework for community college presidents, researchers considered the efficacy of various means of developing presidential competencies (McNair, 2010; Boswell & Imroz, 2013; Hassan et al., 2010). Duree’s (2007) quantitative study for his dissertation found the following to be important factors in developing the competencies outlined by AACC: formal leadership development programs, peer networks and mentoring relationships. The sitting presidents included in the project identified a significant lack of preparation in organizational strategy, resource management, communication and collaboration skills. The research has challenged practitioners, particularly sitting community college leaders, to commit to develop the next generation of leaders from within the sector (Duree, 2007).

A critical assumption of the research is that the community college presidents are best prepared within the community college sector. In 2003, approximately 90 percent of new
community college presidents were hired from within the sector (Vaughan & Weisman, 2003). Jones and Johnson’s (2014) study of the 102 new community college presidents, who assumed office between 2010 and 2012, revealed that over 92 percent were hires from within the community college sector. There is reluctance, it appears, to hire leaders from outside the sector and that reluctance is growing. Community colleges are complex organizations, and it is a sector, as stated previously, that faces mounting challenges (Eddy, 2010; Nevarez & Wood, 2010). This is an important consideration for this project. It speaks to the fact that the competition to find strong presidents from within the shrinking pool of community college insiders will only grow in the years ahead.

McNair’s (2015) qualitative study investigated the strategies that eight new, first-time community college presidents in the California system found to be helpful in professional development. They identified three key activities: mentors, professional development activities and doctoral education to be important in pursuing the community college presidency. Half of the participants in McNair’s study left their position within two years. Two went on to other community college presidencies. Two did not. She observed, “regardless of the reasons for leaving the presidency after such a short time, their departures were unexpected and resulted in additional upheaval for the participant as well as the college” (McNair, 2015, p. 86). McNair’s findings suggest that retention of presidential candidates is a strategic imperative, and she suggests it is an area where research is needed.

**Conclusion.** The literature sparked by the community college leadership crisis is overwhelmingly focused on identifying, training and hiring the next generation of community college presidents. With a declining pool of qualified candidates and increasing demand for candidates to assume presidential positions, competition for qualified presidents will be fierce. It
is not surprising that addressing the most immediate need of hiring candidates has been the focus of the literature. However, recent research indicates that there is an alarming high turnover rate for new, first-time, community college presidents. To date, there has been minimal research conducted on retaining community college presidents. Presidential searches can be expensive and resource intensive undertakings (Howells, 2011). By addressing a critical gap in the literature, this project provides an important contribution to the scholarly discussion.

**The Community College President**

Now, it is important to take a step back and consider a very basic question that is a central premise of this project--do presidents matter? Certainly, the breadth of literature regarding the development and selection of community college presidents speaks to a high level of interest in this role among scholars and practitioners. This project requires an understanding of the unique role of the community college president and the impact of higher turnover rates on the sector.

**The significance of the community college president.** Robert Birnbaum’s (1989, 1992) influential research on the role of the college president suggests that ineffective presidents do not particularly harm institutions of higher education. However, Birnbaum’s (1992) intensive five-year study of college presidents and other academic leaders, also supported the idea that strong presidents do indeed matter for institutional effectiveness. How is it possible to reconcile these conflicting ideas? Further, what unique characteristics of community colleges impact the role of the president?

Birnbaum suggested that preparation, education and training leads to a presidential candidate pool that is competent in enacting the “instrumental” leadership (i.e. technical competence, experience and judgment) needed to run a complex organization (Birnbaum, 1992).
He argued that there was a baseline level of competence that made the impact of gross presidential incompetence of virtually no risk to an institution (Birnbaum, 1992). In the years since The Institutional Leadership Project was launched in 1986, search pools have become far less robust (Martin, Samuels, & Associates, 2004) as a result of a generation of retirements at all levels of community college administration (Jones & Johnson, 2014). Birnbaum’s premise that presidential candidates will have had a long and tested career climbing the professional ladder developing a resume with more complex and encompassing responsibilities does not hold up today. Indeed, the extent to which scholars and practitioners have focused on identifying and preparing the next generation of leaders, discussed in detail above, is a testament to the fact that Birnbaum’s assumption may be flawed.

It is important to note that Birnbaum also focused on a second kind of leadership, interpretive leadership. Interpretive leadership is “the management of meaning” (Birnbaum, 1992, p. 154). Interpretive leadership can only come from the president (Birnbaum, 1992). It is hard to sustain over time since it demands constituency support (Birnbaum, 1992). Most importantly, interpretive leadership is critical for successful change management (Birnbaum, 1992). Interpretive presidents are capable of bringing sense to chaos. They are needed in times of crisis (Birnbaum, 1992). Birnbaum claims that only exceptional presidents are able to maintain this type of leadership over time (Birnbaum, 1992). The challenges facing community college presidents, outlined in chapter 1, require strong, interpretive leaders. Birnbaum’s research supports the assertion that community colleges, in particular, require strong and skilled presidents.

When considering the importance of the role of president, the organizational structure of community colleges differ significantly from four-year colleges and universities. Community
colleges may have much larger adjunct faculty numbers and often lack a strong academic culture (Levin, 1995a). Levin (1995a) identified several reasons that community colleges are more conducive to managerial control and the role of the president carries far greater importance than at a four-year college or university including: a large commuter student population with fewer traditions and a structure that is adaptable and flexible to meet community needs.

Levin’s (1992) study of Canadian community college presidents is further evidence that the role of president in community colleges is strategically important for institutional success due to the president’s impact on public and government perceptions, decision-making and educational leadership. Community college presidents do not determine educational programs. However, their role as the communicator of institutional direction is a critical one (Levin, 1992; Levin, 1995b). This importance cannot be overstated, given the challenges community colleges face. As there is increased pressure on changing funding models (e.g. performance based funding), community college presidents will need to be strong and effective advocates within their communities as well as effective advocates with local, state and federal lawmakers.

**Presidential transition and turnover.** It has become evident that the role of a community college president is of particular importance. Due to this, it is important to consider the impact of presidential transition on the institution. For Birnbaum (1992), the presidential transition is a positive change for an institution. However, more scholars see presidential transitions as disruptive (Kirland & Ratcliff, 1994; Thompson, Cooper, & Ebbers, 2012; Kubala & Bailey, 2001; Levin, 1995a; Padilla, 2004; Martin et al., 2004; Robken, 2007; Sanaghan, Goldstein, & Gaval, 2008) and usher in a period of vulnerability for the institution (Floyd & Maslin-Ostrowski, 2013). New executive leadership often upsets organizational communications and standard operating procedures for the college (Kirland & Ratcliff, 1994;
Robken, 2007). Often, it leads to turnover in the executive team, which contributes to organizational instability (Padilla, 2004). Presidential transition may negatively affect fundraising (Martin et al., 2004; Robken, 2007). Transition costs, both direct and indirect, are significant (Martin et al., 2004). The impending exodus of community college presidents will heighten disruption and vulnerability for community colleges during a period of reduced funding (Nevarez & Wood, 2010; Phelan, 2014), increased regulation and greater attention to completion rates (Reclaiming the American dream, 2012; Wyner, 2014; Phillippe & Sullivan, 2005). In short, the disruption ushered in by presidential transition will affect most institutions at a point when they are already vulnerable.

Presidential transition is projected to increase; not only due to impending retirements but also because the length of time community college presidents hold office (tenure) is also decreasing (Martin et al., 2004; Padilla & Ghosh, 1999). In the most recent CEO survey conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges, the median tenure for CEOs was five years (Phillippe, 2016). This marks a decline from a median tenure of ten years in the 1980’s (Wyner, 2014) and 7.5 years in 1996 (Sullivan, 2001).

Increasing presidential turnover rates indicate both discontent on the part of presidents and that the job is becoming increasingly more difficult (Kerr, 1991). Community college presidents face tremendous pressure, which drives increasing rates of turnover (Kubala & Bailey, 2001). Martin et al. identify five factors that contribute to turnover: pressure to raise money; the pressure to do more with less; distance education; for-profit competitions and “de-professionalism” (Martin et al., 2004, p. 10). Tekniepe’s (2014) quantitative study of 101 community college presidents in 34 states identified four factors as contributing to presidential turnover: increase in political conflict, internal pressures, external stakeholder demand and fiscal
stress. Tekniepe found “push” factors (leading to dismissal) were more significant than pull factors—external opportunities for greater professional development—in driving turnover.

Kubala completed two surveys of new community college presidents (Kubala, 1999; Kubala & Bailey, 2001). The first study involved presidents appointed in a 21-month period, from 1995-1997 (Kubala, 1999). It sought information on the pathway to the presidency, motivation to seek the position and first impressions (Kubala, 1999). The study also included questions on the Carver Governance Model, which was recently embraced by the Association of Community College Trustees and the American Association of Community Colleges (Kubala, 1999). The study found the most common disappointment for new presidents centered on the financial condition of the college (Kubala, 1999). Kubala was surprised to discover over one third of new presidents were unfamiliar with the Carver Model and even where the president was familiar, most Boards of Trustees failed to follow the tenets of the model (Kubala, 1999).

The more recent survey of Kubala’s surveys indicated that the top disappointment for new presidents centered on “dealing with difficult people, a negative climate, hostility toward the administration and lack of cooperation” (Kubala & Bailey, 2001, p. 798). Kubala and Bailey (2001) suggest that this disappointment is rooted in governance problems. While significantly more (79.6 percent) new presidents expressed familiarity with the Carver model, only 11.9 percent of presidents surveyed indicated their organization followed the model (Kubala & Bailey, 2001), far fewer than the 18 percent who indicated they followed the model in the previous study (Kubala & Bailey, 2001). Kubala and Bailey opine that Boards know of the new standards and that the failure to comply “must be by choice” (Kubala & Bailey 2001, p. 803).

**Impact of declining time in office.** A reduction in the duration of a president’s term has a significant impact on the organization. Robken’s (2007) quantitative study of presidential
turnover found that shortened executive tenure limits the ability of the organization to respond to external forces like competition. Further, it limits a president’s ability to enact meaningful change (Robken, 2007). Leaders who see themselves as serving short-term tenures, will focus on short-term goals (Robken, 2007). As discussed in chapter 1, community colleges face a barrage of challenges. A reduction in state and local funding (Phelan, 2014); dramatic changes in funding models (Lahr et al., 2014) and poor completion and transfer rates (Wyner, 2014; Reclaiming the American dream, 2012) have contributed to increased accountability in the sector. Community college presidents must be successful change agents if the sector is to respond to these pressures successfully.

In one of the few studies that examined transformational change in community colleges, Kezar and Eckel (2002) considered the case of “Sunshine Community College” a large, multi-campus institution serving 60,000 students. Sunshine was moving from a teaching-centered institution to learning-centered one. The transformational change that the college went through increased completion rates, even in the short term, by 20 percent (Kezar & Eckel, 2002, p. 304). This achievement is impressive considering the fact that 90 percent of new students required some form of remediation. Kezar and Eckel (2002) drew two important conclusions that are applicable to community colleges today. The first is that change of a large magnitude remains particularly unfamiliar and disruptive in higher education (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). Additionally, transformational change takes time (Kezar & Eckel, 2002). It does not occur quickly. The magnitude of the change required by community colleges means that strong presidents with interpretive leadership skills are needed for a long duration.

**Conclusion.** Community college presidents who exit a position early may exacerbate risk and uncertainty for the college (Robken, 2007; Travis & Price, 2013). It will be harder for
an institution to manage change when turnover in presidential positions runs high (Robken, 2007). Additionally, shortened presidential terms will limit the ability of executives to respond to external sources regarding funding, completion and the regulatory environment (Robken, 2007). Birnbaum (1989) suggests that long-term presidents have greater institutional impact due to repeated and consistent effort. In short, presidential stability strongly influences organizational stability.

Searching for and hiring a college president is an expensive and strategically important task (Howells, 2011). The literature demonstrates the importance of avoiding a short-term president who is unable to focus on anything more than short-term goals. A new president brings inevitable disruption and conflict to college operations. The research also indicates the factors that contribute to the likelihood of a short presidential tenure. However, there is a gap in the literature regarding the factors that support stability in the presidential position of the nation’s community colleges.

**Retention in Higher Education**

The projected imminent retirements of baby boomers in the 1990s and 2000s sparked a research agenda focused on retention in higher education (McBride & Munday 1992; Dee 2004). While the early research predicted crippling employee shortfalls due to retirements by the 1990s (McBride & Munday 1992), an aging workforce continues to drive an examination of retention at both the faculty and administrative levels in colleges and universities. A dominant strand centered on job satisfaction has emerged as critical in retention.

**Job Satisfaction.** Locke (1976) defined job satisfaction as “a pleasurable or positive emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job or job experiences” (p. 1300). Failure to attain job satisfaction leads to higher instances of employee complaints, higher rates of
absenteeism and higher levels of turnover (Locke, 1976). The link between job satisfaction and retention has been broadly studied in higher education. A positive relationship has been shown to exist between job satisfaction and the intent of faculty (Derby-Davis, 2014; Lane, Esser, Holte, & McCusker, 2010; McBride et al., 1992) and administrators (Murray & Murray 1998; Murray, Murray & Summar, 2000) to remain in academia.

