ABSTRACT

HUMMER, DOUGLAS ANDREW. Community College Presidential Change from the Department Leader’s Perspective: A Case Study. (Under the direction of Dr. Diane Chapman).

Academic department leaders are the least studied level of management in higher education, yet they play a fundamental role in transforming the vision and goals of executive leadership into reality (Gonaim, 2016). Academic department leaders play such a role because as a group, they influence the largest part of the employee population at a college; the faculty (Stringer, 2002; Tierney, 1999). Since the ability to create lasting change is one of the core qualities of a highly effective community college president (The Aspen Institute & Achieving the Dream, 2013), it is important to understand how the strategies, tactics, and actions employed by the executive leadership of an institution of higher learning shape the perceptions academic department leaders have of their workplace.

This study took a qualitative approach to understanding these perceptions during the first few months of new president’s administration at a large community college in the southeast US. A transcendental phenomenological (Husserl, 2004) lens and case study methodologies were used to collect and analyze structural and textural data to describe the perceptions and interpretations academic department leaders had of this presidential change phenomenon.

The case study itself provided the structural description, or context of the phenomenon, and semi-structured interviews were used to give voice to the academic department leaders that participated in the study. An analysis of the data revealed a number of themes that addressed the research questions asked in this study. These themes led to the following findings in this study. Listening sessions initiated by the new president and the hiring process that brought him to the college were identified as major influencing events in creating a positive impression of this new executive and his vision for the future of the institution. This positive impression is a contributor
to creating an organizational climate ready to accept change. Other themes that emerged revolved around executive leadership’s support, communication issues, the hierarchical levels of management, changes that were initiated, and the fear to speak up.

The findings from this study can be used by many community colleges as they hire new presidents and prepare for the changes new executives bring. The findings can also be used by any college approaching a major change initiative. The presidential change phenomenon will affect as many as four out of every five community colleges over the next 10 years (Phillippe, 2016). Presidential changes and other major change initiatives that community colleges experience will provide many opportunities to repeat this study and share the findings with others experiencing the same phenomenon.
Community College Presidential Change from the Department Leader’s Perspective:
A Case Study

by
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BIOGRAPHY

Doug Hummer spent most of his childhood in a suburban neighborhood near Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He played football in high school, sang in the high school and church choirs and excelled in his scholastic pursuits. Doug’s father was a third-generation college graduate with a bachelor’s degree in engineering. His mother began attending the local community college while Doug was in high school and earned a degree in nursing which led to a successful career as an RN. Doug graduated in 1980 from Washington and Jefferson College located in southwestern Pennsylvania with a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics/business management. A part of the mission of Washington and Jefferson College (W&J) is to graduate effective lifelong learners. Doug has exemplified this since his graduation. He worked as an Assistant Director of Admissions for W&J for the first year after earning his degree then stepped away from higher education to pursue a career in sales and marketing.

Doug’s one quarter century career in sales and marketing consisted of three phases; retail, consumer goods to retail, and service to manufacturing. Each phase meant learning a completely new industry, line of products, and approach to selling and marketing. Good challenges for a lifelong learner. During the last two phases of this part of Doug’s life, he not only focused on learning product knowledge and sales technique but studied things important to personal goals and success like how to raise, keep, and train horses and how to run a municipality. Doug’s daughter showed horses for 4-H and he served as Mayor of their borough for 14 years.

The early 2000’s brought some life changes to Doug. He divorced from his wife then remarried a few years later while dealing with a major health issue. Two years later, Doug and his bride moved to North Carolina seeking new career paths. Doug found an opportunity at North Carolina State University’s Industrial Extension, a part of the College of Engineering. His bride,
a nursing professional with an administrative background in gerontological care, began teaching at the collegiate level. While working for NC State, Doug decided to pursue graduate studies. As he reflected upon his past and researched the programs available at NC State, he was guided to the Training and Development program in the College of Education. Training and development was always a strength for Doug in his sales and marketing career. Doug began working on his Master of Education in the fall of 2010. His bride began pursuit of a Doctor of Nursing Practice at Duke University a year and a half later. Both celebrated completion of their degrees in May of 2015.

Mid-way through Doug’s M.Ed. experience, he was introduced to research by a colleague at work. Doug had led a successful 4-year change initiative at a local hospital in the area and his colleague suggested they investigate why it had been successful. This research led to another round of research to “dig deeper” to refine the findings. Research was exciting and there was much to learn. Doug applied and was accepted into this program during his last year of his Master’s studies. He flowed directly from a May graduation to an August start of his doctoral studies. He is not certain what the next phase of his life will bring, but it will involve work in higher education and helping others to develop professionally.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I did not make this journey alone. There are many that I need to acknowledge and thank for their support, encouragement, and guidance. This has been an arduous journey filled with joys, frustrations, celebrations, and sorrows. I could not have made this journey alone.

My wife, Debbie, completed her Doctor of Nursing practice at Duke University while I was completing my Master of Education degree at NC State. My Master’s degree took me five years to complete while working full time at NC State. As I completed my degree, I was accepted into this Ph.D. program. When I sought my wife’s opinion about pursuing this degree, she answered with a mantra she has repeated for the last five years, “You ought to get a doctorate, their great!” That aside, her support and encouragement has been second to none. I have lacked for nothing during this time and she has tirelessly proofread papers, offered insights, and motivated me to get it done and hit “submit.” Thank you, my bride.

My committee members are amazing. Dr. Diane Chapman, the chair of my committee, has advised and guided me through my entire graduate education. She has guided me like a curling stone down the ice, gliding me in the right direction, clearing a path for me when needed, and allowing me to find my way to the end of the journey. Dr. Donna Petherbridge launched me into my graduate career. I found her feedback on my very first graduate level paper so encouraging that I immediately decided to prepare for the GRE and apply for the Master’s program. When I shared that I had been accepted into the Ph.D. program, she immediately asked to serve on this committee. Dr. Gayle Greene has shown nothing but support an enthusiasm for my doctoral pursuits. She has gone so far as to solicit the assistance of our college president to recruit participants for this study. And, Dr. Jaeger has provided sound feedback, posed
challenging questions, and proposed future research while encouraging me along this journey.

Thank you, committee members.

I would like to add a special acknowledgement for Dr. Scott Ralls. Thank you for the support you have offered during the execution of this project. You sent an email encouraging the academic department leaders to participate and gave your permission to name you and Wake Tech in this document. Thank you for your support.

There are too many colleagues and co-workers to mention all of them. To all at Wake Technical Community College that have encouraged me, guided me, and put up with me over the last many years, thank you. This has not been a journey I have taken alone.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Academic department leaders, academic department heads and academic associate department heads are the least studied level of management in higher education, yet they play a fundamental role in transforming the vision and goals of executive leadership into reality (Gonaim, 2016). How this level of management in higher education perceives and interprets the communication and actions of a new president and his or her executive team has impact on how the vision and goals of a new president are received by an institution. Academic department leaders play such a fundamental role in the vision and goal transformation process because as a group, they influence the largest part of the employee population at a college, the faculty (Stringer, 2002; Tierney, 1999).

A report released by Achieving the Dream and the Aspen Institute stated one of the core qualities of a highly effective community college president is the ability to create lasting change (2013). Other core competencies of highly effective community college presidents identified in the report are the ability to develop a strategic vision for the college and responsibly manage the financial resources of the college. Since strategic vision and financial resources drive change, the community college president is integral to the continued success of a community college. Communication of a new president’s vision and goals to the academic department leadership is key to making them a reality.

Relevance of This Study

Community colleges are innovative and evolving organizations in higher education. They are constantly implementing changes in response to expanding workforce needs, reshaped legislative requirements, and competitors in the marketplace (Malm, 2008). This constant state of change requires strong leadership from the executive level (AACC & ACCT, 2018: Burke,
In 2016, the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) reported that one third of the community college presidents in the US planned to retire within five years, and four of every five community college presidents planned to retire within 10 years (Phillippe, 2016). This is not a new phenomenon. McNair (2015) outlined similar numbers from other reports and projections spanning back to 1998. These projections have been validated in North Carolina where the State Board of Community Colleges (SBCC, 2018) reports that of the 58 community colleges in the state, 35 have either changed presidents since 2014 or are seeking new presidents in 2020.

This appears as if it will be an ongoing phenomenon. According to a survey conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges, the average amount of time a community college president has been in his or her current position is 5.8 years (Phillippe, 2016) and 56% of the participants responding reported this as their first presidential appointment. The other 44% of community college leaders responding reported spending 2.4 years on average leading other community colleges. This represents relatively rapid, ongoing change in a position that is vital to continued success of a community college.

Since new presidents bring their own strategic visions to their new appointments, this will likely mean a change in direction for a community college. Some changes may be minor adjustments to existing strategies and tactics while others may be more sweeping, affecting larger programs and structures of the college. It is left to the new community college presidents and their executive leadership teams to develop strategies and tactics for successfully leading faculty and staff through the presidential change process and creating an organizational climate that is ready for any level of change a new president will bring.
The new president and his or her executive leadership team have some influence on the organization’s climate for change, but the leaders of academic departments play a fundamental role in this process. Academic department leadership, department heads and associate department heads, have the most direct influence on the largest employee population of the college, the faculty, in transforming the vision and goals of a new president and the executive leadership team into reality (Gonaim, 2016; Tierney, 1999). The following sections will provide an overview of the theoretical framework, purpose, significance, conceptual framework, and research methodology for this study.

**Theoretical Framework**

To understand the role academic department leaders play in an organizational change effort, it is important to grasp the nature and significance of these theoretical concepts: organizational structure for change and organizational climate. The following paragraphs will help to define organizational change and organizational climate, and touch upon the theoretical foundations that support them in the context of this study.

**Organizational Structure for Change**

Change in an organization can take on many forms: planned or unplanned, minor or major, management driven or a product of the environment, and revolutionary or evolutionary (Burke, 2011). In most cases, change is unplanned, environmentally driven, gradual, minor in nature, and readily accepted by the members of an organization. As previously discussed, new presidents bring new management styles and new visions for the future of the college. This can mean major changes in organizational structure and focus that is management driven.

This level of change is defined by Kimberly and Nielsen (as cited in Burke, 2011, p. 122) as a third-order change since it will have influence at the organizational level. Third order change
generally affects organizational climate and employee motivation. Since organizational change happens at the individual level (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2008; George & Jones, 2001; Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2013; Weiner, 2009), it is important that each employee perceives an organizational climate that is supportive of the changes that may come.

There is a direct link between the relationship an employee has with his or her immediate supervisor and the organizational climate they perceive (Stringer, 2002; Tierney, 1999). An organizational climate demonstrating a readiness for change begins with the individual (Bercowitz & Feldman, 2008; George & Jones, 2001; Rafferty et al., 2013) and will be more highly influenced by relationships with local leadership than by executive leadership actions. Local leadership is defined as a person’s immediate supervisor. In the case of faculty, this is their academic department leadership.

Faculty make up the largest portion of the employee population in most colleges. The traditional organizational structure utilized by community colleges places faculty in departments defined by academic discipline. That gives leadership at the academic department level the greatest influence on how the largest portion of the employee population will perceive the vision and actions of a new president and his or her executive team. The local leadership for each of these academic departments is usually provided by academic department heads and associate academic department heads. This is why the role of the academic department leader is such a fundamental part of any organizational change process.