Within the confines of community colleges, McBride, Munday and Tunnell’s (1992) quantitative research study examined 10 job satisfaction factors and their impact on the intent for community college faculty in 11 southern states to leave their jobs. The results of the study were that five factors inversely affected retention: growth opportunities, salary, the actual work, the college administration and supervision. As satisfaction in each of these areas decreased, faculty were more likely to leave. McBride et al. also considered demographic characteristics and found that the longer a faculty member was employed at a college, the less likely she would be to leave (McBride et al., 1992).

Psychological factors are hard to control and manage. This led Dee (2004) to study structural variables, rather than the psychological factors that impact community college faculty retention. Focusing on constructs that can be modified or changed, the study examined: autonomy, support for innovation and collegial communications as factors influencing faculty turnover intent at a southern, urban community college. Only one of these factors was determined to be significant. Faculty who reported perceived support for innovation were less likely to indicate a desire to leave the institution. However, overall, faculty intention to leave was low at the college studied. The study presents a focused snapshot of the organizational factors at a particular institution.
There are strong parallels between the community college leadership crisis and the national shortage of nursing faculty, which has contributed to a national shortage of nurses. Lane, Esser, Holte and McCusker’s (2010) designed a qualitative study of community college nursing faculty in Florida based on Herzberg’s Motivation to Work theory that “hygiene factors” (e.g. supervision, salary, work environment, organizational policy and interpersonal relationships) do not create job satisfaction, but their absence can lead to dissatisfaction. Herzberg posits that motivation factors (responsibility, recognition, the work itself, achievement and advancement) more directly contribute to job satisfaction. While the study supports the premise that high job satisfaction can be used as a “predictor for intent to stay” in a role (Lane et al., 2010, p. 16), the researchers found that two hygiene factors—salary and supervision—were the most important predictors of job satisfaction. Only one motivation factor, the work itself, was significant.

Wang and Leisveld (2015) completed a quantitative study of nursing faculty using the 2004 dataset of the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty. The study found that monetary benefits profoundly influenced job satisfaction. Beyond that, the results were far more complicated. Using the same 2004 dataset, Mamiseishvili and Rosser (2011) found an inverse relationship between faculty teaching, service productivity and job satisfaction. Wang and Leisveld’s results on productivity and job satisfaction found this not to be the case among nursing faculty. Additionally, they found differences in job satisfaction among nursing faculty in other roles at community colleges and four-year institutions. Their research supports the fact that it is difficult, if not impossible, to generalize rates of job satisfaction across different roles and institutions in higher education.
There is a shortage of research regarding factors that contribute to job satisfaction among community college presidents (Travis & Price, 2013). Solomon and Tierney’s (1977) quantitative study of administrators from 22 liberal arts colleges found that presidents and vice-presidents of academic affairs were more satisfied than were lower level administrators. However, their work did not distinguish between these two very different roles.

Perrakis et al. (2011) studied job satisfaction among 602 college presidents from both community colleges and four-year institutions. They found that presidents who reported to Boards of Trustees were generally more satisfied with the presidential position than presidents who did not report to Boards. Perrakis et al. surmise that while the Board/President relationship can cause stress, “a functional and supportive Board-CEO relationship can be a source of stability and stewardship for the college and university” (Perrakis et al., 2011, p. 65).

Approximately 63 percent of the 1,655 community colleges in the United States are public institutions ("Community college facts," 2005) with Boards of Trustees publically appointed or elected. Public Boards are less likely to be supportive of presidents than private Boards (Korschgen, Fuller, & Gardner, 2001), which could also contribute to the pressure presidents face. In their study of the presidency, Vaughan and Weisman (1998) found that the two most important relationships for community college presidents are the relationships with the Board and with the faculty. They further identified this cornerstone for successful governance as necessary for “an environment that nurtures and values stability and continuity for leaders” (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998, p. 140).

**Conclusion.** The range of research results support the findings of the job satisfaction literature that turnover is a complex and multifaceted issue. While some research has focused on administrator intent to leave an organization (Ward, 1995; Murray & Murray 1998; Murray et
al., 2000), the overwhelming research focus on retention in higher education has centered on faculty retention (McKee, 1991; McBride et al., 1992; Dee, 2004; Thomas, 2008; Lane et al., 2010; Wang & Liesveld, 2015). The question of the president’s role and its complexity has yet to be considered in the research. Research provides some clues as to why presidents decide to pursue the role. Some research indicates why they leave. This project enhances the body of knowledge by uncovering some of the multidimensional factors that contribute to presidential retention. It may further lead to meaningful change for community college leaders.

Summary

American community colleges are in the midst of a period of tremendous change and transition (Crisis and opportunity, 2013; Wyner, 2014). Community colleges will be held accountable for student results in a way that they never have previously (Lahr et al., 2014). Future funding and survival will depend on the ability of leaders to transform the sector (Wyner, 2014). Given the extent of the change required in the years ahead, the role of president, traditionally more important for community colleges than four-year institutions (Levin, 1992; Levin, 1995b), will become even more important.

The impending, unprecedented levels of presidential retirements have sparked a body of literature that focuses on hiring the next generation of leaders. Research into the individual leadership qualities that will be needed to lead an institution through the transformational change needed have been well covered (McFarlin et al., 1999). However, hiring qualified presidents is not the only issue. The hiring imperative is exacerbated by the fact that there is a declining pool of well-qualified presidential candidates (Eddy, 2012; Jones & Warnick, 2012; Reille & Kezar, 2010). Further, the turnover rate, particularly among new community college presidents, is increasing at an alarming rate (McNair, 2015). Boards of Trustees will need to make every effort
to recruit presidents with the knowledge, skill and abilities needed to effectively lead community colleges. Once that leader is hired, it will be imperative to retain the president beyond the current median tenure of five years if an institution can expect to implement the changes required of the sector.

While the costs of presidential transition and turnover have been studied (Martin et al., 2004), there remains a significant gap in the literature when it comes to retention of community college presidents. The literature on retention in higher education, broadly speaking, makes it clear that it is impossible to generalize across roles within the sector. Research on retention in other sectors of higher education indicates that the factors, both structural and psychological, are complex and multifaceted.

The research cited above provides threads that should be followed when studying community college presidential retention. Sitting presidents identified communication and collaboration skills as under-emphasized in presidential preparation (Duree, 2007). Tekniepe’s (2014) study found that political conflict and internal pressure led community college presidents to leave their positions. Kubala and Bailey (2001) linked the disappointment of new presidents to a failure in governance. This was supported by Weisman and Vaughan’s claim that strong Board and faculty relationships are central to presidential success (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998; Vaughan & Weisman, 2003) and presidential stability (Perrakis et al., 2011).

In her essay outlining the unique job constraints of college presidents, McLaughlin outlines three dimensions of the role: “leadership answers the questions ‘what,’ management answer the question ‘how,’ and governance answers the question ‘who’ (McLaughlin, 2004, p. 6). McLaughlin believes the third is most important. She claims, “Presidents who do not know how to govern effectively will find their aspirations thwarted and their tenures short-lived”
(McLaughlin, 2004, p. 10). This is even truer for community colleges with their comprehensive missions and pressing external pressures (Amey, Jessup-Anger, & Jessup-Anger, 2008).

This case study endeavored to describe the ways in which the structure, politics, human resources and culture in a community college on the East coast contribute to low presidential turnover and consistent leadership. It attempted to demonstrate that strong relationships between the two most important presidential constituencies—the Board of Trustees (Boggs & Smith, 1997; Harris & Ellis, 2017; Boggs, 1995; Alton & Dean, 2002) and the faculty (Alton & Dean, 2002; Bernardin-Demougeot, 2008)—are vital to presidential success and stability. Further, this study will attempt to fill the gap in the literature that is both critical and timely.
Chapter 3: Research Design

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to describe the ways in which the structure, politics, human resources and culture in a community college on the East Coast support low presidential turnover and consistent leadership. The research design was driven by the central research question: What organizational characteristics influence community college presidential stability in an East Coast community college? This chapter presents the research methods that were used for this study. It includes a discussion of the selection of the method; the setting and participants; the procedures followed; data analysis; the study’s validity, reliability and limitations. The chapter concludes with a case schematic, a visual representation of the project.

Qualitative Research Approach

Understanding, rather than explanation, is the goal of qualitative research (Stake, 1995). Pursuing understanding is context driven (Flyvbjerg, 2006). It demands a grasp of multiple contexts: historical, economic, cultural and even time and space (Stake, 1995). Qualitative research is best suited to exploring problems that focus on meaning within a specific context (Merriam, 2001). This project, which sought to investigate a phenomenon that was not explored in the literature, (as discussed in chapter 2), was well suited to a qualitative research approach.

The history of case study research is rich and extensive. Its beginnings can be traced to the early twentieth century, with early anthropological research and Freud’s work in the field of psychology (Merriam, 2001). Yin (2014) points out that case study is an appropriate approach when the real-life, contemporary context is critical to the project. Further, it is an ideal approach when the boundaries between the context and the phenomenon are blurred (Simons, 2009) as was the case in this project. In educational research, there are three seminal authors that address
the case study research. They are Stake, Merriman and Yin (Stake, 1995; Merriam, 2001; Yin, 2014; Yazan, 2015; Brown, 2008). While each author has a different approach, they are unified by a common goal of interpreting the context through observations in the natural setting and rich documentation (Simons, 2009). This research project was informed by the artistry of Stake (Brown, 2008) and the practicality of Merriam (Yazan, 2015) but the methodology outlined in this chapter was driven by the rigor and process of Yin (2014).

Stake’s approach is not a methodological one. The case is, in his opinion, the subject of the inquiry (Stake, 2005). He acknowledges the process component but the ‘case’ is both the subject and the product of the project (Stake, 2005). Heavily influenced by ethnography and thick description (Stake, 1995), Stake is primarily an interpreter whose principal aim is understanding (Brown, 2008). Stake (1995) categorizes case studies as:

- **Intrinsic:** explores the case itself and its uniqueness is of primary interest
- **Instrumental:** provides insight to a larger questions
- **Collective:** studies several cases within the same project.

For Stake, a case study is, ultimately, “the consummation of a work of art” (Stake, 1995, p. 136).

Merriam’s approach is similar to Stake in that she placed great emphasis on the case as an object of study (Merriam, 2001). In addition, she focused on the description and explanation of the case (Merriam, 2001). She, too, is influenced by the thick description of ethnography (Merriam, 2001). Merriam identified the three qualities of case study as particularistic, descriptive and heuristic (Merriam, 2001). She differed from Stake in that she cautioned the researcher not to confuse the process of case study with the object study or the product of the project (Merriam, 2001). This led her to provide more direction in the appropriate design of a case study project. For Merriam, the theoretical framework provides the scaffolding required for
a meaningful research project (Merriam, 2001). She calls for appropriate sampling strategies and provides researchers with several data analysis approaches (Merriam, 2001). Merriam presented data analysis as the process that produces the interpretive narrative crucial to her approach (Brown, 2008).

Yin differed from Stake and Merriam primarily through his commitment to case study as a method (Yin, 2012; Yin, 2014). By outlining a clear set of systematic procedures and tasks to design a case, collect data, analyze data, and present the results of the study in a rigorous and methodical way, Yin addressed what he saw as a lack of credibility in case study research (Yin, 2012). Yin filled an important void and advances case study as a methodology (Yazan, 2015). His focus on objectivity and validity is a point of demarcation from both Stake and Merriam and is said to demonstrate a positivist (Yazan, 2015) or post-positivist approach (Brown, 2008).

In the fifth edition of Reframing Organizations, the authors posit that organizational life is rich with activity that may be interpreted differently (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Each major organizational activity may be interpreted through each of the four frames. However, multiple lenses are necessary to develop a full and robust picture of a complex organization like a community college. For Bolman and Deal, targeting individuals, while ignoring the larger system, simplifies problems (2013). For these reasons, a case study, a methodology that both enables exploration through a “variety of lenses” (Baxter & Jack, 2008 p. 544) and recognizes the importance of context, was an appropriate methodological approach for this research project. Case study as a methodology required the researcher to consider multiple sources of information including interviews, observations and documents.

Finally, it is important to note that while the literature has addressed the impending leadership crisis in the nation’s community colleges, most research focused on the training and
selection of the next generation of community college presidents (Vaughan & Weisman, 2003; Weisman & Vaughan, 2006; Amey, 2005; Strom, Sanchez, & Downey-Schilling, 2011). Presidential stability has not been directly addressed. Case study is a strong methodology for teasing out emerging issues (Stake, 1995).

This project produced a holistic description of the ways in which the structure, politics, human resources and culture in a unique community college on the East Coast support low presidential turnover and consistent leadership. This project illuminated knowledge, within a contemporary context, of the organizational factors that support a unique example of a community college with a long-serving president. In accordance with Yin’s protocols, the theoretical propositions, derived from the literature outlined in chapter 2 guided the study. Specifically, the case study endeavored to show that strong relationships between the two most important presidential constituencies—the Board of Trustees and the faculty—are vital to presidential success and stability.