**Organizational Climate**

Organizational climate is an important concept to consider in as much as it can affect the success of a planned, third-order organizational change initiative. Walker (1981) says that …
… the climate in a college organization constitutes a critical factor in its capacity for productive change. Attitudes regarding the need and potential for adaptation, along with the degree to which innovative efforts are acknowledged and rewarded, are indicators of the climate for change (p. 23).

Burke and Litwin (1992) say we look at organizational climate for the cause-effect model it presents. It is especially important to recognize that organizational climate is temporal, subject to direct control, and “… largely limited to those aspects of the social environment that are consciously perceived by organizational members.” (Denison, 1996, p. 624). Since organizational climate is a critical factor, an indicator, and can be a cause-effect model, it is a foundational concept in understanding the fundamental role academic department leaders play in transforming the vision and goals of a new president into reality.

Organizational climate has been studied for decades and is often included in discussions surrounding organizational culture. Most agree that organizational climate and organizational culture impact each other, but can be studied independently (Denison, 1996; Ehrhart, Schneider, Macey, 2014; Schein, 2010; Schneider, 1990). Organizational climate can be studied independently because it can be defined as a stand-alone concept. Benjamin Schneider (1990) defined organizational climate as the “…incumbents’ perceptions of the events, practices, and procedures and the kinds of behaviors that get rewarded, supported, and expected in a setting” (p. 384). More recently, Ehrhart et al. (2014) puts forth this definition that will be used for this study: "Organizational Climate is the shared meaning organizational members attach to the events, policies, practices and procedures they experience and the behaviors they see being rewarded, supported, and expected" (p. 69). This definition reflects a culmination of the research
on organizational climate and provides specific areas where a new president may affect changes in policies, practices and procedures across the institution.

When measuring organizational climate, researchers will generally focus on a specific topic or context (Denison, 1996; Schneider, 1990). This study helps us to understand how to create an organizational climate that is ready for the third-order changes that are needed when a new president brings new a strategic vision to his or her new appointment. Historically, organizational climate has been addressed from a business and psychology perspective, and measured with quantitative survey data (Denison, 1996). The goal here is not to attempt to measure organizational climate, it is to try to understand how to better support an organizational climate focused on a readiness for change.

For this study, qualitative case study methods like interviews, communication artifacts, and researcher observations were utilized for data collection. This gave the academic department leadership level of management, the opportunity to describe their perceptions and interpretations of executive leadership behaviors and actions that contribute to their organizational climate providing a deeper understanding of the lived experience of the phenomenon, and gave voice to the meaning they make of this presidential change and the potential organizational changes that come with it (Seidman, 2013). The communication artifacts and researcher observations will add context to better understand the phenomenon itself.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe how the strategies, tactics, and actions employed by a new president and the executive leadership of an institution of higher learning create and shape the perceptions academic department leaders have of their workplace. Focusing on the phenomenon of presidential change, I have taken a qualitative approach to discover how
academic department leaders perceive their organizational climate (Denison, 1996; James, L.R., James, L.A., & Ashe, D.E., 1990) during the early months of a new president’s leadership. I have given voice to this level of management through semi-structured interviews of academic department leaders that have experienced the phenomenon from the beginning of the presidential change.

Organizational climate is generally measured as the aggregate of perceptions shared by all employees of an organization (Ayers, 2005; Denison, 1996). The accepted measure of these perceptions is usually accomplished via a survey instrument utilizing questions designed to fit a Likert scale. New presidents and the executive leadership teams of higher education institutions use this type of quantitative assessment of their organization’s climate to develop strategies, tactics, and actions for strengthening their institution’s readiness for the changes a new president may bring (Ayers, 2005). Although new presidents and the executive leadership teams are strategic in their communications and actions, local management, or an individual’s immediate supervisor, has the most direct influence on their perceptions of the organizational climate in their workplace (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2008; Ehrhart et al., 2014; Tierney, 1999). To create an organizational climate ready for the changes a new president brings, the new presidents and the executive leadership teams of these institutions have the most influence on a small portion of the overall population, their direct reports. This study looks at the influence this group has on the lowest level of management in higher education, the academic department leader.

Those that provide instruction, the faculty, make up the largest segment of the population in community colleges. Their workgroups are divided up into departments where academic department leaders provide immediate supervision and local management. Therefore, the academic department leader level of management has the largest impact on the overall
organizational climate and is the farthest removed from the direct influence of the new president and the executive leadership team. The academic department leader level of management is also one of the least studied and understood in higher education (Gonaim, 2016).

If a new president and the executive leadership team of an institute of higher education can gain a better understanding of how the academic department leaders perceive the president’s and the executive leadership team’s attempts to strengthen the organizational climate for change, they can adjust their strategies, tactics, and actions to be more effective. As many community colleges across the nation will be experiencing the same leadership changes in the near future, new presidents and executive leadership teams may be able to use the insights gained from this study to develop and refine their strategies, tactics, and actions to support change in their organizations.

**Research Questions**

This study answered the following research question and sub-questions through a qualitative methodology:

How do academic department leaders perceive and describe their experience surrounding a presidential change?

- What do academic department leaders describe as major influences on their perception of the presidential change process?
- How do academic department leaders perceive the impact of executive leadership support of the presidential change on the faculty they lead?
- In what ways can executive leadership support academic department leadership during a presidential change?
Conceptual Framework

To gain a richer understanding of the academic department leaders’ perceptions that contribute to organizational climate during this period of uncertainty, the research followed a conceptual framework that gives voice to the group of individuals with the most influence on an organization’s climate for change. Although the focus of this study is the influence of the new president’s and executive leadership team’s communication and actions on the academic department leaders’ perceptions, I also took into account the influence of organizational culture and the influence of an academic department leader’s supervisor and co-workers on their perceptions.

Figure 1.1 is a graphical representation of the conceptual framework that describes this research. The perceptions of the academic department leadership are the center of this study because they have a direct influence, as indicated by solid arrows, on the department level climate. The climate in each of the academic departments contributes to the organization’s climate which is why the department level of climate is shown as a subset of the organizational climate. This study focused primarily on the influences of executive leadership team, and the new president. But, the influence of organizational culture and the academic department leadership’s supervisors and co-workers are also important to consider. Note that the influences of the new president and the executive leadership team are connected by dotted lines because they can vary in importance for each individual academic department leader.
Figure 1.1 Conceptual framework.

Study Design and Methods Overview

Since the phenomenon of interest has been identified, the presidential change process, this research was approached through the lens of transcendental phenomenology (Husserl, 2004). This approach focused more on the descriptions and experiences of the participants than the interpretations of the researcher creating a "fresh" perspective toward our phenomenon through the lens of the academic department leader (Creswell, 2013). The descriptions and experiences of this phenomenon were collected during interviews with academic department leaders that are in the midst of a presidential change process. By focusing on a single case, the case itself played a supporting role in understanding the phenomenon; I have detailed activities and examined the
contexts and influences surrounding the presidential change process at this college. I have utilized case study research methods to record and describe the phenomenon and the context surrounding it.

When approaching this research through the lens of transcendental phenomenology, Creswell (2013) recommends that the analysis of the data utilize the systematic approach and procedural guidelines developed by Moustakas (1994). The phenomenon is described, and the personal experiences and views of the researcher are discussed later. The experiences and views of the researcher are set aside or bracketed out to focus on the experiences and perceptions of the participants exposing the essence of their experience (Creswell, 2013).

I have used a semi-structured interviewing process to collect data from a representative population of academic department leaders at this college. I am using artifacts such as news releases, college-wide announcements, email communications, personal communications, and researcher observations to detail the activities and contexts of this phenomenon.

**Case Study Research Methods**

To support this qualitative approach, I have used case study research methods to provide insights as to how academic department leaders perceive and interpret the actions and communications surrounding this phenomenon of presidential change. For this study, I selected a large community college located in the southeastern section of the United States that is in the midst of the presidential change process. Wake Technical Community College (Wake Tech) was chartered in the late 1950’s as an industrial education center and has grown into one of the largest community colleges in the Southeast. In their more than 50-year existence, Wake Tech has only had one Director and three Presidents. With the retirement of the third President of the college and the potential changes his replacement represents, this study looked at an organization
that is in the midst of an organizational change that is filled with uncertainty and fulfilled the parameters needed for this study.

**Description of the Phenomenon**

This study looked at the presidential change phenomenon as experienced by academic department leaders at this large community college. I will begin describing this phenomenon with the announced departure of the third president in the college’s more than 50-year history. During his 15-year tenure, the college experienced its most expansive growth (Fact Book, 2017); the number of graduates increased by more than 250%, numerous buildings were constructed and opened, new campuses and education centers were opened, and Wake Tech became the largest community college in the state.

On December 18th, 2018, it was announced that Dr. Scott Ralls had been selected as the fourth president of Wake Technical Community College. This announcement and the press release can be found in Appendix A. Dr. Ralls officially started his tenure as Wake Tech’s fourth president on April 11th, 2019. He introduced himself to the employees of Wake Tech with an email that touched on his feelings about coming to Wake Tech, history of working with community colleges, admiration of the students and employees of Wake Tech, and plans to acclimate himself to the college and its people. A copy of his email can be found in Appendix B.

This study looks at the presidential change phenomenon from the point of the new president officially taking office on April 11th, 2019 to the time of the interviews with the academic department leaders. This will encompass a timeframe of approximately 6 months and focus on how the academic department leaders perceive and experience the communications and actions of the new president and his executive leadership team during this time.
Researcher Positionality

As a middle-aged white male with many years of experience in the private sector, I have developed a trust in the decisions of the executive leadership of an organization. I have thrived and survived through both positive and negative organizational change. For the past decade, I have worked in the higher education environment and have listened to the concerns of faculty and staff through many organizational changes. I worked to better understand the perceptual differences of academic department leaders experiencing an organizational change in this higher education environment.

I approached this through the lens of an employee of the institution, a middle-aged white male, and a person involved in the preparation for phenomenon studied here. My bias was considered both in the gathering and the analysis of the data. I needed to be aware of asking leading questions and sharing personal impressions during data collection with the participants.

I do not hold a position of power over the potential participants of this study, but some may be reluctant to participate because of my relationship to a current strategic planning initiative. I was aware of this and encouraged participants focus on my role as a student researcher rather than an employee of the college within the context of this study.

Significance of the Study

As I began to narrow the focus of this research, I was privileged to engage most of the executive leadership team of Wake Tech for their input. Everyone with which I spoke indicated that they wanted to gain more insight into how their communications and actions were perceived and interpreted by the academic department leader level of management.

New presidents and executive leadership teams in many higher education institutions will be able to utilize the results of this study to better strategize and operationalize the support the
academic department leader level of management needs during times of the directional uncertainty that accompanies the presidential change phenomenon. Leadership at all levels will benefit from the insights this study will reveal and be able to adjust their approach to become more inclusive in their leadership styles.

This study adds a new perspective to the literature regarding organizational climate, especially as it relates to organizational change. It also adds to the knowledge base surrounding the least studied and most misunderstood management position in higher education, the academic department leader. Since this study is limited to one community college and one organizational change situation, it provides a template to further study this phenomenon at other sites and other times during the presidential change process.

Conclusion

This chapter provided a brief overview of the importance of understanding the phenomenon known as the presidential change process, a history and background of the specific change process that was examined at Wake Tech, the theoretical framework, and methodological approach I used in this study. Using a qualitative methodology, I built a structural description of case specific context that surrounds the phenomenon and a textural description of the experiences of academic department leaders that provided the overall essence of their experience. I described how the actions and tactics employed by community college executive leadership during a presidential change were perceived and interpreted by academic department leaders who are a major influence on an organization’s readiness for change. Because this was done through the lens of the academic department leader, this study contributes to the growing body of literature surrounding the academic department leader position in higher education, and the perceptions surrounding the presidential change phenomenon.
Chapter two will provide a review of the literature in the areas of community colleges and their need for change, organizational change and the role played by immediate supervisors, organizational climate and readiness for change, and the importance of the academic department leaders in higher education management. In chapter three, I share my qualitative case study methodology, detailing sampling procedures, data collection methods, and the data analysis strategy I used.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Using qualitative case study methodology, this research focused on answering the following question: “How do academic department leaders perceive and describe their experience of the organizational climate surrounding an organizational change in leadership?”

While this study will only gather data from one community college during one presidential change process, the challenge to create an organizational climate ready for change facing community college leadership teams during this phenomenon are similar. Additionally, the theories surrounding organizational change and organizational climate provide a framework for understanding the role academic department leaders play in developing the readiness for change associated with the presidential change process in community colleges so other community college leadership teams benefit from what is learned in this study.

A deeper understanding of the foundational aspects of this study will be explored in through a review of the literature in this chapter. After a brief review of the history of community colleges and their background of change, I will focus on the escalating frequency of presidential change and the importance of the president’s role in the success of a community college. This will lead into a description of the community college that is the setting for this instrumental case study in chapter 3.

The second part of this literature review contains a robust discussion on the theoretical framework provided by the organizational change and organizational climate literature. The role of the academic department leader will begin to emerge from this discourse, and additional literature will be discussed that supports the focus on this management level. With little empirical work in this area, tangentially related work will be used to support the need for this study.
Community Colleges

Merriam-Webster (2019) defines a community college as: “a 2-year government supported college that offers an associate degree.” The National Center for Education Statistics indicates that there were 969 community colleges that fit that definition in the 2017-18 school year (NCES, n.d.). Community colleges are generally open access institutions that offer preparation for transfer to four-year colleges and universities, workforce development training, and a range of noncredit programs like English as a second language, community enrichment programs, and skills retraining (DoHS, 2012).

In a speech Dr. Gail O. Mellow, President of La Guardia Community College made in 2000, she suggested that, “…community colleges might very well be American higher education’s best-kept secret” (Mellow, 2000). She rhetorically asked her audience to name five or ten research universities in the country, or the top five or ten liberal arts colleges, or the best state universities. She then asked the crowd to name the top five or ten community colleges in the United States. Her point being that for the role community colleges play in connecting higher education to the communities they serve is under heralded. Their history of constant evolution and managing the change needed to creatively respond to local community needs, has created an important unsung link in America’s higher education landscape.

History of Change

The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 expanded access to higher education for many members of the general public in the United States that had historically been precluded from higher education (Drury, 2003). The land-grant universities created by these acts focused on teaching the agricultural and mechanical arts. As these institutions made higher education more affordable for the more common classes of society, prominent educators began in the mid- to
late-1800’s looking at the German model of higher education (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). This model proffered that universities should become true research and professional development centers and give up the lower level general education preparatory work to other institutions.

In 1892, William Rainey Harper, the President of the University of Chicago, divided his organization into two separate colleges; a junior college and a senior college. He then took the next step and created an associate degree for those that successfully completed the junior division of the University (Drury, 2003). Harper was not successful in convincing local high schools to offer college-level courses until J. Stanley Brown, a friend, colleague, and principle of Joliet High School, began offering college-level courses in his curriculum. In 1901, this created the first, and oldest existing public Junior College in America, Joliet Junior College.

Junior colleges got off to a slow start and in the early years, the colleges focused on general liberal arts studies. Only two more public colleges were started in the first nine years after the founding of Joliet Junior College (Drury, 2003). But by 1914, another 11 publicly funded junior colleges came into existence. They were accompanied by 32 private junior colleges. California passed various legislations during this period that allowed high schools to offer postsecondary courses and provided funding for junior colleges. Many other states followed suit (Cohen et al., 2014).

1917 saw the formation of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) which later became a part of the Higher Learning Commission. This was the first organization to create accreditation criteria for junior colleges (Preceden, 2019) and in 1917 they accredited Joliet Junior College (Joliet Junior College [JLL], n.d.). Joliet Junior College was further legitimized by the State Examining Board’s approval of selected courses for teacher certification.
As the economy migrated from an agricultural base to manufacturing, American society had embraced postsecondary schooling as a means of upward mobility and contributing to society (Drury, 2003). 1917 also brought about a change in the nature of the junior college. The Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 and the Junior College Act passed by the California State Legislature the same year expanded the scope of junior colleges to include vocational education focusing on mechanical and industrial arts, household economy, agriculture, and commerce (Cohen et al., 2014). This change represented a controversial step in the evolution of the junior college (Drury, 2003).

The organization known today as the American Association of Community Colleges was founded in 1920 as the American Association of Junior Colleges (AAJC) (Drury, 2003). The AAJC came into being while there were wide differences between those that felt junior colleges should focus on transfer programs and those that promoted vocational training. Leonard Koos and Walter Eells were early leaders of the AAJC that were very successful in developing strategies to help academically oriented junior college administrators and faculty understand and accept the concepts and importance of terminal vocational education. Koos promoted the use of intelligence testing and advising to direct students into vocational training programs that he called semi-professional training. He and Eells touted vocational training as terminal education that could be completed upon completion of a two-year program. The demand for junior colleges continued to grow and by 1927 there were 325 junior colleges in the United States (Preceden, 2019).

Additional legitimacy was afforded to junior colleges through a report prepared by the Carnegie Foundation in 1932. The report was purposed with determining merit of converting teachers’ colleges and two-year junior colleges into four-year institutions (Drury, 2003). They
looked at the higher education system in California. The report’s conclusions focused on the differing functions each type of institution served in this state system. California’s state universities concentrated on research and training for the higher professions. Mid-professions, like teaching, were the focus of the state colleges, and the priority of junior colleges was general education, semi-professions, and vocational training.

The Great Depression of the 1930’s inspired many junior colleges to develop and refine their approach to vocational education. They began offering job-training programs as a way of easing widespread unemployment (Cohen et al., 2014). This gave the two-track curriculum concept some traction. Guidance counseling emerged and junior colleges began to survey employers to discover their needs in the workplace. Junior colleges began to offer assistance in occupational placement. Transfer and terminal tracks were established, and enrollments almost tripled during this ten-year period (Drury, 2003). College education was perceived as a conduit to social and economic upward mobility, and junior colleges were becoming accepted as providing that type of education.

Brint and Karabel (1989) stated, “By the time that the United States entered World War II, the junior college had become established as the major organizational innovation in twentieth-century American higher education.” (p. 84). The veterans of World War II were provided financial assistance with the GI Bill of Rights signed in 1944. The economic and social barriers to higher education in America were broken down by this law (Drury, 2003; Mellow, 2000). But this law also served the purpose of using America’s colleges and universities to keep America’s veterans out of the labor market until it was able to absorb them (Brint & Karabel, 1989).

After World War II, the conversion of military industries to consumer goods created new, skilled jobs. This economic transformation along with the GI Bill created the drive for more
higher education options. The executive secretary of the AAJC, Jesse R. Bogue began to promote the term “Community College” in 1946 (Drury, 2003). But in 1947, the Truman Commission suggested the creation of a network of public, community-based colleges to serve local needs (Brint & Karabel, 1989; Drury, 2003). The term “Community College” is said to have come from the Truman Commission’s report (Beach, 2011). This report defined the two-year college as one that would promote economic development, democracy, and social mobility. It legitimized an expanded institutional mission to include academically oriented general education, vocational education, adult education, and responsiveness to local community needs. Regardless of where the term originated, “Community College” began to describe the mission of the two-year institution in higher education. And in 1950, Jesse Bogue posited that the mission of the community college was, “service primarily to the people of the community” (Beach, 2011, p. 57).

In 1900, three percent of the American student population enrolled in postsecondary education. But the junior college, or community college, provided the opportunity the convenience of geographical proximity and low tuition to more of the lower socioeconomic classes to attend postsecondary education, or to complete their high school education and move forward (Beach, 2011). This opportunity moved the percentage of American students enrolled in postsecondary education to increase to 32% by 1955. The 1950’s demonstrated a trend toward comprehensive, multipurpose, two-track approach community college. However, there were still those that argued for a distinction between the academic focus to facilitate transfer to a four-year institution and a vocational focus on a two-year terminal degree. The number of community colleges still continued to grow.
The W.K. Kellogg Foundation recognized the need to develop leadership for this type of postsecondary education. In 1960, the foundation offered a series of grant to establish centers at universities to educate and train community college leaders (Drury, 2003). Many of these programs continue into the present day (Amey, 2006).

Baby boomers and financial aid fueled the growth in the 1960's and 70's (Cohen et al., 2013). Many recent high school graduates that didn't want to go far from home, needed a lower cost alternative to universities, or didn't meet the entry requirements for a 4-year program fueled most of the growth. By 1967 there we over 900 community colleges serving 1.7 million students. And by 1970, there were 1,091 two-year institutions in the United States (Preceden, 2019).

1968 saw the founding of the League for Innovation in the Community College. This organization was created to cultivate innovation in the community college (League for Innovation, n.d.). The League for Innovation in the Community College has been focused on student success, sustainability, and the development of community college leaders for more than 50 years and continues in the present day. This organization has provided a form to share best practices and highlight successful changes some community colleges have implemented.

By the late 1970’s and into the 1980’s community colleges were more focused on highly vocational-oriented programs with customized training programs to meet the demands of higher technology job opportunities (Drury, 2003). In the mid-1980’s, the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges issued a policy statement on the Associate Degree to reaffirm the Associate Degree as central to the mission of the community college (NISOD, 2018). And in 1984 the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), an accrediting body of many community colleges, added institutional effectiveness to the requirements for re-affirmation
These demands created changes in the focus of the community colleges and created new data collection and reporting structures in many institutions.

In 1999, a U.S. Department of Education grant established the Center for Community College Policy to focus on effective community college policies and practices (NISOD, 2018). This center targeted state and federal community college policy makers and encouraged them to increase access to postsecondary education both academic and vocational, contain costs, and provide leadership in the economic development of their communities. And in 2004, the Lumina foundation for Education launched Achieving the Dream: Community College Count initiative with the goal of helping more community college students succeed with emphasis on students of color, working adults, and those from lower socioeconomic status. These changes have brought us to the community colleges of today which provide two years of postsecondary education within financial, geographical, and practical reach of almost every American (Cohen et al., 2014). Table 2.1 highlights the change milestones in the history of the community college model.