**Setting and Participants**

It is important to note that for the purposes of this research project, the unit of analysis was the organization. The author was interested in developing a deeper understanding of the organizational factors that support presidential stability, particularly considering the expected level of executive turnover in community colleges over the next several years. Case study requires two levels of participant selection. The first is a purposeful (Merriam, 2001) selection of the organization. A community college located on the East Coast was selected as the site for this case study after written requests to several long-serving community college presidents explaining the purpose of the research, the levels of confidentiality and the impact for
community college practitioners. Pemberley College (pseudonym) was selected as the site of the study.

Pemberley College is a regionally accredited, comprehensive community college located on the East Coast. The college offers associate’s degrees that lead directly into careers, and/or lead to transfer to a four-year college or university. In addition, Pemberley offers a robust portfolio of non-credit, or continuing education courses. Pemberley serves multiple local municipalities some of which, but not all, have funding responsibilities for the college. The service area is primarily rural with some large towns. The current president is the second president in the college history and has served in that role for more than fourteen years. Further, he succeeded another long-serving president.

One of the key characteristics of the case study method is the use of multiple sources of information. Yin identified six common sources of case study data: “documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts” (Yin, 2014, p. 103). A table outlining the relevant data sources for this project as they pertain to the study protocol questions is attached as Appendix A. This project included open-ended interviews (Merriam, 2001) with nine key participants at the research site. This allowed themes to emerge and develop as is typical for case study research (Merriam, 2001). A second level of participant sampling occurred within the case to identify these participants (Merriam, 2001; Brown, 2008). It was critical to interview the president at the college site. In addition, a snowball sampling strategy was employed to identify eight additional participants from the administrative, trustee and faculty populations. In addition to interviews, the author observed Board meetings and reviewed available documents regarding the college structure, policies and meetings. Finally, archival information about the college presidency was considered.
Procedures

This single, holistic case was designed following Yin’s methodology (Yin, 2014). Following IRB approval, a letter of intent was sent to the selected case site. The letter outlined the scope and parameters of the study. It included the research questions, theoretical framework and study propositions. Once a site was selected, data collection began.

In accordance with Yin’s methodology the case study protocol shaped data collection. The protocol, a series of questions driven by theoretical framework served as the “mental framework” of the case and directed the researcher’s activities during data collection (Yin, 2012). For this project, the case study protocol questions were:

1. How does the organization differentiate and integrate work?
   Rationale: Bolman and Deal (2013) recognize that there is no single structural ideal for an organization. However, structures that align goals, strategy, people and the environment will be more effective.

2. How does the organization respond to the president’s individual desire for meaningful work?
   Rationale: Bolman and Deal (2013) suggest in the human resource frame that progressive organizations that support employee engagement are better suited to retain talent.

3. In a period where resources are scarce, what is the process to allocate resources?
   Rationale: Bolman and Deal’s (2013) political frame considers the organization as a political arena where coalitions form and reform. Considering the process of resource allocation will illuminate the political climate of the organization.

4. What is the emblematic order of the organization?
Rationale: The symbolic representations and rituals comprise the organization’s culture. This question will elucidate cultural elements that support presidential longevity.

One of the key characteristics of case study research is the use of multiple sources of information. This project included open-ended interviews with members of the Board of trustees and other participants identified through snowball sampling as discussed above. An open-ended interview was also conducted with the president of the college. Open-ended interviews allow for questions to emerge and develop (Merriam, 2001). Additionally, the author observed a Board meeting and reviewed available documents about the college and its structure and policies. Finally, the researcher considered archival information about the college.

Data Analysis

The data analysis strategy was influenced by the work of Boeije (2002) on the constant comparative method (CCM) as well as Thomas’ (2006) general inductive approach. The general inductive approach, in particular, mitigates the risk of leveraging an older theoretical framework (Kim, 2014). In order to limit the analysis to the scope of the project, the propositions derived from the literature and outlined in chapter 2 tightened the study (Yin, 2014; Rosenberg & Yates, 2007; Baxter & Jack, 2008). The author compared the data collected with the propositions. Rival explanations were explored. This iterative process increased the confidence in the ultimate findings of this project (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

The first phase of analysis centered on an inductive approach. Focused on the open-ended interviews with trustees, faculty and staff participants as well observations and a review of documents and archival materials, the inductive analysis required multiple close readings of the text (Thomas, 2006). The author read all interview transcripts, documents and observation notes carefully and closely. During the second reading, key passages identified as “code-able
moments” (Saldana, 2012, p. 18) were identified. At that point, open coding began (Merriam, 2009).

Open coding considered each passage in the text and labeled it with an appropriate code. The author focused on Saldana’s (2012) descriptive coding method and identified a word (noun), or short phrase that summarized the passage. The code was written in the margin of the document. When document coding was complete, the author wrote an analytic memo capturing initial impressions of the analysis and, in the case of interviews, summarizing the interview. After the first round of open coding, a code list was identified. During the second pass of coding, the meaning and appropriateness of the codes were considered in light of the code list. Described as axial or analytic coding (Merriam, 2009), this process led to an adjustment in codes as categories emerged.

A central concept in CCM is fracturing the data into small nuggets of information that are then compared across all data (Boeije, 2002). Third party software, MaxQDA was used to support the comparative analysis. Codes were isolated and compared and some categories were collapsed. CCM required the researcher to search for patterns and identify themes or categories (Boeije, 2002) across documents. To achieve that end, the author isolated and read each code separate from other text and yet juxtaposed with passages coded alike. In each case, the author considered the phenomenon captured by the code. Once each code was analyzed in isolation, it was possible to identify patterns across codes.

Following the completion of the inductive analysis, the author conducted an open-ended interview with the president. In addition to providing rich and robust data on the research question, this interview also provided an opportunity to test the themes that emerged from the
inductive analysis using a deductive strategy (Thomas, 2006). The inclusion of both inductive and deductive approaches served to strengthen the validity of the findings.

**Ethical Considerations**

In accordance with Yin’s (2014) recommendations, the author completed the following actions to protect human subjects. Prior to completing any observations on site, the author communicated why the site was included in the case study, the goal of the study, and ensured that her presence would not be disruptive to operations. Prior to conducting interviews, the author reviewed the informed consent process with participants. This included: 1) informing participants of their ability to withdrawal from the study at any point; 2) the purpose of the study; 3) procedures to protect the confidentiality of participants; and, 4) a discussion of the risks and benefits of participating in the study. A signed consent form was received from each participant.

A key ethical consideration was the protection of the privacy and confidentiality of human subjects (Yin, 2012). During the research process, the identities of participants were protected by use of pseudonyms. In addition, the name of the site was changed to protect the identity of participants. During the course of the interviews, the author occasionally reminded interviewees they were being recorded as a means of mitigating any possibility of deceit by omission (Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Data was stored in a secure location, accessible only to the author. Electronic files were stored on a laptop with password protection. Two copies of all electronic files were made. One back-up was stored on an external hard-drive. The second back-up file was stored on a cloud-based server. Back-up files were also password-protected. A transcription service, Rev.com, was used to transcribe interviews. Handwritten notes from observations and interviews were stored in a locked file cabinet for which the author has the only key.
Trustworthiness

Aligning with the writings of Merriam (2001), the trustworthiness of this study was ensured with rich, thick description of the case as well as triangulation of the data. Multiple data sources were used including interviews, observations, document and artifact reviews (Yin 2014).

Yin suggests that each data source used in case study research offers the potential for bias. During interviews, a participant may answer questions based on their own understanding and creation of reality (Yin, 2012). Archival records may reflect biases due to editorial decisions (Yin, 2012). However, the method mitigated these shortcomings by requiring the use of multiple data sources. This provided the opportunity to triangulate the data. As Yin posits the convergence of evidence establishes validity in the study’s findings (Yin, 2012).

Finally, the researcher employed additional validation strategies, as recommended by the key theorists. The researcher shared findings and analysis with the participants. Memos provided ample opportunity for revisiting questions and methodology throughout the research process (Yin, 2014; Merriam, 2001).

Positionality

My philosophical foundation has been rooted in the social constructivist/interpretivist paradigm as outlined by Ponterotto (2005). The approach was nominalist, anti-positivist, voluntarist and ideographic as Burrell and Morgan (1979) define. In essence, my goal was to understand an organization with long serving presidents as it is today. As an employee of a community college with a president who is long-serving, I am also deeply entrenched in community colleges and as such, find it difficult to be an outside, impartial observer. From a philosophical perspective, a case study methodology aligns strongly with the constructivist
paradigm where cooperation between researcher and the participant is an asset (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

This philosophical orientation raises the question regarding the alignment of case study methodology with the post-positivist orientation of Yin. I do not see a contradiction because as Stake suggests, “In our search both for accuracy and alternative explanations, we need discipline, we need protocols which do not depend on mere intuition and good intention to ‘get it right’” (Stake, 1995, p. 107). Stake fails to provide the procedures and protocols. Yin fills that void (Yazan, 2015).

This project centered on community college leadership, and my research examined a community college on the East Coast. My interest in the project evolved from my professional experience working in higher education and the wide range of very different organizational environments within the sector. I came to this question, in particular, through my experience as a community college administrator. I am committed to the historic mission of community colleges to provide open access education, at a low cost, including a commitment to serve a much higher percentage of first-generation and minority college students. I believe that respectable and stable leadership is critical for community colleges, precisely because community colleges make higher education possible for students who do not have the resources or opportunity to pursue a four-year degree.

My grandfather, an Irish immigrant, did not attend high school. He started working in a textile mill in Massachusetts because the family needed his paycheck. As a young man, he was given the chance to go to college, high school diploma notwithstanding. College led to law school. That opportunity dramatically changed his life and the effects ripple through my family
today. A college degree, in my opinion, does not simply change the economic position of an individual. It changes a family.

That is not to say that the rest of my identity (socio-economic, religious, race, cultural) impacts my identity as a researcher. I believe that these have greater potential to affect prospective biases more than others. An important step to mitigating this bias is to be sensitive to it (Merriam, 2001). It is important to reflect on how my personal experience has fueled my research. Once results were gathered, it was be necessary to be self-conscious about it in that critical second step where I am equally conscious of how they may impact my findings.

**Limitations**

Case study, like all forms of research, has its limitations. Many of these limitations are common to qualitative research, regardless of methodology. Case study has been faulted for subjectivity (Simons, 2009) and lack of rigor (Farquhar, 2012). However, the interpretation of the researcher is an essential element of the method. As Stake points out subjectivity, far from being a limitation to be avoided, is actually an essential component of understanding (Stake, 1995). As a qualitative researcher, the goal of this project was to seek understanding and specifically that which is driven by context (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Rigor can be attained through a logical and consistent methodology (Farquhar, 2012). This study, as discussed above, was shaped by Yin’s conventions, which mitigate this limitation (Luck, Jackson, & Usher, 2006).

Critics have also found fault with the failure of case study to provide generalizations from a specific case to the more general population (Yin, 2012; Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000; Simons, 1996; Siggelkow, 2007). However, it is important to note that generalization is not the exclusive avenue to knowledge creation (Flyvbjerg, 2006). Yin argued that while case study does not provide for “statistical generalizations” it does allow “analytic generalizations” (Yin,
This case study, with strong scaffolding and alignment between the theoretical framework and design, establishes logic that can be applicable in other contexts (Yin, 2012). The method and analysis outlined in this study coupled with a clear and transparent discussion of the findings (Farquhar, 2012) will allow future scholar-practitioners to glean understanding about community college presidential stability within the context of this project.

Summary

A visual map is a tool to clarify the case study and promote rigor (Rosenberg & Yates, 2007). The research methods that were undertaken in this project, as discussed above, are outlined in the schematic attached as Appendix B. The schematic displays the key concepts and theories underpinning the methodological approach to this project. With the methodological approach well defined and supported by the literature, the study, as outlined, produced a robust set of findings. These findings will be presented, examined and assessed in chapter 4.
Chapter 4: Findings and Analysis

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to describe the ways in which the structure, politics, human resources and culture in a community college on the East Coast support low presidential turnover and consistent leadership. This chapter presents the findings that emerged during the data collection process. Four themes emerged from the data collected in this study as relevant organizational factors that support presidential stability at Pemberley College (pseudonym). They were:

- Stability as a value
- Personal satisfaction
- Board supporting the president’s vision; and
- Significance of state and local politics

Presented below, the themes are positioned within a narrative description of the college. As outlined in chapter 3, the methodology for this study included both an inductive and deductive process in order to strengthen the validity of the findings. Following an initial analysis of the documents, artifacts, and eight participant interviews, the researcher conducted an open-ended interview with the president of Pemberley College. In addition to providing data on the research question, this interview allowed the researcher to test themes that emerged during the inductive analysis.

Pemberley College is located on the East Coast. It serves multiple local municipalities some of which, but not all, have funding responsibilities for the college. The service area includes both rural areas and some large towns. The current president is the second president in the college’s history and has served in that role for more than 14 years. Further, he succeeded another long-serving president. Brief descriptions of the participants who contributed to this
study are presented in general terms, including length of time in employment, in order to preserve the anonymity of the case site. Pseudonyms were used for all participants. Participants’ information is included in the demographic table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Current Role at the College</th>
<th>Previous Role at the College</th>
<th>Length of time at college</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Faculty member and academic program director</td>
<td></td>
<td>More than 20 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td>Chair of the Board of Trustees</td>
<td>More than 14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Vice president</td>
<td></td>
<td>More than 30 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lloyd</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Chair, Board of Trustees</td>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td>Approximately 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Faculty member and Department Head</td>
<td>Staff member</td>
<td>Approximately 6 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Owen</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Trustee</td>
<td></td>
<td>More than 14 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Vice president</td>
<td></td>
<td>Approximately 2 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Theme 1: Stability as an Organizational Value

An understanding of the culture of Pemberley College must start with its beginnings as a ‘college without walls.’ As outlined in the college catalogue, for nearly the first twenty years of its existence, Pemberley had no campus. The college leased classrooms and administrative offices at numerous locations throughout its service area. Several participants mentioned an artifact that was once on display at each location, a formal “proclamation” declaring the college’s commitment to its status as an institution without a campus. However, in the 1990’s, while still under the leadership of the college’s first president, 173 acres were purchased and construction began on what is now a large, nine-building campus. The campus, with its large architecturally consistent, post-modern classical buildings, plays a large role in Pemberley’s identity. Every interviewee who participated in the study commented on the campus. In some cases, it was to reflect on the physical representation of change at the institution. In many cases, an appreciation of the beauty of the campus represented the sense of pride in the college.

In addition to being prominently outlined in the college catalogue, this evolution from a college without walls to a traditional college campus environment was mentioned by six of the nine interviewees. Even for staff who arrived at Pemberley after the campus was purchased and developed, the college’s history is important. In the early years, the absence of a campus led to a
high degree of cooperation and collaboration out of necessity (Joe, personal communication, February 7, 2017). It is a value that continues to persist today. As Patrick described the environment: “We collaborate and talk” (personal communication, February 3, 2017).

**Subtheme: Appreciation for change over time.** Participants articulated a keen awareness of the dramatic change from a college without walls to a traditional campus environment. An awareness of this change permeates the culture. As Patrick stated: “I think there’s been so much change in a relatively brief period of time…You’re talking 20 something years and this has popped up” (personal communication, February 3, 2017). It was a transition that changed the organizational culture as well. Peter pointed out: “Through the construction campaign we were bringing people into the campus, and it was changing their culture as well, because they had a heck of a lot of independence when they were off campus” (personal communication, May 2, 2017). The high degree of change over time had actually been experienced by many of the participants in the study. In fact, Patrick, identified it as a contributing factor to the lack of turnover at the college: “I think part of the reason people don’t leave is because they’ve seen so much change” (personal communication, February 3, 2017).

**Subtheme: Familial culture.** The transition to a campus environment impacted how participants described the culture. As Ben summarized: “Everybody’s here on campus. Everybody’s close” (personal communication, February 2, 2017). That closeness is critical to the college culture. Five of the nine interviewees described the institutional culture as being, “familial.” As Ben stated succinctly: “The college culture is a family culture” (personal communication, February 2, 2017). The sense of family was demonstrated, interestingly, in the lunchtime norms. As Ben explained, “Walk through the cafeteria. You’ll see a VP sitting there with support staff. You’ll see them eating lunch together” (personal communication, February 2,
2017). As Terry went on to explain: “We enjoy a great deal of camaraderie and shared experience. We have a lot of really wonderful people. You build great relationships across other departments” (personal communication, February 6, 2017).

The researcher made three separate trips to the campus of Pemberley College during data collection. During each of those visits, there was an opportunity to observe campus interactions. Unlike many community colleges in the region, faculty, staff and administrators at Pemberley do not always wear name badges. Even without an outward identifier, employees greeted each other consistently with a, “hello” or questions about families or projects. These interactions support the statements shared during the interviews that staff enjoy a high degree of friendliness. What is more, it was clear to college employees that the researcher was a visitor to campus. On each of the three separate visits, an employee approached the researcher to provide an informal welcome or asked if they could provide assistance in locating a room or building.

The college cafeteria is located in the student services building on campus. Most of the tables in the cafeteria are rectangular two or four-tops. While the researcher did observe students studying, individually, over lunch, on a small, two-top tables, most of the tables were pushed together to accommodate larger groups of people in long rectangular tables very reminiscent of ‘family style’ dining. The researcher also observed members of the college community joining groups, eating at the long tables that echoed the descriptions of lunchtime norms that were shared during interviews.

**Subtheme: Retention.** One of the interesting characteristics of families is that voluntary ‘turnover’ is unusual. The lack of turnover at Pemberley is noteworthy. The president stated that overall retention rates are higher than other community colleges within Pemberley’s region, even as many employees, who have worked at the college from its founding, retire. As Joe
shared: “If you look around and see how many people have been here for 20 or 30 years, I think that says something about the institution… I think it’s a good place to work.” (Personal communication, February 7, 2017). Even among adjunct faculty, generally segment of the employee population with a high turnover rate, Pemberley has strong retention. Many adjuncts have chosen to remain at the college for over 20 years (Martina, personal communication, February 7, 2017).

Of the nine participants interviewed for this project, only one had been at the college for less than five years. Perhaps what is even more unusual was that at least two considered leaving but decided to remain at Pemberley. Peter, the president, considered leaving as did Joe, who was an internal candidate for the presidency when the job went to Peter. When reflecting on that decision, Joe stated, “They (the Board of trustees) got both of us…we’ve been a good team together.” While he considered presidential positions at other colleges, ultimately “I didn’t have that thing where I really wanted to be a president anywhere else and [Peter] and I got along, so I said all right” (personal communication February 7, 2017).

During the course of the data collection, Joe, a vice president, announced that he would be retiring after more than 30 years at the college. Peter described one of the preliminary interview questions asked of Joe’s successor: “At Pemberley we value stability, as evidenced by the fact that the retiring VP is [here] [more than 30] years. The president is only the second president in the institution. Tell us about how you see your role and your growth in this organization in the next five to 10 years” (personal communication, May 2, 2017). In essence, the question clearly articulates that the organization values stability and that it expects employees, particularly executive staff, to stay. The value placed on stability rises through to the Board of trustees. As Owen, a trustee, stated when describing the role of the Board: “You have
to get the right Board, so you can pick the right president *that will be stable for a long term*” (personal communication, February 2, 2017). A lack of turnover, or stability, is an organizational value that permeates and is articulated throughout the entire organization at Pemberley College. Stability is important to the trustees (Bill, personal communication, February 6, 2017) and is important to the faculty and staff (Martina, personal communication, February 7, 2017 & Patrick, personal communication, February 3, 2017).

In addition to a lack of turnover among staff, there is remarkable stability on the Board of Trustees. The college has seven trustees appointed by the governor to a term of six years. No limit exists as to number of terms trustees may serve. Three of the current Board members were trustees when the current president was hired more than 14 years ago. At the time of data collection, two trustees were serving in their first term. One of those trustees has since been appointed to a second term; one is still serving an initial term. This lack of turnover is a critical component to Peter’s successful tenure as president. As he, himself, pointed out, when “you hire somebody, you want that person to be successful. When the people who hired you are no longer there there’s not that allegiance to you.” (Personal communication, May 2, 2017). This was echoed by Bill, a trustee of the college who recognized the lack of turnover on the Board as a key factor in retaining a strong president. He stated: “I think, stability on the policy Board is helpful. I think that way the President can go about his job or jobs. Feel comfortable. Not worrying when the next shoe’s gonna drop” (personal communication, February 6, 2017).

**Subtheme: Mission focus.** Finally, the culture at Pemberley College embraces the mission of the institution. The mission statement, vision and values of the college were found in many publications reviewed as part of this study, including the college catalogue, website and current and historic strategic plans. Far from being only a slogan, the commitment to the mission
emerged as important to participants. Faculty shared their respect for the students who attend the college and persist even in the face of tremendous barriers. As one trustee pointed out, “Even the folks whether they're on the maintenance staff or they plow the parking lots, or whatever they do, it’s all about the student. I think there's a focus on who we serve and I think that's a healthy thing” (Owen personal communication February 2, 2017). As Patrick shared: “My associate, my support staff associate, she’s been there for 23 years. She bleeds Pemberley. She loves it. She doesn’t get paid a lot of money and she’s not high on the totem pole. She loves it. And there are a lot of those people there” (Patrick, personal communication, February 3, 2017).

Pemberley College presents an organizational culture with a strong commitment to the mission of the college. There is a narrative that places the dramatic change from a college without walls to a traditional campus college at the foundation of the college culture. The evolution of the organization led to “a tradition of improvement and innovation” (Owen, personal communication, February 2, 2017). Perhaps, most importantly, stability, or a lack of turnover, is an organizational value at the heart of the college’s culture that is articulated and enacted by members of the college at all levels including, the Board of trustees, faculty and staff.

**Theme 2: Personal Satisfaction Outweighs Economic Factors**

The commitment to the mission of a community college that infuses the culture as outlined above also contributes to a deep sense of personal satisfaction in the work at the individual level. A high level of personal satisfaction on behalf of faculty and staff emerged throughout the project. The current president explained: “I really enjoy this work. I’m passionate about it because I’m a community college graduate, and I really feel strongly about what I’m doing” (Peter, personal communication, May 2, 2017). As Patrick, stated the college community is comprised of “people very committed to the mission of what we do” (personal
communication, February 3, 2017). Building a campus from the ground up provided Joe with “a lot of gratification” (personal communication, February 7, 2017). Significantly, for this study, trustees interviewed articulated the importance of their role in ensuring the president’s personal satisfaction in his job.

The lack of turnover at Pemberley is noteworthy and, as outlined, above, is a critical value reflected in the organizational culture. When explaining why she thought the retention rate was so high among adjuncts, Martina explained: “I think it’s a little bit of a prestigious position to be able to say: ‘I teach at [Pemberley]’” (personal communication, February 7, 2017). Faculty also outlined a level of commitment to ensuring favorable and consistent schedules as factors affecting the high retention rates. Pemberley’s administration reflected a commitment to temporary and part-time staff. The intangible factors, like mission, prestige and satisfaction, emerged as consistently important to college employees during participant interviews. There was little discussion of financial incentives to remain at the college.

Subtheme: Compensation. Publically available salary data for community colleges within Pemberley’s region indicate that the size of the full-time faculty and the average faculty salaries at Pemberley at the time of this study are nearly constant with the pre-recession (2008) levels. In 2007, when comparing Pemberley to six other colleges of comparable size within the region, Pemberley had the third highest weighted average faculty salary. However, in fiscal year 2017, Pemberley had the lowest weighted average faculty salary. Many factors contribute to salary levels. According to archival college planning documents, during the recession, state and local support declined. During the recession, college (credit-student) enrollment increased. By 2017, the enrollment had fallen to levels slightly higher (less than 3 percent) than 2007 enrollment levels. Growth in enrollment, without growth in financial support from the state and
local governments, places great stress on a college. For example, growing enrollments can lead
to larger class sizes, which likely was a factor to increasing faculty salaries at other community
colleges in the region. However, faculty salaries at Pemberley did not keep pace with other
community colleges in the region. What is more, publically available regional data indicate that
the lowest salaries for assistant professors and instructors at Pemberley are below the lowest
band of K-12 teachers in the college’s service area. Assistant professors and instructors could
find greater economic compensation teaching in the K-12 sector and yet Pemberley’s retention
rates remain high.

During the course of this project, the Board of Trustees and senior administrators were
weighing implementation recommendations from an external compensation study. The study
was launched, at least in part, to feedback from faculty and staff on dissatisfaction with the
current salary scales (Patrick, personal communication, February 3, 2013). The college engaged
an outside consulting firm to review current job descriptions and salary scales in light of salaries
for other community college professionals in similar roles within Pemberley’s region. The
compensation study accounted for cost of living differences within the region studied, but even
factored into the analysis, the study found at least some of the positions at Pemberley in need of
an increased adjusted salary. This information was presented to the Board of Trustees at a
meeting observed by the researcher. The estimated financial impact was approximately
$500,000 for the following fiscal year if the recommendations were to be fully implemented.
The compensation study demonstrated the willingness on behalf of the college leadership to meet
the economic needs of faculty and staff. The president advocated for the need to close the
compensation gap and asked for support to bring salaries in line with industry standards. The
study, or more specifically, the need for the study, also indicated that economic factors might not
be only organizational factors that support a lack of turnover. Dissatisfaction with salaries had been raised to the level to warrant an external study and salaries were found to lag behind the market rates. Yet, the turnover rates among faculty and staff remain low.

**Subtheme: Presidential retention.** Peter, the college’s current president, also considered leaving the institution at different points during his tenure. When considering pursuing opportunities outside of Pemberley, Peter weighed economic factors rather than “emotional” ones (personal communication, May 2, 2017). However, when presented with opportunities beyond Pemberley, he ultimately decided to stay. One near departure received media coverage when another college announced Peter would be assuming the presidency. When he ultimately remained at Pemberley, media reports attempted to uncover the rationale for the decision. This coverage, while reviewed as part of the research, is described in general terms to protect the privacy of the case site.