Table 2.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Change Milestone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1862 &amp; 1890</td>
<td>The Morrill Acts expanded access to higher education for many members of the general public in the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1892</td>
<td>William Rainey Harper created the Associate Degree for those that successfully completed their first two years at the University of Chicago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1901</td>
<td>Joliet Junior College was established.</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Table 2.1 (Continued)

*Community College Change Milestones*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Change Milestone</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>North Central Association of Colleges and Schools ((NCA) created the first accreditation criteria for junior colleges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1917</td>
<td>Joliet Junior College was accredited by the NCA and the Illinois State Examining Board approved selected courses for teacher certification.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1920</td>
<td>The American Association of Junior Colleges was formed. This would later become the American Association of Community Colleges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1927</td>
<td>There were 327 junior colleges in the United States.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1932</td>
<td>Carnegie Foundation report legitimizing junior colleges as a part of the higher education system in the United States offering general education, education for the semi-professional, and vocational training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>GI Bill of Rights was signed breaking down the economic and social barriers to higher education in America.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1947</td>
<td>The Truman Commission Report focused the two-year college on local, community needs that would promote economic development, democracy, and social mobility. The Report coined the term “Community College” to describe an institution whose mission was to provide academically oriented general education, adult education, vocational education, and be responsive to local community needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>W.K. Kellogg Foundation College Leadership Program.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1984</td>
<td>AACJC issued a statement reaffirming that the Associate Degree is central to the mission of the community, technical, and junior college.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Community colleges will need to respond quickly to the social and economic needs of the students and communities they serve. Community Colleges will continue to change to reflect the needs of their communities and the organizations with which they collaborate; K-12 schools, community organizations, four-year colleges and universities, and public and private sector organizations (Mellow, 2000). This will require rapid change that embraces the rapid learning involved in information technology and the changing horizon in life-long learning through continuing education.

Presidential Change

In the forward to “Presidential Transition in Higher Education: Managing Leadership Change” (Martin & Samels, 2004), George Keller (2004) states, “… perhaps as many as one-fourth of all thirty-nine hundred U.S. colleges and universities in any year are preparing for a presidential change, are in the midst of one, or have just selected a new president” (p. viii). And the editors of that book, Martin and Samels (2004), state in the preface that, “… almost 50 percent of all community college president are planning to retire within the next six years …
presidential transitions now exert an impact in shaping institutions well beyond the straightforward choice of their next leaders.” (p. ix).

It has been recognized for decades that for a community college to remain vital, it must constantly implement change in response to the local cultural, economic, and employment conditions (Walker, 1981). In fact, Carter (1998) includes more than just the changing contexts of the local community as the driving force for change in community colleges and adds new competition and changing student expectations to the factors that affect change. Community Colleges presidents are expected to lead their institutions through these changes just like they have in the past. But the Aspen Institute notes:

Nationwide, community colleges are being called upon to dramatically improve student outcomes while maintaining the longstanding commitment to open access and low costs. While the sector is benefitting from strong momentum for reform, community colleges also face dramatic turnover in leadership. Over the next decade, more than 80 percent of presidents are projected to retire, creating an opportunity to develop leaders with the tools and vision needed to lead transformational change aligned to student goals and community needs. (Aspen CEP, 2019)

A survey conducted by the American Association of Community Colleges in 2015 confirms the retirement prediction above (Phillipe, 2016). McNair (2015), Plinske & Packard (2010), and Eddy (2005) all make mention of the accelerating retirement and change in community college leadership in their articles on preparing for community college presidency, qualifications for community college presidency, and how community college presidents frame their roles. This will place many community colleges in a state of transition as they search for new presidents in the near future.
The search process plays a key role in the success of a presidential transition. John Ross (2004) identifies the communications surrounding the presidential transition process among the institution’s constituencies the most important. They should begin the moment the departing president expresses to someone beyond their significant other the desire to relinquish their post. He goes on to say faculty and staff, students, the trustees, and alumni should work together to build consensus regarding the future of the college and the capacities and profile of a new president. Ross (2004) goes on to say that the college should communicate strategically at all stages of the transition process and should:

- Reinforce the belief that the institution is benefitting from good leadership during transition.
- Engage the entire community in establishing vision for the future and in developing the list of qualifications for the new president.
- Keep the entire community well informed regarding the progress of the search process.
- Invite extensive involvement by all stakeholders during visits to campus by finalists.
- Confirm that contributions by those groups and individuals were given serious consideration in the final choice of the new president. (p. 175)

This communication strategy facilitates a transition process that leads to stable leadership with a long-range outlook for the college by identifying the characteristics of a leader with a shared vision.

These new presidents face many challenges as they step into their new role. Even presidents that rise from within the ranks of the institution find it difficult to launch into their
new appointment at full speed (Padilla, 2004). Many of the problems and situations will not be familiar to a new president and the capabilities of middle managers will not be known. The three most important groups to a successful transition are the Board of Trustees, the vice presidents and other cabinet members, and the leadership of the faculty or academic department leaders (Martin & Samels, 2004b). To learn more about the last group in this list, Martin and Samels (2004b) recommend “… walking around: Take a daily walk around campus and leave the entourage at home. Faculty, staff, and especially student can provide interesting and informative insights when they are not speaking through senior staff interpreters” (p. 231).

**Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework that drives this study has two major components: organizational change and organizational climate. Since changing community college leadership at the highest level has the potential to “…reshape every facet of the organization.” (Kearney, 2013, p. 901), the constructs of organizational change drive the direction of the study. The theoretical lens provided by organizational climate yield a perspective from which data can be gathered and analyzed.

**Organizational Change**

Change in an organization can take on many forms; planned or unplanned, minor or major, management driven or a product of the environment, and revolutionary or evolutionary (Burke, 2011). In most cases, change is unplanned, environmentally driven, gradual, minor in nature, and readily accepted by the members of an organization. This is referred to as evolutionary change and represents more than 95% of organizational changes. This type of change takes place in incremental steps that address problems or change a part of a larger system.
As demonstrated above, new presidents bring new management styles and new visions for the future of the College. This can mean major changes in organizational structure and visionary focus (Kearney, 2013). These are referred to as revolutionary changes (Burke, 2011). “Revolutionary change, by definition, can be seen as a jolt (perturbation) to the system. As a result, nothing will ever be the same again.” (Burke, 2011, p. 77). The potential for this type of change can be challenging for institutions that have well established norms of behavior, strong traditions, and are embedded in highly institutionalized contexts (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2008) and can cause employees to have concerns about job security, the structural changes they may experience, and even the capacity of the institution to continue moving forward (Kearney, 2013).

The basic component of every organizational change model is the individual organizational member (George & Jones, 2001). The same is true in higher education where change is dependent upon the individual faculty and staff to adopt new norms and behaviors (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2008). Leslie (1996) encouraged additional study in this area by stating, Change in colleges and universities comes when it happens in the trenches; what faculty and students do is what the institution becomes. It does not happen because a committee or a president asserts a new idea. We need further study of how and why these street-level changes occur and how they actually shape the directions of a college or university. (p. 110)

Presidential changes shake up reality as it is perceived and understood by the faculty and staff of an institution (Kearney, 2013). In the instance where the exiting president has had an extended tenure filled with widely recognized accomplishments and has left a positive imprint on the institution, their departure can leave individuals feeling apprehensive and insecure. Conversely, a departing president that has been controversial, inappropriate, unsuccessful, or tarnished in some
way can leave individuals with a feeling of relief, or even euphoria. However, this may soon dissipate leaving individuals uncertain as to what a new president may bring (Stanley & Betts, 2006).

Although there are various magnitudes of the organizational change accompanying a change in leadership, organizations are human systems with many interrelated processes making any level of change potentially chaotic (Burke, & Litwin, 1992). Out of this chaos, consistent patterns emerge as organizations work through change initiatives. This has been demonstrated in the research literature repeatedly (Burke, & Litwin, 1992). These patterns have led community college leadership to measure the perceptions of their faculty and staff, and then determine their progress and reprioritize their efforts through a planned organizational change event (Sullivan, Reichard, & Shumate, 2005).

**Organizational Climate**

The perceptions of faculty and staff measured by community college leadership have a name, organizational climate. Organizational climate can be defined as the perceptions of events, practices, and procedures coupled with the perceptions of the kinds of behaviors that get rewarded, supported, and expected in an organization (Ehrhart et al., 2014). It is widely accepted that leadership plays a role in creating organizational climate (Denison, 1996; Hummer, Mazur, Lefteris, Grant, & Marks, 2012; Stringer, 2002; Sullivan et al., 2006). Additionally, organizational climate is thought to drive behavior because it is tied to motivation (Stringer, 2002). Executive leaders in higher education utilize survey instruments like the Personal Assessment of the College Environment (PACE) administered by the National Initiative for Leadership and Institutional Effectiveness (NILIE) to develop strategies for managing change or measure the effectiveness of a change initiative (NILIE, 2019). These concepts lead to a
framework that has the success of an organizational change initiative dependent on the type of organizational climate associated with that change.

**History**

The study of organizational climate has been around for many decades. It is rooted in early work published by Lewin as far back as 1939 (Denison, 1996; Ehrhart et al., 2014). Much of the early research was qualitative in nature and performed by observation of organizational settings. Research in this area began to pick up in the mid-1960’s and 1970’s that spurred consensus in three distinct approaches to the study of organizational climate: measurement of the perceptual attributes of individuals, measurement of the perceptual attributes of organizations, and measuring the combination of organizational attributes and more objective measures (Denson, 1996).

Since organizational climate is measuring perceptual attributes of individuals and organizations, it is usually studied using methodologies common to the field of psychology (Denison, 1996). Quantitative surveys are the most common research tool employed in the measurement of organizational climate (Ayers, 2005; Denison, 1996; Schulte, Ostroff, & Kinicki, 2006). The data collected by these surveys are aggregated and presented as representing the climate of the organization.

**Climate Levels**

When these perceptions are taken to the individual level, they are called psychological climate. Any aggregation of climate above the individual level is considered the organizational climate of that “unit” (Schulte et al., 2006). By breaking down the organizational climate in this fashion, quantitative measures can still be utilized, and data sorted by a variety of means including levels of the organization. Climate can then be viewed from some mid-range climate
concept such as division or department (Joyce & Slocum, Jr., 1990). It is important to remember that any level of organizational climate is an aggregate of the psychological climates of individuals. Collective climates at any level can be described by three dimensions: consensus in multidimensional climate perceptions, consistency of specific climate dimensions with one another, and congruency of collective climate profiles. These dimensions speak to climate strength, or the extent the perceptions of employees are aligned with each other (Ehrhart et al., 2014).

Change Readiness

Organizational change in community colleges, can be defined as “… a difference in form, quality, or state of the organization as perceived by faculty and staff” (Van Wagoner, 2004, p. 716). Presidential change has the potential to change the form, quality, or state of the organization as perceived by faculty and staff. During a presidential change initiative, it is important to help faculty and staff develop positive emotions about change that will enhance their change readiness and change-supportive behaviors (Rafferty & Minbashian, 2018). Since “…social learning and local context influence an individual’s decision to follow strategic initiatives and participate in new activities” (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2008, p. 86), it is important that the support for change readiness happen in the local work environment level. Tierney (1999) confirms this and adds “…in order to enhance the potential for positive change, organizations must be willing to support supervisors and teams in their attempts to develop high quality interactions.” (p. 8).

A variety of factors influence and define readiness for change. There are both organizational factors; trust in management and communication, and organizational commitment factors; affective commitment, continuous commitment, and normative commitment (Ahmad,
Ismail, Rani, & Wahab, 2007; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Nordin, 2012). The first of the two organizational factors, trust in management speaks to a faculty and staff member’s inclination to follow and support the leadership of an organization. Trust in management is evident when faculty and staff members recognize management’s good intentions and feel that the benefit, they may gain will outweigh any risk or extra effort. Faculty and staff members that have trust in management do not feel manipulated by management. Trust in management is a strong factor for the acceptance of any organizational change or new system.

The other organizational factor that directly effects readiness for change is communication. Communication travels in three dimensions; down, up, and horizontally (Ahmad et al., 2007). Downward communication must be open, honest, and complete in its presentation of any potential changes or change initiatives. It is important to communicate and educate on the reasons for any potential change (Nordin, 2012). Upward communication should be solicited by executive leadership. Inviting faculty and staff members to be a part preparing for change by developing communication channels, creating a shared language, and recommending process changes from their perspective, enhances an organization’s readiness for change (Astin & Astin, 2000; Bolman & Deal, 2008). Horizontal communication links directly to the influence of social networks. Communication through social networks can help shape attitudes, alter the schema or mindset pertaining to change readiness, and enhance problem solving abilities (Kezar, 2014). Additionally, horizontal communication through social networks can easy the anxiety associated with the risk-taking involved with pending change. Or as stated by Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder (1993), “…any individual’s readiness may also be shaped by the readiness of others” (p. 683). In essence, the vertical components of communication can assist in building trust in
management and the horizontal communication component supports and educates the faculty and staff member through social networking interaction.

Individual characteristics such as gender, age, ethnic background, years of experience, and organizational culture can influence an individual’s commitment to an organization. Ahmad et al. (2007) states, “By having organisational commitment, one will feel strongly attached with the organisation and voluntarily adapt with the organisation’s values and always be ready for any changes made by the organisation.” (p. 020019-3). There are three components to organizational commitment; affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment (Ahmad et al., 2007; Meyer & Allen, 1997; Nordin, 2012). Affective commitment describes the academic faculty or staff member’s emotional attachment to, involvement in, and identification with their higher education institution. Faculty and staff with high affective commitment will stay with an organization because they want to be a part of that organization. Continuance commitment measures the faculty or staff member’s awareness of the costs associated with leaving the organization. Faculty and staff with high continuance commitment stay because it would cost them too much to leave. The final component, normative commitment, looks at the individual faculty and staff member’s values and moral obligations to the organization. These faculty and staff members stay because they feel it is the right thing to do.

**Theoretical Framework Summary**

Organizational change theories tell us that the presidential change process in community colleges can create a feeling of uncertainty across the faculty and staff of an institution. They know change is coming but do not know the magnitude nor the direction (Kearney, 2013). It falls to the executive leadership of a community college to lead the faculty and staff through the
transition from one president to another (Zimpher, 2004). They are tasked with creating an organizational climate ready for change.

The theories around organizational climate indicate that local leadership has the greatest influence on developing an organizational climate ready for change (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2008; Tierney, 1999). And, that organizational climate strength is determined by how well the individual psychological climates align across a unit, division, and institution (Ehrhart, 2014). It stands to reason that the group that has the greatest potential influence on an institution’s readiness for change would be the lowest level of management serving the largest number of employees in their work groups. In community colleges, that level of management is known as the Academic Department Leadership.

**Academic Department Leadership**

Gonaim (2016) cites the academic department as “… the fundamental unit for transforming the university’s visions and goals into reality.” (p. 272). Riggs (2009) states, Too few people outside of community college administrative circles adequately understand the enormous contributions outstanding mid-level administrators make to the successful operation of their colleges. While strong presidential leadership is a critical component to the long-term success of a college, the deans, vice presidents and other mid-level administrators are the ones who have the greatest impact on the actual operations, organizational priorities, and functioning of the college. (p. 30-31)

Clegg and McAley (2005) claim the mid-level administrator is at the heart of an organization and serves as the “…transmitter of core strategic values and organizational capacity.” (p. 24)

Gonaim (2016) also argues that the academic department leader position is one of the least studied and most misunderstood management positions in higher education. As there were just
these few pieces of literature that I could find relating to the topic of this study, I would concur. Gonaim (2016) goes on to define this position as a conduit to convey administrative decisions to their faculty and convey faculty concerns up to administrative leaders. Academic department leaders are responsible for fostering a climate of motivation linking a department’s performance directly to their management style. Smith and Abouammoh (2013) state that the achievement of a university’s mission depends heavily on the success of faculty members influenced by effective academic department leaders. That makes the academic department leader the focus of this study.

**Summary**

In this review of the literature pertinent to this research study, I have discussed the history of change in community colleges and the importance of their continued change moving forward. The important role a community college president plays in moving a college forward and the accelerating pace with which presidential change initiatives will be developing has been documented. I provided a brief overview of the history of Wake Tech, the subject of this instrumental case study. Our theoretical framework points us to the importance of academic department leaders and the role they play in creating an organizational climate that is ready for the changes a new president will bring. Since the executive leadership of a community college is saddled with leading the institution through the presidential change process and creating an organizational climate ready for change, this study will provide insights that will be helpful in determining how executive leadership can support academic department leaders during the presidential change process. Chapter three will provide an overview of the processes and methods I will use to gather and analyze data for this instrumental case study.
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The literature shows us that academic department leaders play a vital role in the presidential change phenomenon soon to be experienced by many of our community colleges Gonaim (2016). They are the front-line supervisors who are major contributors to the development of an organizational climate ready for change. This study focused on researching one aspect of creating organizational climate by trying to understand how the presidential change phenomenon is perceived and interpreted by the academic department leaders.

This study has taken a social constructivist approach to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

How do academic department leaders perceive and describe their experience surrounding a presidential change?

- What do academic department leaders describe as major influences on their perception of the presidential change process?
- How do academic department leaders perceive the impact of executive leadership support of the presidential change on the faculty they lead?
- In what way can executive leadership support academic department leadership during a presidential change?

Assumptions

Every academic department leader interpreted the phenomenon of the presidential change process based on his or her view of the world. The academic department leaders’ realities have been formed from their previous experiences and background knowledge. Each of these individuals has created his or her own understanding, or reality of the common events that they
experienced based on the beliefs, ideas, and activities they have experienced in the past (Ültanir, 2012). These understandings and realities are the subject of this study.

The social constructivist approach is built upon the premise that reality is of a social construction resulting from a collaboration between researcher and participant where the participant is able to tell their stories and describe their views of reality (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Baxter & Jack (2008) cite Yin in saying that this approach “…supports the deconstruction and the subsequent reconstruction of various phenomena” (p.544). In this study, the collaboration between the researcher and the participants took place in the form of one-on-one interviews. These interviews were semi-structured and utilized various open-ended questions to assist the participants in sharing their experiences and perceptions of their reality. Since this study was focused upon how the academic department leaders experienced a specific phenomenon, the presidential change process, it was important that the researcher focus on describing their realities exactly as they experienced them and not through a theoretical lens or the researcher’s own experiences (Bevan, 2014). Husserl (as cited in Bevan, 2014; Creswell, 2013; Henriques, 2014) calls this epoché or bracketing when the researcher sets aside what he or she already knows, takes a fresh perspective about a given phenomenon and focuses solely on the experiences and perceptions of the participant.

Although these realities were individualized, there was some commonality between them (Peck & Mummery, 2018) since the participants experienced the same phenomenon. These commonalities have been identified through conventional hermeneutical techniques with the final aim of creating a consensus of experiences and perceptions of the academic department leaders (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). This consensus, or generalization of individual experiences, can also be called themes since they lose individual detail but identify general aspects common
across the group of participants (Peck & Mummery, 2017). A combination of these themes provides a textural description of the participants’ experiences. How the participant experienced the phenomenon in terms of the conditions, situations, and context, provides the structural description of the experience. The combination of the textural description and structural description provide the overall essence of the participant’s experience and in turn provide the answers for the research questions proposed in this study (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994).

**Research Design**

According to Yin (2003), a case study approach is appropriate when the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions, the researcher cannot manipulate the behavior of the participants of the study, and the contextual conditions are relevant to the phenomenon under study. This study has employed instrumental case study methodology since the case itself is of secondary interest (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Here, the presidential change process at Wake Tech plays a secondary role to how the academic department leaders perceive and interpret the phenomenon. The context the case provides added to the description of the overall essence of the experience.

Since the phenomenon of interest was the presidential change process at a community college, this research was approached through the lens of transcendental phenomenology (Husserl, 2004, p.179). This approach focused more on the descriptions and experiences of the academic department leaders than the interpretations of the researcher creating a "fresh" perspective toward our phenomenon. When approaching this research through the lens of transcendental phenomenology, Creswell (2013) recommends a systematic approach and the procedural guidelines developed by Moustakas be utilized to gather and analyze data.
Moustakas (1994) recommends organizing and analyzing data to create both a textural and a structural description of the phenomenon experienced by the participants. Two types of data have been collected to create these descriptions. One type of data collected was the perceptions and interpretations of academic department leaders that are experiencing the presidential change phenomenon. This data was collected through a semi-structured interviewing technique utilizing a set of open-ended questions in a person-to-person interview. A purposeful sampling approach was used to identify participants, and the interviews were recorded and transcribed. These transcriptions have been analyzed and clustered into common categories, or themes to develop the textural descriptions of the experience.

The other types of data collected are artifacts surrounding the presidential change phenomenon. This data consisted of internal memos, external press releases, email announcements, observations of the researcher, etc. A description of the context, situation, and conditions surrounding the participants’ experience have been derived from this data and used in the creation of the structural description of the experience. The textural and structural descriptions of the participants’ experience have been combined to convey the overall essence of the experience of the academic department leaders (Creswell, 2013) and answer the research questions.

**Brief Background of the Study Site**

The following is a brief history of the site used for this study with one author’s perspective on the executive leaders of the institution to present day. This historical perspective speaks to the current organizational culture and the need to create an organizational climate ready for change.
Wake Technical Community College (Wake Tech) was chartered in the late 1950’s as an industrial education center focused on training adults in the vocational and technical skills needed by emerging industries within the region (Wake Tech History, n.d.). The institution first functioned under the leadership of a director that served until the first president was named in 1965. Although this director had led the institute through a successful launch and its early development, he was thought of as a nice, personable fellow but not what the institute needed to move forward (Ireland, 2010).

There were 3,000 students enrolled, and technical education was the sole focus of the institution. Enrollment more than doubled in the first ten years of the first president’s tenure and land was acquired to create a campus devoted to the health sciences. Under the 14-year leadership of the first president, the institution was licensed to award its first associate degree and it became accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (Timeline, n.d.). This president’s leadership style was described as “ruling through a strict line of command that left little room for collegial and team efforts.” (Ireland, 2010, p. 51).

The institution saw two major changes in 1980, “College” was added to its name and the second president began his 23-year tenure (Timeline, n.d.). These two decades continued to see growth and change for the College. This president led the College in adopting its current name, opening the health sciences campus, driving a college transfer program to approval, acquiring land for another major campus, offering the College’s first online courses, and creating a business and industry center. And, enrollment grew to more than 50,000 curriculum and continuing education students (Fact Book, 2004). This president’s leadership style was credited with the creation of a small-town community type of culture with an emphasis on quality
instruction. He is also credited with giving the College a new direction and a new philosophy making the “open door” a reality for thousands of students (Ireland, 2010).