Peter was one of two finalists for the presidency at another college. The other finalist was an internal candidate groomed to assume the leadership position. The Board of Trustees voted to offer Peter the presidency. The Board’s decision, while not unanimous, was quickly announced in the local media, prior to the finalization of the employment contract. The lack of unanimous support by the Board of Trustees for Peter’s candidacy was cause for concern. In addition, media coverage cited statements from the outgoing college president regarding his desire for a successor who understood the college culture, and who was well known locally. Finally, the internal candidate was well connected in local politics, having worked in the political arena prior to a career in higher education.

Ultimately, Peter decided to remain at Pemberley after the contract negotiations broke down. The fundamental issue identified by the media was a termination for convenience clause,
which essentially made the president an, “at will” employee. This, when added to the fact that it was widely known that Peter did not have the full and complete support of the Board of Trustees and that he had been chosen over a politically well-connected insider, made the position a high risk move. Pemberley, in contrast, offered Peter a higher level of job security and the full and complete support of the Board of Trustees. This decision again highlights that economic factors may not always be the most important when considering a college presidency.

It is clear that retention rates at Pemberley College are high. Contributing to this phenomenon is a high level of personal satisfaction in the work being done. The Board of Trustees, in particular, is concerned with the satisfaction of the president in his role at the college. Interestingly, this occurs despite salaries trailing colleges of a comparable size within the region. What emerged from the analysis is the fact that financial factors do not always dominate the question of retention. Even with the dissatisfaction among employees with the current salary scales that fall below other colleges, at least in some areas, Pemberley’s retention rates are high. In addition, although the president considered economic factors when considering leaving the college, he ultimately found non-economic factors, including job security and support of the Board at Pemberley more important.

**Theme 3: A Board of Trustees with lack of turnover supporting the President’s vision**

Many of those interviewed commented on the strong “chain of command” structure at Pemberley. Publicly available information indicates that Pemberley has fewer administrators than other colleges of a comparable size in the region. The college organizational structure indicates four vice-presidents, who report to the president, administer the daily operations of their divisions. Participants commented on the lack of interference by others in decisions within their purview in their department or division. Patrick, one of four vice-presidents, commented
that he felt confident that others would not meddle in his “sandbox” (personal communication, February 3, 2017). This clear sense of roles and responsibilities appears to support independence. Several commented that Pemberley does not suffer from micromanagers. Further, these characteristics of clearly defined roles and strong behavioral norms extend to the Board of Trustees.

As stated above, Pemberley College has seven trustees appointed by the governor for a term of six years. The governor considers the advice of state elected officials in making those appointments. During the data collection phase of this project, two trustees at Pemberley were currently in their first term on the Board. Trustees reside in the two municipalities with funding responsibility for the college. Four trustees are from one municipality. Three reside in the second municipality. That ratio is constant and does not change. No trustees represent the third, non-funding municipality in Pemberley’s service area.

**Subtheme: Board/President relations.** Both the president and the three trustees interviewed for this study commented on the strong working relationship between the president, other college administrators and the trustees. Far from being a result of chance, it is a status that the president has made a priority to develop over his time in office. As he stated, “Everything is about relationships, and you've got to take full responsibility for your relationship with your Board. They should too, but you've got to do it” (personal communication, May 2, 2017). To that end the president consciously seeks to cultivate a sense of “camaraderie and friendship” among the college’s vice presidents and the trustees (personal communication, May 2, 2017). One way that he accomplishes this is through a small, private Christmas party every year that includes the President in full Santa Claus regalia and the distribution of small token gifts to evoke funny moments throughout the year.
The strength of the relationship between the President and the Trustees was seen in a favorable light by the faculty and staff interviewed for this project. Several cited it as a contributing factor to lack of presidential turnover. “As far as what enables that presidential position stability, I think that [Peter] has a great relationship with our Board of trustees. I think our Board gives him a lot of freedom in terms of looking around, in terms of seeing what other schools do and bringing that back” (Martina, personal communication February 7, 2017). Martina’s observation also suggests that the relationship between the president and the Board supports a level of managerial independence that enhances his position.

**Subtheme: Board structure.** There was also strong alignment in conversations with the trustees and president about the Board’s role as a policy Board. Trustees consistently expressed a common understanding of their role to set the direction for the college but not become involved in the day-to-day operations. As Owen stated, “we don’t have to feel like we need to micromanage everything he does, and we’re not a Board that wants to do that” (personal communication, February 2, 2017). More specifically, at Pemberley, the structure requires the president to work directly with the Board chair, rather than with the Board as a whole. The chair, a two-year term, meets with the president to plan meeting agendas and discuss emerging issues. The Board chair is more informed and all trustees bring any issues or questions to the President through the Board chair. Trustees do not contact the president directly (Peter, personal communication, May 2, 2017). The Board handles business without standing committees. As Owen commented, that while there is a provision for ad hoc committees there is little need for them. Generally, they are used to support large projects like a presidential search (personal communication, February 2, 2017).
This structure, whereby the Board chair serves as a single point of contact for the president and trustees, strengthens the role of the chair. It also, as the president observed, provides a vehicle for a strong personal relationship to develop with the president and each trustee during their term as chair (Peter, personal communication, May 2, 2017). Interestingly it is a structure that may be better suited to a Board with little turnover among the trustees. Without term limits, either prohibited by policy or proscribed by tradition, long serving trustees will at some point rotate into the chair position and work in close partnership with the president.

Subtheme: Board norms. Given the lack of turnover among the trustees, it was not surprising to discover that the Board has strong and clearly articulated norms. As Owen shared, “I think when new folks come on they absorb that normative behavior of being able to disagree without being disagreeable” (personal communication, February 2, 2017). There is a strong drive for consensus. Owen went on to explain: “In fact, I can think of a handful of occasions where we’ve had to take a vote to settle an issue.” As Lloyd pointed out, they try to avoid “winners and losers” that will emerge from contested votes and therefore make finding consensus a priority (personal communication, February 6, 2017). Whether a result of the lack of turnover among the trustees, or strong personal relationships, the trustees interviewed for this project articulated a high level of confidence in the strength of their working relationships. As Bill stated: “We trust each other. Appreciate each other’s contributions” (personal communication, February 6, 2017).

Subtheme: Appointed Board. In addition to an emphasis on consensus and trust, the Trustees at Pemberley recognized the importance of holding no further agenda than the interest of the college. Both trustees and the president commented on the importance of an appointed Board as a critical component of the lack of turnover and by extension, a vehicle to bolster
Elected Boards, by their nature, bring trustees to an organization who have campaigned on a platform of change to enact (Peter, personal communication, May 2, 2017). This is diametrically opposed to the vision of the Pemberley Board of Trustees. As one trustee, Owen, explained the Pemberley Board sees their role as providing the stability for the president to execute his vision. It is not their role to manage the college. “It’s really we want to take his [the president’s] vision for the college and let him implement it within the guidelines of what our needs are locally” (personal communication, February 2, 2017).

**Subtheme: Norms in practice.** The Board of Trustees meets monthly and the meetings are open to the public. As part of the data collection process of this project, the researcher observed one meeting of the Board of Trustees. Many of the observations that emerged from the research memos and journal from that event support data that emerged from the participant interviews. The Pemberley College Boardroom is not large. Sitting at the Board table were the trustees, college president, college vice presidents, the executive assistant to the president, and representatives from the two municipalities with funding responsibility for the college. There were six chairs reserved for observers. The implication of a smaller observation venue is that not many outsiders observe Pemberley Board meetings. The researcher was the only observer on the day she attended.

The meeting the researcher observed included a long report from the president that addressed several issues contributing to a budget shortfall. While the subject was serious, the president’s report was striking for its conversational tone. The president did not read from prepared remarks but shared an update that appeared to be extemporaneous, with only suggested notes as a guide. He addressed the challenges, many outside the college’s control, that led to the shortfall, what could be done to mitigate the situation and the information that had been shared
with the faculty and staff at the ‘All Staff’ meeting. The meeting concluded with trustees pledging support for the president’s mitigation plan, as well as a verbal commitment from the funding municipality representatives. In those final concluding comments, it appeared that there was a high degree of trust from the governing Board and municipalities in the leadership of the institution. Specifically, it was mentioned that the college had not experienced a shortfall before and there was confidence in the president’s abilities. The positive tone of the interactions, as well as the transparent and collaborative approach, was an observable representation of the strong working relationship between the trustees and president that was shared during the interviews.

Analysis of the data collected during this study revealed Pemberley has a well-defined, “chain of command” structure that facilitates managerial independence. Roles and decision-making responsibilities appear to be clearly defined and adhered to. The data suggests the presence of a high degree of trust in articulated norms regarding collaboration. The president, in particular, places emphasis on maintaining personal relationships. This consistency extends across the organization and includes the Board of Trustees. A theme that emerged from the data is the Board of Trustees is comprised of members who have served the college for a long time and who bring a commitment to support the president’s vision rather than a personal agenda or platform is critical to the lack of presidential turnover at the college.

**Theme 4: Importance of State and Local Political Relationships**

During the analysis of participant interviews, a critical theme emerged from the data. Eleven percent of all coded segments, the most pervasive collection of codes, focused on the interaction between the college and the local community and the collaboration between the college and state and local political leaders. Fundamental to this discussion is an understanding
of the college’s funding structure. As outlined in chapter 3, Pemberley College serves and is funded, in part, by multiple local jurisdictions. While it also serves jurisdictions without funding responsibilities, for purposes of this project, the discussions are focused on the two municipalities with funding obligations to the college. More rural than urban, Pemberley serves a geography that is more conservative than liberal. However, it is important to note that local and state elected officials are a mix of both major political parties.

**Subtheme: Municipal funding.** The college’s archival strategic planning documents, outlined the funding received in 2001 from local municipalities (28 percent), from the state (35 percent) and from student tuition and fees (34 percent). The remainder of the budget was closed with endowment income, grants and private contributions. By 2011, the ratios placed a far greater burden on students (48 percent of the college budget) than the state (30 percent) or local government (20 percent). The remainder of the budget was met through grants, endowment income and private contributions. The decline in state and local support corresponded with a national recession. During the recession, Pemberley’s enrollment grew, as state and local funding declined, exacerbating the pressure on the college. Archival strategic plans outlined a goal of developing additional revenue streams as well as the need to equitably balance the funding formula.

Publically available funding and budgetary data for Pemberley College and the other colleges in the region reveal that the direct aid the college received from the state in fiscal year 2016 was a greater percentage of Pemberley’s budget than other colleges of a similar size. Pemberley’s direct funding, from the local municipalities, was a smaller percentage of the total college budget than other colleges of a similar size in fiscal year 2016. What is more, when comparing pre-recession data in fiscal year 2006 to the most recent comparative data in fiscal
year 2016, the increase in local municipal contributions to Pemberley was smaller than other comparably sized colleges in the region in terms of real dollars. In short, Pemberley does not receive the same level of financial support from local government that other colleges receive.

One potential reason for this lack of financial support is the shared local responsibility. As explained by the president and trustees, local funding is determined through proportional formula. Any increases to funding must be agreed to by both municipalities in accordance with the required ratios established when the college was founded. In essence, one municipality cannot unilaterally increase funding because that would require a comparable increase from the other municipality. Peter summed up the challenge succinctly, “The downside of it is that we don't belong to anybody” (personal communication May 2, 2017). The lack of a single responsible municipal funding source has presented challenges for Pemberley and they have lagged behind other community colleges in the region.

Another potential reason for the lack of financial support lies in the municipalities themselves. As Ben explained, it is important to understand that Pemberley is in an area that is fiscally conservative (personal communication, February 2, 2017). Without large cities or areas of dense population, municipal revenue is not as high as other areas of the region. Further, one of Pemberley’s funding municipalities has one of the lowest income tax rates in the region. Property tax rates are lower than many municipalities of a similar size and composition in the region. Pemberley’s location plays a role in its level of local financial support.

The college’s most recent strategic plan summarized the accomplishments since the last strategic plan. Eleven major grants were identified in the document as well as new fundraising initiatives. In addition, the college benefited from a locally enacted, “free community college program” by one of the funding municipalities. Pemberley is in a part of the country where there
is not widespread free community college. Securing this support from one municipality was a source of pride on behalf of trustees and staff alike (Lloyd, personal communication, February 6, 2017 and Patrick, personal communication, February 3, 2017). It was an achievement that one vice-president attributed to the president’s ability to work effectively with both political parties (Patrick, personal communication, February 3, 2017). The program attempted to resolve the funding challenges with scholarship support in a way that did not challenge the funding ratios from each county outlined above.