In 2003, the third president of Wake Tech was named after a search that involved a professional executive search organization that focused on finding someone that could take the College to the next level (Ireland, 2010). The new president valued employees that felt pride in themselves, their job, and the institution. He had a strong belief that it is better to give people the opportunity to answer the “how” questions while it was his responsibility to make certain they were staying on track. His first few years were marked with jolting changes in almost every area of the College’s infra-structure. This president felt these changes were necessary to empower people to move the College from good to great. These first years contained staggering changes in information systems, registration, and communication, not to mention expansion on to two more campuses. Under his leadership, this third president saw enrollment increase by almost 20,000 students and six campuses in 15 years (Fact Book, 2017) creating one of the largest community colleges in the Southeast.

The past four leaders of Wake Tech each brought their own vision of the future and approach to managing change. Each of these presidents adjusted the mission and vision of the college and made substantial organizational structural and cultural changes to address the growth of the college and address the needs of its community. The first two presidential transitions were imbued with uncertainty and apprehension. Faculty and staff did not know if the new president would carry on with business as usual or make changes to a well-tuned working model (Ireland, 2010). In both instances, the executive leadership team and the Board of Trustees were saddled with preparing the workforce of the college for any potential changes while continuing to get the routine work of the college accomplished. This study will provide insights as to how the
executive leadership team can better support preparing the college’s workforce for the coming changes.

**Participant Selection**

The participants in this study will be academic department leaders who have been in their positions since a time before April 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2019. The April 11\textsuperscript{th} time frame is important because the presidential change phenomenon under study started with Dr. Ralls’ first day on the job. Sampling has been accomplished in a strategic and purposive manner so as to represent a cross-section of the academic department leaders (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006; Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Since saturation is the key to excellent qualitative work, a minimum of 6 participants was acceptable with 12 to 15 being the ideal range of interviewees because the participants will be relatively homogeneous group of academic department leaders (Guest et al., 2006).

Once the potential pool of participants had been identified, I emailed an invitation (Appendix C) to participate in the study from my North Carolina State University student account. In the email, I identified myself, the purpose of the study, and how the results of the study will be used and shared. The email also outlined the measures that have been taken to ensure the participant's confidentiality. Details of the participant's time commitment and right to withdraw were also included in the communication. A simple response to the email was enough to invite the potential participant to a semi-structured, face-to-face recorded interview at a location of their choosing (Appendix D). Since the participant may not have a previous relationship with the researcher and the subject matter of the interview involves perceptions of the workplace, it was important that the participant be allowed to choose a location where they would feel safe and their confidentiality could be preserved.
Role of the Researcher and Reflexivity

The role of the researcher was to guide the participants through an interactive process that utilized open-ended questions and comments to assist the participant in describing their lived experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). It was important that as a researcher, I set aside my experiences as much as possible to focus solely on the experiences of the participant. This process is called epoché or bracketing (Creswell, 2013; Flood, 2010). It also was important for the researcher to check back with the participant to gain additional input or clarity on salient descriptions of the lived experience. As the researcher, I did not allow my perceptions and opinions to influence the way I gather and analyze the participants’ perceptions, experiences, and the contextual data surrounding the phenomenon.

Data Sources and Collection

A transcendental phenomenological approach to examining the lived experiences of academic department leaders during a presidential change process requires data to develop both a textural description of their experiences, and structural description of the conditions and context of their situation (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The following sections describe the sources of the data needed and how data has been collected.

Data for Textural Descriptions

Seidman (2013) tells us that, “Interviewing allows us to put behavior in context and provides access to understanding their action.” (p.9). For this transcendental phenomenological study, I have used open-ended questions and built upon the participants’ responses to help them reconstruct their perceptions of the organizational climate (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2013). The interviews were focused on concrete details of the participant’s lived experiences. Without the
details, the opinions and attitudes of the participant would have been difficult to understand (Seidman, 2013).

To facilitate data collection, a meeting was scheduled with the 13 academic department leaders who chose to participate. The participants were able to choose between meeting places; their office, a study room or conference room on their campus, a study room at one of North Carolina State University’s libraries, or a public venue mutually agreed upon by the participant and the researcher. In the email invitation, participants were made aware that this meeting was a time commitment of one, to one and one-half hours. The first 10 to 15 minutes of the meeting was devoted to reviewing the interview, recording, and transcription processes that had been approved by the appropriate Institutional Review Boards. It was reinforced that the participant could withdraw from the study at any time and his or her withdrawal would also remove their data from the study. Two copies of the consent form (Appendix E) will be provided to the participant for their review. The participant will sign one copy and provide a preferred email for the researcher to retain, and the other copy is provided for the participant’s future reference.

The interview itself was of a semi-structured design utilizing open-ended questions and prompts to assist the participant in recounting the lived experience. These questions were constructed to inspire the participant to provide a textural description of their experiences related to the presidential change and construct a structural description of their experiences with the context surrounding this phenomenon. In order to manage the process of questioning (Bevan, 2014), a protocol was developed (Appendix F). The interviewer began by introducing himself and the purpose of the study. Then the interviewer reviewed the consent form and gained the participant’s preferred email and signature, answered any questions or concerns the participant may have had regarding the handling of their data, then started the recording device. Moustakas
(1994) recommends that the phenomenological interview begin with a social conversation since this should be an informal, interactive process. Demographic data was gathered during this social conversational period. Then, since this study was asking the academic department leaders to describe their perceptions of the presidential change phenomenon, the next step in the protocol was to define the timeframe and nature of the phenomenon (Lauterbach, 2018). Once the participant had acknowledged an understanding of the phenomenon, the interviewer began asking open-ended questions designed to assist the participants in describing their experiences and perceptions surrounding the phenomenon of the presidential change. At the conclusion of the interview, the interviewer again asked if there were any questions and if the participants were willing to verify or clarify the data collected during the interview. The participant was then thanked for their time and cooperation.

Since there are only a few guiding questions, a successful interview depended upon the advanced listening skills of the researcher to lead the discussion and keep the participant on topic without interjecting the researcher's own bias. The interviews were audio recorded and interview notes taken to record interviewer’s observations. The audio recordings were later transcribed with any information that could possibly identify the participant, immediate supervisor, or colleague omitted or replaced with a generic pronoun in the transcript. Other identifying data like department and division references, or campus locations were also omitted or replaced with a non-identifying descriptor.

Data for Structural Descriptions

Some structural data was provided by the participant during the interviewing process. They described their reactions or perceptions of a specific artifact or event (Bevan, 2014). A
large portion of the structural data came from artifacts collected by the researcher. These artifacts include items such as:

- email sent to all faculty and staff personnel;
- invitations sent to all campus employees that provided the opportunity to provide input in the hiring process, meet with the potential candidates, and meet the incoming president;
- press releases;
- social media announcements;
- video transcripts.

As an employee of the college, the researcher has access to all of the internal communications shared with the faculty and staff of this college. The press releases are a matter of public record and the social media and video transcripts are routinely posted on this college’s public website where they are easily collected and stored for analysis.

**Data Analysis**

An audio recording of each interview was transcribed verbatim with the exception of any identifying references which were deleted, redacted, or replaced with a generic pronoun. An electronic copy of this transcription in the form of a Google document (Google Doc) was then shared with the participant by providing a link to the Google Doc from my North Carolina State University account to the email account the participant designated on their consent form. The Google Doc of the transcript was shared with the participants for their review, amendment, or comment. If the participant preferred a paper copy, it would have been hand delivered to the participant for their review and comment. No paper copies were requested. This process of
providing a copy of their transcript for review and comment is commonly called member checking (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Additionally, the participant may have been asked to clarify specific points in the interview. If any amendments, comments, or clarifications were needed, a second face-to-face interview would have been recommended with a phone interview as a second choice. A face-to-face interview would have been recorded and transcribed in a similar fashion to the original interview. There would not have been an audio recording of a phone interview, only notes taken by the researcher. The least preferred option would have been if the participant had provided written comments on the Google Doc. All copies of the electronic audio recordings and researcher notes are stored on the researcher’s personal password protected computer and backed-up to a password protected portable hard drive with 256-bit AES hardware encryption. The audio transcripts and email correspondence have been stored in the secure filing system provided by North Carolina State University’s Google Drive. All handwritten notes have been securely filed at the home of the researcher.

Once the data was member checked, I developed a list of significant statements that were not repetitive (Creswell, 2013). Utilizing a table, I grouped these statements into themes. These themes helped to describe how the participants experienced the organizational climate created during the presidential change phenomenon. These themes are the textural descriptions of this organizational climate. I then focused on how the experience happened for the participants. This analysis provided the structural description of this organizational climate. Combining the textural and structural descriptions described the essence of the various ways the participants experienced the organizational climate surrounding this phenomenon and provides a common understanding of the experiences of the participants. If gaps had remained, additional interviews for
clarification would have been necessary. No new participants were introduced into the process at this point.

**Rigor and Quality of the Study**

Rigor is generally thought of as the quality of the research process. A more rigorous research process will result in more trustworthy findings (Saumure & Given, 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1986) use the term trustworthiness as a parallel to the term rigor. And when speaking of the research process involved in a qualitative study, Creswell (2013) used the term validation rather than the more traditional terms introduced by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Rigor, trustworthiness, and validation are all centered around following research processes that are transparent, credible, dependable, and appropriate in addressing the research questions. Another important factor to consider in the rigor and quality of a qualitative research study is reflexivity. Since the social constructivist approach requires a collaboration between the researcher and the participant, it is important to recognize that the researcher’s presence has some influence on the research findings regardless of how bracketed or neutral the researcher remains (Creswell, 2013; Lincoln & Guba, 1985, 1986; Saumare & Given, 2008).

Creswell (2013) cites the works of Giorgi (1985), Polkinghorne (1989), and Moustakas (1994) to define his standards to assess the quality of a phenomenological study. These standards address the appropriateness of this study. The standards Creswell (2013, p.260) would use to assess the quality of a phenomenological study are:

- the researcher demonstrates an understanding of principles of a phenomenological study,
- the researcher concisely defines the phenomenon,
- the researcher utilizes procedures recommended by Moustakas (1994),
the researcher conveys the overall essence of the experiences of the participants, and
the researcher remains reflexive in responding to new data during the course of the study.

The principles, or tenet philosophies of a phenomenological study were discussed earlier in this chapter. The phenomenon, the presidential change process, was described in the first chapter of this treatise. Moustakas (1994) provides the following methods and procedures to satisfy the requirements of a systematic, organized, and disciplined phenomenological study:

- “Discovering a topic and question in autobiographical meaning and values, as well as involving social meaning and significance:
- Conducting a comprehensive review of the professional and research literature;
- Constructing a set of criteria to locate appropriate co-researchers;
- Providing co-researchers with instructions on the nature and purpose of the investigation, and developing an agreement that includes obtaining informed consent, insuring confidentiality, and delineating the responsibilities of the primary researcher and research participant, consistent with ethical principles of research;
- Developing a set of question or topics to guide the interview process;
- Conducting and recording a lengthy person-to-person interview that focuses on the bracketed topic and question. A follow-up interview may also be needed;
- Organizing and analyzing the data to facilitate development of individual textural and structural descriptions, a composite textural description, a composite structural description, and a synthesis of textural and structural meanings and essences.” (p. 103-104).
The third bullet and portions of the fourth bullet did not apply since I did not use co-researchers in this study. Creswell’s (2013) fourth bullet and the last bullet listed by Moustakas (1994) were demonstrated after interviews had been completed, and a systematic analysis had been performed upon the data. I remained reflexive throughout the study, documenting any procedural adjustments as the data drives the inductive-deductive logic process (Creswell, 2013).

It is also important for research in this area to be trustworthy and authentic, especially since we are looking at organizational climate through the lens of qualitative research rather than the more widely accepted quantitative approach. The trustworthiness of this study is demonstrated through the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the data it produces (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). To keep the data credible and accurate, I utilized triangulation and member checking in the analysis so as to produce thick descriptions of how the participants experienced the organizational climate associated with this phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

The rigor, quality, and trustworthiness of the study has been demonstrated through well-documented methodology and memoing. During analysis of the interview data, I attained intra-coder agreement by coding the first four interviews, waiting one week, then coding a fresh copy of the same interviews and checking internal consistency. There was an 85% to 90% agreement between analysis.

Limitations

This study is limited by its design in the use of the instrumental case study methodology. Although the descriptions of the lived experiences are unique to this circumstance, understanding how the academic department leader perceives and interprets the phenomenon of presidential
change at a community college may be helpful to executive leaders preparing for a similar phenomenon.

Other potential limitations regard the researcher. As I mentioned in my positionality statement, I am currently employed by the case study site and although I am not in a position of authority, I am known for participating in college-wide initiatives. This did not inhibit the interviewing process and no participants questioned my ability to maintain their confidentiality.

Conclusion

Presidential change is happening at community colleges at an accelerated pace leaving executive leadership teams with the responsibility to prepare their faculty and staff for the potential changes in mission and vision that a new president may bring. Earlier research documented in literature points us to the important role academic department leaders play in building an organizational climate of change readiness. This study is focused on understanding how the presidential change phenomenon is perceived and interpreted by academic department leaders.

A case study approach was used to answer the “how” and “why” questions asked in the study of this phenomenon. The contextual conditions surrounding the presidential change is relevant to the way the phenomenon is interpreted and experienced by academic department leaders. This context also adds to the overall description of the essence of their experience. A brief history of the case has been provided in this chapter.

Semi-structured, one-on-one interviews are an appropriated means to gather the interpretations and experiences of academic department leaders. It was important that the researcher bracketed out their preconceptions, perceptions, experiences, and opinions during the
data collection and analysis of these interview interactions. This époché approach is important to understanding the essence of the academic department leaders’ experience of the phenomenon.

The study of a phenomenon required a systematic, organized, and disciplined approach to the research process in order to maintain rigor, quality, and trustworthiness. The steps used for collecting data and gathering the interpretations and experiences of the academic department leaders are outlined in detail throughout this chapter. Since the subjects of this study, academic department leaders, were current employees of the community college, steps have been taken to protect their identity and de-identify their data. Those steps are also outlined here. After this proposal was approved, the next step was to submit the processes outlined here to the respective Institutional Review Boards of North Carolina State University and Wake Tech to gain their approval for data collection and handling. Their approvals are on file with the respective Institutional Review Boards and copies are retained by me for my records.
CHAPTER 4: DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to describe how the strategies, tactics, and actions employed by a new president and the executive leadership of an institution of higher learning create and shape the perceptions academic department leaders have of their workplace. Focusing on the phenomenon of presidential change, this study took a qualitative approach to discover how academic department leaders perceive their organizational climate (Denison, 1996; James, L.R., James, L.A., & Ashe, D.E., 1990) during the early months of a new president’s leadership. The study addressed these research questions utilizing a qualitative case study methodology:

How do academic department leaders perceive and describe their experience surrounding a presidential change?

- What do academic department leaders describe as major influences on their perception of the presidential change process?
- How do academic department leaders perceive the impact of executive leadership support of the presidential change on the faculty they lead?
- In what ways can executive leadership support academic department leadership during a presidential change?

Participants

After receiving approvals from the Institutional Review Boards at North Carolina State University and Wake Tech, I requested a list of academic department heads and associate academic department heads that had been in those positions since April 1st, 2019 from the human resource department at Wake Tech. Since Dr. Ralls officially began his tenure on April 11th, 2019, the April 1st date was selected so that the potential participant list would only contain potential participants that have experienced the entire presidential change phenomenon until the
time of this study seven to eight months into their administration. The list generated by the human resource department at Wake Tech contained the names, contact information, and position description of 36 academic department leaders that matched the participant profile needed for this study.

The new president of Wake Tech, Dr. Scott Ralls, was supportive of this study and agreed to send an email to the eligible participants encouraging them to “play a role” in this research effort. The email emphasized that participation was “completely voluntary and confidential”. The email can be found in Appendix G. The invitation email approved by the IRBs was sent later the same day. Of the 36 academic leaders that were invited, 14 offered a positive response to participate, 1 declined to participate, and the other 21 offered no response. Interviews times and places were able to be scheduled with 13 of the 14 that offered to participate resulting in a total of 13 completed interviews.

Participants were given the opportunity to choose the location and time of the interview in order to maintain anonymity and decorum (see the Interview Scheduling Email found in Appendix D). Six of the participants opted to meet off campus and away from the workplace, and two of these six asked to meet outside of regular working hours. Five of the participants requested meetings in public settings like restaurants or coffee shops, and one academic department leader requested the interview be held in a private setting at NC State’s James B. Hunt Jr. Library. The other seven participating academic department leaders requested meetings on their assigned campus: four in their offices and three in conference room locations in buildings different than their office locations.

Wake Tech has six academic campus and five education center locations. The participants represented four of the academic campus locations. Additionally, Wake Tech has six
academic program divisions: Applied Engineering and Technologies; Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences; Business and Public Services Technologies; Information Technology; Health Sciences; and Mathematics, Sciences, and Engineering. Of these six academic program divisions, the participants represented five. Finally, nine of those interviewed were female and four were male which closely matches the female to male ratio reported in Wake Tech’s Fact Book (2017) and their length of employment at Wake Tech ranged from 1 to 26 years of service with mean of 13.6 and a median of 12. Table 4.1 is a representation of the participant’s profile outlined above.

Table 4.1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Campus Locations</th>
<th>Academic Divisions</th>
<th>Length of Employment</th>
<th>Location of Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female = 9</td>
<td>4 of 6 Academic</td>
<td>5 of 6 Academic</td>
<td>1 – 26 years</td>
<td>Off Campus:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male = 4</td>
<td>Campus Locations</td>
<td>Divisions Represented</td>
<td>Mean = 13.6</td>
<td>-Restaurant or Coffee Shop (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Median = 12</td>
<td>-NC States’s James B. Hunt Jr. Library (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On Campus:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Participant’s Office (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>-Conference Room (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection**

A transcendental phenomenological (Husserl, 2004, p.179) approach to examining the lived experiences of academic department leaders during a presidential change process requires data to develop both a structural description of the conditions and context of their situation, and a textural description of their experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). Structural data in the form of artifacts was collected by the researcher. These artifacts consisted of:
• emails sent to all faculty and staff personnel;
• invitations sent to all campus employees that provided the opportunity to meet the incoming president in townhall formats;
• press releases;
• social media announcements;
• transcripts of videos posted on the college’s website.

The academic department leaders were reminded of these artifacts as a part of the Interview Protocol found in Appendix F. The welcome message sent by Dr. Ralls on April 11th, 2019 (see Appendix B) is an example of these artifacts. This reminder was provided to the participant to help define the parameters of the phenomenon and focus the conversation.

The textural data, in the form of narrative, was gathered from the participants through semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with academic department leaders who were experiencing the phenomenon of the presidential change. Open-ended, guiding questions were used to assist the academic department leaders recall and describe their perceptions and interpretations of actions and communications surrounding the president’s arrival and first few months leading the college. These guiding questions are also included in the Interview Protocol found in Appendix F. None of the interviews were subject to time constraints by either the researcher or the participant. The interviews ranged from almost six and a half minutes to just over 40 minutes of actual recording time. Eleven of the participants added more to their perceptions and interpretations after the recording device was shut off. These additions were noted on a Google document and stored with the transcript documents.

These interviews were recorded then transcribed verbatim by the researcher onto a Google doc in the researcher’s encrypted university Google account. The interview transcripts
were then reviewed by the researcher and identifying names or pronouns were either replaced with gender neutral pronouns or redacted from the interview transcript. Other potentially identifiable information such as department names, campus locations, divisions, etc. were also removed and replaced with generic descriptors in the transcript. As per the protocols approved by both the NC State IRB and Wake Tech’s IRB, permission to view the Google doc containing their interview transcription was provided via email to each of the participants. The participants were asked to review their interview transcription and request any changes or redactions they felt were needed to maintain their confidentiality. Once they responded to the review request, any required changes were made to their interview transcript and the electronic recording of the conversation was deleted. The academic department leaders that participated in this study had the opportunity to withdraw at any point prior to completion of this document. None withdrew their consent and all of the data collected are reported in these findings.

**Findings**

In this section, the perceptions and interpretations shared by the academic department leaders about the presidential change phenomenon during their interviews were used to answer the research question and sub-questions asked in this study. Excerpts from the communications and descriptions of actions taken by the new president and the executive leadership of Wake Tech during this presidential change phenomenon will be used to add context to the experiences shared by the participants. The sub-questions surrounding major influences, the perceptions of leadership impact, and executive leadership support will be addressed first. Following this, the main research question will be answered by providing an overview of how academic department leaders describe their experience surrounding this presidential change. The themes that emerged from the findings in the sub-questions were combined with the themes that emerged from the
findings in the main research question to present an overview of how the academic department leaders describe their perceptions surrounding this presidential change phenomenon.

To bring clarity to the terms used to describe executive leadership the following terms were used:

- **ELT** – this term is an acronym for the executive leadership team that consists of the vice presidents, senior vice presidents, and executive vice president that function as the president’s cabinet
- **executive leadership** – is the term that will be used when referring to Dr. Ralls and the ELT combined

**Major Influences**

Sub-Question: What do academic department leaders describe as major influences on their perception of the presidential change process? Actions, events, and decisions are at the core of the major influences for the academic department leaders. Listening sessions, the presidential hiring process, changes in divisional leadership, convocation, and graduation were the major areas of influence shared by the participants.

The listening sessions were among the major influencing events in the perceptions of the academic department leaders. Listening sessions had a positive influence in the onboarding of this new president. One academic department leader stated:

I think one of the major influencing events was his intentionality from hearing from all parts of the college in these small groups, listening sessions, if you will. Because I had been in the college for so long, I really hadn't been in a session where I sat around with other colleagues and talked to the President. You know, so, for me, I that, that was a plus, that was a plus to me that this President was really interested in hearing. Not the overall
pulse of the college, but kind of from every area of the college, what people were feeling. And so by him doing that, I ... it's really influenced ... my support, I should say, my support of him moving forward, and also I think it's also impacted the way I perform as a leader, as well, because the President was taking a lot of time to hear from different parts of the college with probably not as much time, and I have, I have more time and it made me start thinking as a leader of my own department, how much am I taking to listen to those that that will work with me, so .. it's been positive, it's been positive.