Subtheme: Board liaison. One of the more unusual consequences of Pemberley’s local funding structure is that each municipality has a formal “liaison” to the Board of Trustees. These liaisons are local elected officials and attend the monthly Board meetings at the college. They do not vote on matters before the Board but, as observed by the researcher, actively participate in the discussions. Pemberley’s president sees this unusual structure as helpful in advancing the financial support of the college from the local municipalities. Participating in discussions about enrollment, or the college budget in a ‘real time’ manner, has had the effect of developing strong local allies in the budget process (Peter, personal communication, May 2, 2017). In fact, in fiscal year 2017, the college faced a potential budget shortfall for the first time under the current president’s leadership. As observed by the researcher at the Board meeting, after a lengthy discussion regarding the causes of the shortfall and the steps taken to mitigate the impact, all trustees expressed their support of the college leadership and the president. In addition, the liaisons pledged their support in solving the problem—presumably with additional, supplemental funding to meet the shortfall. The president confirmed that he asked the local municipalities for the largest budget increase ever for the following fiscal year. The municipalities have supported the request (Peter, personal communication, May 2, 2017).
**Subtheme: State politics.** The importance of political relationships extends to the state legislature as well. As noted above, the governor considers the recommendation of local representatives to the state legislature when appointing trustees. As the president stated, “I really work hard as most of my colleagues do with all of our members of our delegation. Bring them in, have briefings, talk to them individually, work very closely with them during the legislative session as well” (Peter, personal communication, May 2, 2017). Trustees recognize the importance of their role in this outreach (Bill, personal communication, February 6, 2017) and the benefit to the college (Owen, personal communication, February 2, 2017; Bill, personal communication February 6, 2017). College staff who participated in this study also expressed an awareness of the importance of this aspect of the work of the president (Ben, personal communication, February 2, 2017). Further, they see this it as having a direct impact on decisions that better the college: “It is largely based on their [elected officials] trust in him [the president] and their relationship with him that’s been *built over many years*, Republican and Democrat. That’s the other amazing piece to me is that we’re able to get some things done that don’t match politically” (Patrick, personal communication, February 3, 2017). It has taken time for the level of effectiveness to develop and grow.

**Subtheme: Local community.** Due to the dependence of local funding, there is a great emphasis placed on the relationship between the wider community and Pemberley. As Joe stated succinctly, “Being out in the community…being collaborative has been one of our things. Of course, *that’s been the main thing*” (personal communication, February 7, 2017). Trustees recognize the president’s role in the community as critical. As Bill stated, “He [the president] is so well known in our community here. Being so engaged in so many different aspects of the
community. He would be sorely missed and difficult to replace” (personal communication, February 6, 2017).

The importance of the community in the operations could be seen in several of the college’s structures. In addition to the Board of Trustees, Pemberley attracts local community leaders to serve on two local advisory councils, 17 program advisory councils, and an educational foundation Board. The most recent college strategic plan listed 65 community members, including state and local elected officials, who participated in the strategic planning process at the college. An awareness of community impact permeates the college decision-making process. According to one of the trustees interviewed for this project, the sensitivity to the community is central to the budget and resource allocation process. “Exploring the impact in a community way, what the effects of cutting a certain program would be. We will discuss that” (Owen, personal communication, February 3, 2017). As Pemberley’s president summarized, “To me the most important thing for a college president is to be invested in your community” (Personal communication, May 2, 2017).

**Subtheme: College policy.** Pemberley’s president attributed much of his success operating within the state and local political environment to his request of the trustees early in his presidency to implement a college policy that prohibits the president from participating or contributing to any political campaign. Peter views any overt political activity to be highly detrimental to a college president. He observed, “If you’re going to have to give everybody something you’re still going to upset someone, you might as well give everybody nothing, and tell them you can’t. That’s been the best thing imaginable” (personal communication, May 2, 2017). This political neutrality has become even more important over time, as since Pemberley is in an area that has seen a significant political shift in party control. Several participants
commented on the political changes in recent years. As Peter observed, “it’s gone from blue dog Democrat to very conservative Republican” (personal communication May 2, 2017). The college policy that demands political neutrality has, in fact, been significant in preserving Peter’s tenure. He observed that he is aware of colleagues who lost their presidencies following a turnover in party control. As he summarized, “Bam they’re gone” (personal communication, May 2, 2017).

Analysis of the data collected at Pemberley College reveals the importance of strong community relations and local political support as critical for presidential success and stability. As Patrick stated to be a successful community college president, “You have to be political, you have to have a political awareness in the community and have the connections, on funding decisions for the college” (personal communication, February 3, 2017). The data that emerged from the research suggests that community colleges have a symbiotic relationship with state and local government driven, at least in part, by funding models. The dependence on funding from the local municipality intensifies the importance of community influencers, including state and local politicians. One of the strongest themes that emerged from this study centered on the role of the community preserving a community college president’s tenure. A lack of presidential turnover supports the strengthening of the relationship as well. In fact, the media coverage of the near departure of Pemberley’s president highlighted the other finalist’s strong relationships and long history with state and local elected officials. In that case, the local politics were against Peter from the start. Understanding this relationship is critical to understanding presidential stability.

Deductive Analysis
At the conclusion of preliminary inductive analysis, the researcher had three broad themes to test at the conclusion of the interview with the college president. The first theme centered on the organizational culture that placed tremendous value on stability. The president validated stability as an organizational value. He stated, “I’ve had a couple of thoughts that keep percolating as we’ve been talking, and it has to do with stability. It goes back to the stability of not just the president still being there, and the Board still being there, but the top administration being there” (Peter, personal communication, May 2, 2017). He went on to reflect, “I don’t have that hang up that other people do where I have got to have my own people” (Peter, personal communication, May 2, 2017). Bringing in a new executive team to the college was not a priority when Peter assumed the presidency at Pemberley. While it is unclear if stability was as highly valued within the organizational culture when Peter assumed the presidency, his decision to preserve retention rates, particularly among administrators provided an opportunity for the value to grow in importance. The president, by maintaining commitment retention, allowed the value to increase in importance.

The president provided validation and additional evidence to support the theme regarding the importance of the president/Board of Trustee relationship to his long tenure at Pemberley. He confirmed the initial finding that the lack of turnover at the Board level was an important factor to presidential stability. To that end, Peter also provided additional evidence supporting the importance of an appointed structure, rather than an elected Board, in advancing Board stability and a lack of turnover. Further, when the evidence regarding the strength of the Pemberley president/Board relationship was considered in light of evidence the president provided regarding his near departure, it became clear that the trust and “excellent working
relationship” between the president and Board played a significant role in retaining the Peter at Pemberley (Peter, personal communication, May 2, 2017).

Peter also validated and provided additional insight into the importance of cultivating and maintaining relationships with municipal and state political leaders (Peter, personal communication May 2, 2017). The foundation of that relationship requires first, a commitment to the local community. As Peter shared, “The reality is you’ve got to have roots as a president…Community college mission is local and you’ve got to be invested in your community . . .It’s a symbiotic [relationship]. It supports the institution” (personal communication, May 2, 2017). The data suggest that importance of the community/president relationship is particularly important at a community college with an appointed Board comprised of community leaders. Further, at Pemberley, with a more complicated funding model and multiple service municipalities, there are “a lot of different dynamics going on…but it’s important that you maintain those relationships” (Peter, personal communication, May 2, 2017). To that end, the additional information regarding the importance of the college policy prohibiting political contributions emerged. It is clear that from the president’s position, the local elected officials are allies in accomplishing the mission of the college.

The interview with the Pemberley’s president also included his reflections regarding when he considered leaving the college the reasons he has chosen to remain at the college for so many years. What emerged from those discussions was the importance of non-economic factors, including a commitment to the institution, the students and the community as well as the college’s commitment to the president. When this evidence was considered in light of the other data collected from the study, it warranted elevation as a primary theme as outlined above. While the non-economic factors surrounding retention did not emerge on a first analysis, similar
to the other themes presented in this chapter, evidence was present at all levels of the organization. In particular, documentary data provided strong support for this theme.

Summary

This chapter outlined the four themes that emerged from the study as relevant organizational factors that support presidential stability at Pemberley College. Three themes emerged from the initial inductive analysis that were validated in an interview with the college president. A fourth theme emerged following the interview with the president. The data revealed a consistency in each of these themes as evidence emerged in both interviews and artifacts. Of particular note is the depth of commonality among those interviewed. Faculty, staff, the president and college trustees each presented evidence to support these themes.

Stability was found to be a value that was central to the organizational culture of Pemberley College. There are unusually high retention rates among the administrators, faculty and trustees of the college. These rates persist even when data indicates that compensation levels lag behind other community colleges in the region, indicating that non-economic factors are important, particularly in the case of presidential stability. A strong relationship between the Board and the president played a critical role in the tenure of the president of Pemberley College. An appointed Board with clearly defined norms, and a high degree of trust and collaboration supports the Board/President relationship. At Pemberley, the Board of Trustees is unified in supporting the president’s vision for the college. Finally, driven by the community college funding model, state and local elected officials, as well as community leaders in general, play a significant role in the life of the college. For that reason, it is critical for the president to be active within the community, which in turn, breeds support for the college and the president.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations for Practice

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to describe the ways in which the structure, politics, human resources and culture in a community college on the East Coast support low presidential turnover and consistent leadership. The central research question was: What organizational characteristics influence community college presidential stability at an East Coast community college? Leveraging a case study methodology, the research project illuminated knowledge, within a contemporary context, of the organizational factors that support a unique example of a community college with a long-serving president. This chapter begins with a discussion of the findings as they relate to the theoretical framework outlined in chapter 1 and the theoretical propositions outlined in chapter 2. Each of the four themes that emerged from the analysis in chapter 4 will be positioned within the relevant literature. The chapter concludes with recommendations for practice and future research.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework and scaffolding for this study was the four-frames framework first introduced by Bolman and Deal in 1983 (Bolman & Deal, 2013). Initially, an approach to leadership, more recent scholarship has leveraged the framework as a tool to understand organizations (Hodgman, 2014; Martin, 2014; Robinson, 2015). The frames can be summarized as:

- **The symbolic frame** places the myths and values that mediate the meaning of work at the center of inquiry. Organizational culture, as represented by norms and artifacts, is considered the glue that binds the organization.

- **The human resource** frame focuses on “the relationship between people and organizations” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 135).
• The structural frame considers the “social architecture of work” (Bolman & Deal, 2013, p. 66). At the core of the structural frame is how the organization differentiates work by assigning individual roles and then integrates that work as a whole.

• The political frame centers on the ongoing processes of bargaining and negotiation that occur among coalitions competing for scarce resources.

Applying each of the lenses to data collected at Pemberley College served as a means to provide a clear and robust picture of the institution. Furthermore, using the theoretical framework as scaffolding for analysis allowed the researcher to see the themes emerge around the organization and remain focused on the central research question of this study. Three of the four findings presented in this study closely align with the theoretical framework.

The first theme, stability as an organizational value, provided a view into the symbolic order of Pemberley College (pseudonym). For Bolman and Deal, it is critical to consider the rituals, like the lunchtime dining norms at Pemberley, as well as the artifacts, symbols and values of the institution. The metaphors and symbolism that underscore organizational life at Pemberley helped the researcher to understand the college’s unique culture and identity (Bolman & Deal, 2013) as it relates to the research questions of this study.

The second theme, personal satisfaction outweighs economic factors, illustrated the human resources frame. Bolman and Deal argue that to fully understand an organization, consideration must be paid to bond between the individual and the institution (Bolman & Deal, 2013). This relationship is dependent on the alignment of individual needs with the needs of the organization. The juxtaposition of the high retention rates at Pemberley College, with the less competitive salary figures, supports the idea that there is strong alignment between individual goals and organizational goals. As Bolman and Deal suggest, further exploring the assumptions
regarding the fit between individual motivators and organizational needs provided powerful information regarding the institution.

The third theme, which focused on the relationship between the president and the Board of Trustees, illuminated a great deal about Pemberley’s structure and decision-making responsibilities, aligning with Bolman and Deal’s structural frame. Within this theme, data emerged around the structure within the college itself. With a lean administrative function, participants commented on a high degree of autonomy when making decisions within their area of responsibility. The clear sense of roles and responsibilities extended to the Board of Trustees as well. In particular, the well-defined role of the Board Chair both enhanced the President/Board relationship and the effectiveness of communications. Bolman and Deal do not offer a value opinion on worthy or effective structures; rather they advocate the use of the structural lens to provide and nuanced understanding of the day-to-day activities within the institution (Bolman & Deal, 2013).

When Bolman and Deal advocated for the use of a political lens, they did so because they saw understanding the bargaining and negotiations that occur within an organization as a critical component to understanding the institution as a whole. While several of the participants for this study shared how they compete for and allocate the college’s limited resources, this data did not emerge as particularly relevant to the study. Rather, it became clear that the broader emphasis participants placed on external political interactions was far more critical to understanding the college as a whole and presidential stability in particular.

There are a few reasons why. Historically, community colleges relied on a mix of funding from the state, local municipality and tuition and fees (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2017). However, state-supported funding for higher education
has fallen significantly in recent years. State support for colleges and universities is almost always a discretionary budget item, and therefore most susceptible to cuts by state lawmakers (Mettler, 2014). Between 1990-91 and 2009-10, state funding for higher education fell by 26 percent in real terms at a time when the costs were escalating (Mettler, 2014). The American Association of Community Colleges reports that state funding fell from 36 percent of community college budgets in 2008-2009 to 31 percent in 2014-2015 (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2017). Generally speaking, community colleges are some of the least well-funded institutions by state legislatures (Bowen & McPherson, 2016).

Community colleges are traditionally a low-cost avenue to college, with tremendous pressure to keep tuition and costs down. The results of this study suggest that for community colleges, the competition for financial resources is more pronounced and significant at the state and local level as budgetary support is decided. Therefore, the negotiation required at a legislative level, both at the state and local municipality, is more significant in understanding the organizational environment and more relevant to the central research question than the political machinations within the college.

**Theoretical Propositions**

At the conclusion of the literature review in chapter 2, two theoretical propositions were put forward to be tested by this study. The first, that a strong relationship between the Board of Trustees and the President is critical for presidential retention. This proposition was validated by this study. The second theoretical proposition suggested that a strong relationship between the faculty and President is also vital to presidential stability. This however, was not supported by the data that emerged.
Research discussed in chapter 2 outlined the president/faculty relationship as critical to presidential success (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998; Alton & Dean, 2002). More recently, research found that a negative faculty/president relationship to be a leading cause of turnover among community college presidents (Bernardin-Demougeot, 2008). There is also scholarship that indicated that a larger adjunct faculty population at community colleges makes faculty influence less powerful than at four-year colleges and universities (Levin, 1995). Indeed, more recent research posits that there are two forms of authority within higher education. Bureaucratic authority lies in the realm of administrators. “Professional authority” is held by faculty and rooted in the subject matter expertise of academic specialization (Eckel & Kezar, 2016). Given that faculty at community colleges are generally more focused on teaching rather than research, it is not surprising that professional authority is diminished. Further, as state legislators place a greater emphasis on performance objectives in making funding decisions, traditional shared governance models are weakened (Eckel & Kezar, 2016). The American Association of Community Colleges reports that 35 states have performance-based funding or are currently transitioning to that model for community colleges (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2017). Regardless of the funding models in place in Pemberley’s region, there is a national trend toward diminishing faculty authority in community colleges due in large part to increased state authority. The failure of the theoretical proposition surrounding the importance of the president/faculty relationship in determining presidential stability supports Levin’s (1995a) research that the faculty role is less powerful at community colleges.

**Theme 1: Stability as an Organizational Value**

Organizational culture “is a multidimensional, multifaceted phenomenon not easily reduced” (Schein, 2010, p. 91). The metaphor at the core of the organizational culture at
Pemberley College is family, which reflects an underlying basic assumption that places a high value on retention and a lack of turnover. The culture uncovered during data collection and presented in chapter 4, includes a high degree of warmth and friendliness, combined with a strong commitment to the mission of the institution. Additionally, there was a strong cultural consistency and alignment as reflected by Trustees, faculty and staff.

As outlined in chapter 2, job satisfaction is a critical component of retention in higher education (Derby-Davis, 2014; Lane, Esser, Holte, & McCusker, 2010; McBride, Munday, & Tunnell, 1992; Murray & Murray, 1998; Murray, Murray, & Summar, 2000). The findings in this study support more recent literature that indicates organizational culture can be an important dimension to consider in job satisfaction (Belias & Koustelios, 2014) and ultimately impact retention (Park & Kim, 2009; Zeitlin, Augsberger, Auerbach, & McGowan, 2014).

The warmth and friendliness that is a component of Pemberley’s family culture supports recent scholarship that “agency,” meaning the relationships with coworkers and supervisors, is an important component of organizational culture that supports retention (Zeitlin et al., 2014). The participants in this study viewed the college culture positively, suggesting an alignment between their own values, beliefs and the culture of the college. This congruence of values has been found to be a strong indicator of retention (Zeitlin et al., 2014) and shared loyalty (Chaney & Martin, 2017) in industries outside of higher education. Finally, the findings of this project also align with research on presidential tenure at liberal arts colleges found that the small, tight culture established at liberal arts colleges extended presidential tenure (Langbert, 2012). While not a liberal arts college, the family metaphor for culture at Pemberley echoes this notion of a small and tight culture and supports the idea that organizational culture is a key factor to consider when studying retention.
While there has been scant research on the role that organizational culture plays in higher education retention, research in other industries suggest it is an important factor. The values that were articulated by participants in this study were consistent throughout all the interviews. Stability and a lack of turnover were considered a positive component of culture of the college. This value was also reflected in high retention rates at all levels of the organization, including the president. It is clear that high retention rates are supported by a college culture that values a lack of turnover is a critical organizational characteristic supporting presidential stability.

**Theme 2: Personal Satisfaction Outweighs Economic Factors**

As outlined in chapter 2, there is a strong link between job satisfaction and retention that has been studied broadly within higher education (Derby-Davis, 2014; McBride, Munday, & Tunnell, 1992; Lane, Esser, Holte, & McCusker, 2010; Murray & Murray, 1998; Murray, Murray, & Summar, 2000). The variables in this research have varied widely. Since psychological factors are hard to control or manage (Dee, 2004), numerous studies have focused on structural variables that can be modified or changed. A common variable considered is salary (McBride et al., 1992; Lane et al., 2010; Wang & Liesveld, 2015; Kennerly, 1989; Marshall, Gardner, Hughes, & Lowery, 2016).

Much of the job satisfaction research is grounded in Herzberg’s Motivation to Work Theory (Herzberg, 1968), and considers the weight hygiene factors (e.g. supervision, salary, interpersonal relationships) and motivation factors (e.g. recognition, responsibility, advancement) play in job satisfaction. Herzberg himself argued that hygiene factors do not create satisfaction, but their absence can lead to dissatisfaction (Sachau, 2007). The research results in higher education have been mixed. In some cases, salary is critical to satisfaction
Compensation data indicates that Pemberley College lags behind other community colleges in the region. In addition, the current president considered the positive financial impact of other presidential positions before deciding to remain at the college. This data, when considered in light of Pemberley’s high retention rates, would support the idea that salary is a hygiene factor and does not weigh heavily on satisfaction. Indeed, the results from this project suggest that while administrators and staff voiced concerns about salary levels, their unhappiness has not reached a tipping point to impact satisfaction overall.

It is interesting to also consider this finding in light of more recent scholarship on presidential turnover that specifically identifies “outsized” salaries as a liability for a president as they distance the president from the rank and file (Bowen & McPherson, 2016, p. 138). Dennis’ (2016) quantitative study to predict presidential tenure lengths at liberal arts colleges found that presidents with higher compensation at the time of hire were less likely to hit a tenure point of ten years than those with lesser starting salaries. Dennis suggests that with a higher salary comes higher expectations, which could lead to being pushed out of the position or being courted by another college (Dennis, 2016). This recent scholarship, when considered in light of this study, may also suggest that if economic factors are the primary drivers to pursue a college presidency and the main decision factors to accept a community college presidency, retention is at risk. As discussed in chapter 2, there has been minimal research undertaken to explore the factors affecting presidential job satisfaction (Travis & Price, 2013). However, the results from this study indicate that financial drivers are mediated by other organizational factors like the environment, mission and culture for long-serving presidents and support Ekman’s (2010) claim (Lane et al., 2010; Wang & Liesveld, 2015). In other studies, it is not (Kennerly, 1989; Marshall et al., 2016; Jo, 2008).
that presidential satisfaction is rooted in the values of the educational enterprise, rather than economic components.

**Theme 3: A Board of Trustees with lack of turnover supporting the President’s vision**

A key finding that emerged from this study is the importance the Board of Trustees played in preserving presidential tenure. Trustees, in addition to valuing presidential stability as a component of the college culture, articulated the important role they play in that stability. The case of Pemberley College outlines several specific components surrounding Board composition, roles and relationships that can each be well positioned within existing literature regarding community college leadership.

**Board composition.** Sixty-four percent of American community college presidents report to a local Board, either elected or, as in the case of Pemberley College, appointed (Phillippe, 2016). Reporting to a Board, as opposed to a chancellor, increases presidential satisfaction (Perrakis, Galloway, Hayes, & Robinson-Galdo, 2011). Both the president and trustees at Pemberley cautioned against volatility elected Boards, which is supported in the literature (Kerr & Gade, 1986). Although appointed Boards can bring a degree of political chemistry that can limit presidential tenure (Smith, 2007). At Pemberley College, the political risk is minimized due to the high degree of commitment the trustees have in enabling the president to fulfill his mission and vision for the institution. Further, the fact that Board has a high retention rate with many long serving trustees at Pemberley is a critical component of the Board composition that also supports presidential tenure since the research indicates Board turnover can lead to presidential turnover (Boggs & Smith, 1997; Boggs, 1995).

**Board roles and responsibilities.** The clear demarcation of roles and responsibilities seen in other areas of Pemberley College extends to the Board of Trustees. There was strong
alignment among the trustees and president on the Board norms. Research suggests clear roles and common objectives are a characteristic of effective community college Boards (Boggs & Smith, 1997). Trustees articulated agreement around setting policy guidelines for the president, but not becoming involved in the day-to-day operations of the college. Indeed, they presented a commitment to supporting the president to enact his vision for the institution. While some scholars have identified a move toward micromanaging Boards (Boggs & Smith, 1997), Pemberley has bucked that trend which has contributed to presidential retention. Recent scholarship into local K-12 Boards (Tekniepe, 2015) and community college Boards (Alton & Dean, 2002) indicate micromanaging leads to executive turnover. The data that emerged from this case study supports the converse of that argument, namely that a Board that does not micromanage supports presidential stability.

Kubala and Bailey (2001) identified a failure in effective governance to be one of the primary factors that led to community college presidential dissatisfaction. The data that emerged from this study support the fact that effective governance bolsters presidential stability. The unified commitment that the Pemberley Board has demonstrated in embracing the Carver Governance model, which is promoted, by both the Association of Community College Trustees and the American Association of Community Colleges (Kubala, 1999; Doyle, 2009) is a characteristic that supports presidential longevity at Pemberley College. Further, rotating the role of Board chair cushions against a dominating trustee (Boggs, 2006). Indeed, some scholars have argued that a rotating Board chair strengthens the authority of the president by diminishing the power in the chair (Boggs & Smith, 1997). The clearly defined, and widely adhered to, roles within the college that follow a framework (Carver model) that is considered to be a best practice in community college governance is a key organizational characteristic of Pemberley College.
The norms articulated by the trustees at Pemberley, specified an expectation of collegiality and cooperation. Trustees may disagree, but as conveyed in chapter 4, they do so in a way that is not seen as argumentative or disagreeable. The fact they can work well together is a contributing factor to presidential stability at the college. When community college Boards struggle to work well together, the common result is presidential turnover (Boggs & Smith, 1997). The data at Pemberley also suggests that the relationship among the trustees is built over time. There is minimal turnover on the Board, with several trustees serving longer than the college’s long-serving president.

**Board-president relationship.** One of the most important characteristics that emerged from the data at Pemberley College is the importance of the strong relationships among the trustees and between the trustees and the president. It was a critical characteristic that explained the stability and lack of turnover in the presidency at the college. The findings support the scholarship reviewed in chapter 2 on the importance of a good president/Board relationship and critical to presidential stability (Perrakis et al., 2011; Boggs & Smith, 1997), but the findings of this study provide a more nuanced understanding of how that relationship can be developed and nurtured.

A solid, functional relationship between the president and Board is a key component of presidential stability (Boggs, 1995; Boggs & Smith, 1997; Bernardin-Demougeot, 2008; Perrakis et al., 2011; Eckel & Kezar, 2016; Harris & Ellis, 2017). In fact, it has been argued that there is “no substitute” for a strong Board/president relationship (Bowen & McPherson, 2016, p. 139). Not only was this evidenced by the data collected from Pemberley College, the president made the fostering of that relationship a key strategic objective. That commitment, especially in light
of research (Boggs & Smith, 1997; Boggs, 2006) and data from Pemberley, can be seen as a best practice for community college presidents.

It is possible to conclude that the Board/President relationship is a critical factor supporting presidential stability and a lack of turnover. While a commitment to fostering and nurturing positive communication was a priority for the president of Pemberley College, there are other components that should be considered. The Board at Pemberley is an appointed Board, with very little turnover and high retention rates among trustees. Further, there is a consistent understanding of the Carver Governance model (Doyle, 2009) and a commitment of trustees to follow a recognized best practice of community colleges in adhering to their role as a policy Board and removed from managerial decisions at the college. Finally, trustees themselves view the lack of turnover in the presidential position as a positive characteristic of the college and one that they have profound influence over.

**Theme 4: Importance of State and Local Political Relationships**

One of the unexpected finding of this study was the importance of state and local political relationships on the question of presidential tenure. While discussed broadly in relation to the theoretical framework above, the increased state authority in higher education, as well as greater competition for decreased funding, has led to college/presidential interactions to be vitally important to presidential stability, particularly for community college presidents.

The data outlined in chapter 4 indicate that Pemberley College has a greater dependence on tuition revenue as a percentage of the college budget than the national average for community colleges (AACC, 2017). According to data published by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC, 2017), this is largely due to less support from state and municipal agencies than the average community college. Bowen and McPherson (2016) argue that the
current crisis in higher education can be traced to this failure of government to adequately support higher education. At the very least, the funding pressures have made the role of the presidency a demanding position (Kerr & Gade, 1986). The dependence between the college presidency and political demands can trap a president and derail a career (Bowen & McPherson, 2016). Therefore, while political interference has been seen to lead to presidential turnover (Alton & Dean, 2002), presidents ignore the political climate at their peril. Higher education is a de facto segment of the broader political ecosystem (Marginson, 2011). The role of the college president is particularly important due to the impact the president has on governmental relations (Levin, 1992).

Longitudinal research into the presidential permanence in higher education found that presidents of public institutions, dependent on state and local funding, had shorter tenures by nearly three years than presidents of private, independent institutions (Smith, 2007). More recent research specifically identified that as tuition as a percentage of total the budget increases, community college presidential tenure declines (McNaughton, 2016). This helps explain the high turnover rates among community college presidents and the identification of a “leadership crisis” (Crisis and opportunity, 2013; Eddy, 2010; Reclaiming the American dream, 2012). It also raises the question about how to consider the data from Pemberley College, an institution with a history of long-serving presidents.

Community college presidents are often challenged by legislative advocacy (Schmitz, 2008). Data from this study suggest that a key component of presidential stability is a commitment to fostering a positive and productive relationship with local politicians. Not only did the president of Pemberley see this as a critical strategic priority, other participants interviewed identified this presidential task as fundamental to some of the more recent college presidents.
successes, like free community college. Further, local political support was a factor when the president considered opportunities at other colleges. One structural factor that emerged as important to garnering support from officials was the fact that funding municipalities had formal liaisons, as non-voting representatives at each Board meeting. This was identified as a critical element to improve communication and advocacy with those municipal officials who provide funding support to the college. The importance of this commitment to building political relationships is supported in the literature (Boggs, 1995).

While political activity is generally recognized as an important component of presidential responsibilities (Boggs, 1995), the president at Pemberley specifically identified a college policy that prohibits political contributions as a key organizational factor that has enhanced his tenure, particularly as party control has shifted in the locality during the president’s tenure. It is not uncommon for community college scholars to encourage direct support of candidates as a means to enhance political relationships (Boggs, 1995). The case of Pemberley College strongly cautions against this practice.

It is valuable to question whether it is fair to consider the local political relationships as an organizational factor rather than environmental factor. To answer this question, it is important to revisit the unique components that distinguish the community college sector. One of the distinguishing characteristics of community colleges is the high level of commitment to a local community and a local service area (Vaughan, 1986). It distinguishes community colleges from other post-secondary institutions. The role that the community plays in community college presidential retention is critical (Kerr & Gade, 1986; Weisman & Vaughan, 2006). At Pemberley College, community relations are a critical component of the mission, as evidenced by the high level of participation from community leaders in the strategic planning process and
several advisory Boards. While this may be an environmental factor for a private college, it is a critical component of presidential stability for a community college.

In summary, while tuition as a percentage of the total college budget has increased at Pemberley College, presidential tenure exceeds national community college averages. This suggests that management of the local political environment is both complex and multi-faceted. There is no single lever that leads to success in this area.

**Recommendations for Practice**

As outlined in chapter 1, the nation’s community colleges are in a period of leadership turmoil as a generation of college presidents retires. In addition to retirements, there is more turnover among presidents as the average tenure diminishes. The most recent estimate is that only 20 percent of sitting college presidents will be in place in seven years (Phillippe, 2016). Most community colleges will launch a presidential search imminently and large numbers of new presidents will be pursuing presidential positions. The findings from this study offer five broad considerations for both Boards and potential community college presidents to consider.

**Recommendation 1: Align personal and organizational values.** The organizational culture that emerged from this study placed a high value on stability. There was a clearly articulated expectation on the part of the trustees, faculty and staff that people would remain at the college for the long term. What is more, there was strong alignment between this value and individual values, which was demonstrated by the fact that participants who participated in this study saw stability as a positive attribute of the culture. The literature suggests that this convergence of values is critical to retention and satisfaction. Certainly, a commitment to retention is a vital characteristic for presidential candidates to consider. Beyond that, it is
important for presidential candidates to participate in interviews with an awareness of their personal values and how they may or may not, fit with the values of a potential employer.

**Recommendation 2: Weigh the impact of the existing Board structure.** The findings from this study suggest that a lack of turnover on the Board of Trustees supports presidential stability. While it is not always possible to predict trustee tenure, it is important for presidential candidates to consider whether the governing Board is elected or appointed, as well as institutional policies regarding term lengths and term limits. In addition, it is worthwhile to consider the broader political climate that may affect appointments. For example, local elections, with a dramatic change in political party control, could usher a turnover of an appointed Board. This assessment may provide valuable information regarding potential risks on the horizon for a new president.

**Recommendation 3: Maintain political neutrality.** The impact of local elections, and a changing political environment on the composition of a community college governing Board, makes it critically important for a community college president to maintain political neutrality. The data that emerged from this study demonstrates that an ability to work with elected officials from across the political spectrum is a critical component of presidential tenure. One way to accomplish this is to prohibit political contributions for all candidates, regardless of affiliation. Managing and fostering relationships with local community leaders is paramount, especially for new presidents. Finally, this study encourages both Boards of Trustees and community college presidents to ensure there are college policies in place to protect the political neutrality of the president.

**Recommendation 4: Implement governance best practices.** Additionally, this study supports the college governance best practice advocated by the American Association of
Community Colleges and the Association of Community College Trustees, the Carver (Doyle, 2009) governance model. Presidential candidates and Boards should consider if a clear demarcation between the Board role in setting policy, monitoring progress and approving decisions and the managerial responsibilities of the president exist. Further, the case of Pemberley College also highlights the importance of a positive working relationship among and between trustees and president. That climate of trust is another component of effective governance. All parties should make this an operational imperative but it is critical for a new president to foster a positive and collaborative relationship.

**Recommendation 5: Immerse a new president in the local community.** It is clear from this study that involvement in the local community, particularly with state and locally elected officials and community leaders, is critical for community college presidential success and stability. For presidential candidates and new presidents, managing and fostering those relationships needs to be a high strategic objective. Governing Boards should support new presidents in making these connections and building productive community relationships. Boards will also need to consider how the findings from this study influence national searches. New presidents from different regions or states will need extensive immersion into the community college environment in order to learn all of its unique characteristics. In addition, new presidents will have to develop relationships with key community leaders that will make them successful presidents in the long term.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

As discussed in detail in chapter 2, presidential stability and tenure has not been widely addressed in the literature. The work that has been done has identified elements of presidential dissatisfaction, rather than satisfaction (Travis & Price, 2013; Tekniepe, 2014). Case study was
selected as a methodology for its value in teasing emerging issues (Stake, 1995) and four critical issues have emerged to pursue in future research.

**Recommendation 1: Investigate the faculty/president relationship.** One of the surprising findings was that the relationship between the president and faculty did not emerge as a factor of critical importance to the central research questions for this study. Other research projects identify a positive relationship as critical for presidential success (Vaughan & Weisman, 1998; Alton & Dean, 2002). A negative relationship with faculty has been found to be a cause of presidential turnover (Bernardin-Demougeot, 2008). That research, in light of this study, begs the question of whether a positive faculty relationship is a hygiene factor for community college presidential stability. A more thorough understanding of the impact of this relationship, both on presidential retention and presidential turnover will better serve the community college sector during the leadership transition in the years ahead.

**Recommendation 2: Clarify the elements of presidential job satisfaction.** This case study of presidential retention illuminates areas for potential research regarding presidential satisfaction. It is clear that non-economic factors emerged as more important to satisfaction for the president of Pemberley College. While there is some literature that claims presidential satisfaction is rooted in the academic mission (Ekman, 2010), more research needs to be completed regarding the motivational factors of long serving presidents. Understanding the factors that influence a president to remain at a community college, rather than what pushes presidents to leave, will be critical to better understand the community college presidency moving forward.

**Recommendation 3: What role does culture play in retention in higher education?** There has been minimal research conducted on the role organizational culture plays in retention
in higher education. Again, much like the research on presidential satisfaction, work to date has just touched on characteristics of an organizational climate that drives a new president to leave an institution (Kubala & Bailey, 2001). While Langbert (2012) suggests that small colleges with tight cultures extend presidential tenure, a robust study on culture and retention in higher education has, to date, been neglected. There has been research conducted in other fields on the relationship between retention, value congruence and organizational culture outside of higher education (Zeitlin et al., 2014; Chaney & Martin, 2017). This study called attention to the need to consider a similar research agenda in higher education.

**Recommendation 4: Investigate the impact of performance based funding on shared governance structures in higher education.** As discussed above, some scholars have identified performance-based funding as a cause for the decline in the traditional lines of authority in higher education (Eckel & Kezar, 2016). This is based on an assumption of collegiate authority being, essentially, a zero sum equation. As the power of state legislatures increases, the power of college leaders and shared governance structures declines. Given that 35 states either have adopted or are in the process of transitioning to performance-based funding models (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2017), understanding the impact of these changes on the historical administrative structures within higher education is of critical importance to scholars and practitioners alike.

**Conclusion**

The central research question of this study was: What organizational characteristics influence community college presidential stability at an East Coast community college? The findings were grouped into four themes: *stability as an organizational value; personal satisfaction outweighs economic factors; a Board of trustees with lack of turnover supporting the
president’s vision; and, the importance of state and local political relationships. This chapter discussed the findings presented in chapter 4, in relation to the theoretical framework and theoretical propositions. The changing fiscal backdrop for community colleges with increased competition for limited state funding resulted in a the political interactions with state and local community leaders having far greater impact on presidential stability than initially anticipated. The fiscal environment also contributed to the failure of one of the theoretical propositions for the study. The data did not support the proposition that a strong faculty/president relationship is critical to presidential stability. While the increased control state governments have exercised in managing state-funded colleges and universities is a potential explanation, this is clearly a topic that warrants further research.

When considering how this project contributes to the body of knowledge regarding community college leadership, it is helpful to consider an analogy drawn from NASA’s deep space exploration, the Kepler mission, launched in 2009. The Kepler mission differed from the missions that preceded it by first identifying the characteristics that make earth so well suited to supporting human life. Planet size, distance from its star, internal energy sources are all critical characteristics of a “habitable zone.” This preliminary step changed the way scientists thought about planets beyond our solar system. In July 2015, NASA confirmed the finding of the first “near-Earth-size” planet, Kepler-186-f, within a habitable zone. Since then, NASA has identified hundreds of potential Kepler planets… and the mission continues (NASA website, August 6, 2017).

The most recent survey by the American Association of Community Colleges of sitting presidents indicates that 80 percent plan to retire by 2025 (Phillippe, 2016). As discussed in chapter 1, research has focused almost exclusively on identifying the skills and abilities needed
to fill these presidential positions (Vaughan & Weisman, 2003; McNair, Duree, & Ebbers, 2011; Plinske & Packard, 2010) as well as identifying, training (Hull & Keim, 2007), and hiring (Gnage & Drumm, 2010) presidents. This project was the first to consider the organizational factors that support presidential retention. Much like the Kepler Mission, this project sought to describe an organizational environment of a community college that supports presidential stability. However, as unprecedented numbers of community colleges seek new presidents in the near future, it will be useful to understand if a given institution lies within a habitable zone for a new president.
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Appendix A:

Six Sources of Evidence

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<td>• Organizational charts</td>
<td>• Change in faculty and staff headcount over time (growth)</td>
<td>• How is the college organized? Why was that structure chosen?</td>
<td>• Board meetings</td>
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<td>• College catalogue</td>
<td>• Change in average salaries over time</td>
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<td>• College strategic plan</td>
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<th>How does the organization respond to the president’s individual desire for meaningful work?</th>
<th>Documentation</th>
<th>Archival Records</th>
<th>Interviews (Questions)</th>
<th>Direct Observations</th>
<th>Participant Observations</th>
<th>Physical Artifacts</th>
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<td>• Media reports</td>
<td>• Did you ever consider leaving your presidency? If yes, tell me about this experience. Why did you decide to stay at [college name]? If no, why do you think your experience is different than the average community college president?</td>
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<td>• Press releases</td>
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<th>What is the process to allocate resources?</th>
<th>Documentation</th>
<th>Archival Records</th>
<th>Interviews (Questions)</th>
<th>Direct Observations</th>
<th>Participant Observations</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Strategic planning documents</td>
<td>• Media reports regarding legislative activity</td>
<td>• Could you describe the process to allocate resources?</td>
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<td>• Board minutes</td>
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<th>What is the emblematic order of the organization?</th>
<th>Documentation</th>
<th>Archival Records</th>
<th>Interviews (Questions)</th>
<th>Direct Observations</th>
<th>Participant Observations</th>
<th>Physical Artifacts</th>
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<tr>
<td>• College traditions</td>
<td>• Programs/documentation regarding college traditions (e.g. commencement, convocation, inauguration)</td>
<td>• Can you please describe what you think are the college’s meaningful rituals? What are the values of college?</td>
<td>• Office layout/locations Cafeteria</td>
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<td>• College mission and vision statement</td>
<td>• Press releases</td>
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| | Name badges; name tags | Signs/banners/decorations |
Appendix B:

Case Schematic

What organizational characteristics influence community college presidential stability in a Maryland community college?

Research Question

Structural Frame  Human Resource Frame  Political Frame  Symbolic Frame

Theoretical Framework

Setting: An East Coast Community College
Phenomenon: A long serving community college presidency
Proposition: Strong relationships between Trustees and faculty are vital to presidential success and stability

Case Study Design

Protocol

Documentation Review  Open-ended interviews  Observations  Artifact Review

Data Collection

Content Analysis  Content Analysis  Content Analysis  Content Analysis

Inductive Analysis

Data Reduction

Conceptual Grouping

Open-ended Presidential Interview

Deductive Analysis

Content Analysis

Case Conclusion