Another stated:

I've been able to meet with him in a small group format four or five times, which, you know, is a, in my opinion, a tremendous amount. It hasn't been one-on-one. I haven't requested that, but just having him make time to talk with faculty, to talk with department leaders about their feelings, their concerns, ... I think that has made a huge difference.

One stated simply, “I think the, the listening sessions, … it seems like there was an attempt to make sure that there were many opportunities, so everybody who could, who wanted to be heard, could be heard.” Another academic department leader mentioned the impact of these sessions. For example, “I have appreciated the fact that he has made himself available to respond to questions or just to listen to what department heads said.” One department leader expressed their impressions of how the listening sessions impacted their faculty:

I would say that his listening sessions, especially with faculty, have just had very positive impression on me, and on faculty as well. So, I do feel like he's making an effort to know the place from the ground up. And those are the biggest things. I think that the biggest things that I could see.
There were various types of listening sessions offered for the college. Some were like the one “… at the beginning, you know, as soon as he came on board, there was an opening session that was open for everybody that could come.” Dr. Ralls also held smaller listening sessions for specific groups, “The fact that he had one that was specifically with department heads, where we could address issues that were more specific to us, I think was helpful.” Another expressed, “He had a couple of meetings for specifically for department heads and that was, I think, helpful in terms of feeling positive about the, the change process.”

Dr. Ralls’ listening skills were appreciated by the academic department leaders; they felt as if their voices were heard. One participant commented, “So those listening trust sessions, they were small, and he really seemed to listen.” Another participant said, “It seems like there was an attempt to make sure that there were many opportunities, so everybody who could who wanted to be heard could be heard.” And, another academic department leader said, “I think that that has been probably the most influential that he sat down with department heads and listened.”

Although the timeframe for the phenomenon was emphasized for the participants at the beginning of their interview as starting with the onboarding of Dr. Ralls on April 11th, 2019, the presidential selection process was identified as a major influence on their perception of the new president.

I guess it was the Presidential Search Committee. I was really eager to see where they were with their steps and who they were looking at. I was … I want to say that I was not a major part of that at all, but I definitely appreciated the college sharing where they were at each step in the project's process. And when it came down to the last, I think it was maybe two or three. I just felt like I was a part of the change. I felt like the college was listening. Not that it was my hope. But I felt that the college was … was really trying to
be transparent. And when they announced who the President was going to be, my next thing was okay, so when is he starting? When are we going to start? You know, seeing some, some things moving along? Because I'm ready. I think the college is ready.

It was stated that, “It started with the interviews we had, we got to a Q & A session with each of the three possible candidates. And I thought that was interesting. I appreciated that it was good to get background.” While another academic department leader said,

I think there was a conscious effort on trying to be transparent in the sense of through the process we received as a college general emails of saying, this is where the search is or the committee. You know, we have this many candidates or applicants or three have made it to the final round.

It was felt that, “unlike many transitions, I think it was very well planned I mean it was announced, we knew that it was going to happen.” Being a part of the interviewing process and providing feedback made one academic department leader, “a little bit more conscious of being able to explain to someone what it is that you're doing here.”

Although other participants were not as engaged, they still felt it necessary to mention the presidential search process during their interview. One said, “I read the information when they were doing the final interviews. I didn't attend those. They were just, they weren't convenient for me and I just took a wait and see attitude.” Another academic department leader offered that, “I came on board during the presidential search process. And so, I did not have any particular time, or you know, way to prepare for the presidential change.” One academic department leader observed that, “everybody just sort of went into a, you know, protective holding pattern of we'll just do what we've always done. And then, you know, deal with changes as they're coming.”

Although the participant did not feel “significantly impacted in any way by the change process,”
this participant thought “there was clarity, of communication of what the process was going to follow” and “there were incremental updates of various activities in the in the recruiting process and the vetting process.” Another academic department leader found this to be “a positive thing that, you know, the process was clearly identified, and that there were updates as it progressed.”

The third major influence on how the presidential change was perceived and interpreted was that some participants were also dealing with leadership changes within their division. The changing of an academic leader’s Dean or Provost had greater impact than the arrival of a new president and represented one more change to consider. For example, “… we have an interim Dean and also our Provost just announced they are retiring. I think those have a greater impact.”

After stating that “it was an interesting confluence of events for our department. So, before the presidential change happened, or maybe even concurrent with the presidential change, right as it began”, another academic department leader described the restructure and leadership changes that occurred in their division. This represented “a lot of confounding factors … So, the presidential change was just one more the change that my faculty saw.” And on one campus, … it's been a little bit different for us. Because it's hard to tell exactly what's related to the presidential change because we also had a dean leave, a provost hired, an interim dean is still our Associate Dean that's never been replaced by Dean yet. So, we're kind of in a flux stage. So sometimes it's, it's hard to figure out exactly what's the result of the presidential change and a Provost change.

Yet another academic department leader has had a new Dean for a “year, year and a half” and says that “cannot help not have an effect on how I feel about the way things proceed.” Another shared, “I can tell you that my particular division has undergone a lot of turmoil and
transitions, since the announcement of, since Dr. Ralls has taken over and I, I don't think that things are necessarily related.”

Lastly, there were two events that influenced the academic department leaders’ perception of the presidential change; convocation and the winter graduation. Convocation is an event used by Wake Tech to rally the faculty and staff and launch them into the new academic year. One academic department leader noted,

… convocation sticks in my mind as being a time when everyone really felt like Dr. Ralls was kind of in and familiar with everything. And a lot of the people that I supervise did not like convocation, they thought it was a very negative message. And we've been dealing with some backlash from that changing that perception. And so that, that was one I've heard from people that they thought it was a very negative message that what we do doesn't make a difference, because there's still so much work to do, which I think I kind of took away from but it was interpreted by others that we just, what we did didn't matter. Another stated that they,

… had a lot of faculty who were upset by the convocation. Who felt that it was not the supportive convocation that they've gotten in the past that the way that it was structured, led them to believe that there was a lot of problems with the college and we were just trying to hype everything up as if it's wonderful. One academic department leader stated that “… it was a different tone and a different approach to the convocation than they had been used to …” and noted that “… Dr. Ralls needed to send out an email talking about the fact you know, what was going on with salaries and stuff, because apparently that had always been addressed at convocation that he didn't touch on it.”
In contrast, another academic department leader “… liked that he came in with this reach and rally idea, and I know he communicated that through convocation.” They later went on to say,

And then you know, convocation was really I think when he hopefully got the message across to people. I mean, I am a believer in it. So, I don't know if I'm your most objective interviewee, but I do really like the idea of reach and rally. I think it's resonated.

Two participants mentioned positive changes to the second graduation ceremony held with Dr. Ralls. The first graduation ceremony took place just weeks after he joined Wake Tech. For the second graduation ceremony, Dr. Ralls had the faculty, administrators, and dignitaries form two lines for the students and their families to recess through as they were applauded. “It was fun to see the joy of the students faces as they were trying to, to exit. So that's one of the changes I think a small but very meaningful and impactful.”

Table 4.2 shows the five major influences on the presidential change process as themes with the associated subthemes as the data was view through the lens of the sub-question: What do academic department leaders describe as major influences on their perception of the presidential change process? The subthemes are identified as either having a positive influence on the perception of the new president or a negative influence on the perception of the new president.
Table 4.2

*Major Influences – Themes and Subthemes.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Listening Sessions      | - Positive - Influenced support  
                          |     - Positive - Affected faculty  
                          |     - Positive - Specific session for Academic Department Leaders  
                          |     - Positive – New president demonstrated listening skills           |
| Hiring Process          | - Positive - College was listening  
                          |     - Positive - Demonstrated transparency  
                          |     - Positive - Wait and see  
                          |     - Positive - Claimed no influence but felt it was important enough to mention |
| Divisional Changes      | - Negative - Just one more change to deal with  
                          |     - Negative - Hard to discern where the change comes from  
                          |     - Positive - Not related to how the communications and actions were perceived |
| Convocation             | - Negative – we are not making a difference  
                          |     - Negative – a lot of problems  
                          |     - Positive – Reach and Rally message                               |
| Graduation              | - Positive – celebrating students                                         |

*Perceptions of Executive Leadership Impact*

Sub-Question: How do the academic department leaders perceive the impact of executive leadership support of the faculty they lead? There were two main types of perceptions described by the academic department leaders that addressed this sub-question: how the new president and the ELT have impacted faculty, and how the multiple layers of management, or hierarchy of
Wake Tech influences the impact of how the executive leadership supports this presidential change.

Related to how Dr. Ralls impacted faculty, an academic department leader stated,

It was interesting to hear their feedback from coming from the faculty listening sessions, and what they brought back to me. And they really felt like okay, this is going to be good. We have a president who really does support faculty and wants to see that we're treated professionally.

Another shared their perceptions about how Dr. Ralls impacted faculty this way,

That's the feeling I got from our faculty, and from April on, I haven't heard anything negative, which says a lot about you, when you are used to a particular style of leadership. [The previous president] as I said before, had a big following. So, when Scott Ralls came in, I've heard positive especially for those who directly interacted with him.

So, very hesitant at first, very positive after.

To one academic department leader, Dr. Ralls arrived with “a lot of positive buzz … because of his previous tenure. His resumé was very impressive.” This led to “the general consensus among the faculty was positive, open minded, welcoming.” Another academic department leader mimicked that his faculty’s perception of Dr. Ralls, “… in general, they seem favorable” and “… those who have had exposure to him find him to be pretty straightforward and approachable.” It was noted that a lot of faculty attended listening sessions, a major influencing factor identified in the first sub-question, and “liked what they heard.” After speaking with those faculty, one academic department leader determined “they like the direction that he’s taking so far.” And another said, “… my faculty have been very receptive and that’s going to prove to be beneficial
as we move forward with the strategic planning.” Another participant expressed concern about potential changes coming.

I honestly think that there has been pretty good communication from, you know, Dr Ralls and actually, ... I think he's been pretty clear. I don't really sense a mixed message, I don't, I don't think that that's come down through the chain in any sort of coordinated way, you know, because I think there's a again that uncertainty and that feeling out and then part of it is, .. are the people in the current ELT are they going to be around? I mean I think a lot of people are looking at that and saying, are these people that Dr Ralls trusts and, you know, from what we've seen, there's just been a lot of changing, so nothing. I don't really have anything I guess, negative to say I just don't think they've done much in that regard.

Another academic department leader perceived Dr. Ralls’ impact is as positive and impact faculty by influencing other leadership at the college,

I'll have to say that through this whole thing. It's really, it really started from Dr. Ralls set setting the stage in the beginning. And that has influenced, I believe, other college leaders in a positive way, so that we are addressing our faculty or our departments. For me, personally, I think I'm conveying that same positive message of support as well. So, it's been a good change.

There were mixed perceptions about how the ELT are supportive of the presidential change. On the positive side, one academic department leader speaking to the executive leadership stated that, “I think they have had very positive thoughts about the change.” And referring specifically to the ELT, “I can't really think of any of any way they could have been
more supportive.” Another participant stated, “I think that they've supported us by not being intrusive.” And, “I think the best thing they've done for me is not radically changed the path.”

Another academic department leader was in the middle, “So I don't know that I've, I have felt supported by the executive leadership, and I don't know, I haven't felt unsupported it just has been sort of a nonentity.” Another participant stated, “I typically don't have a regular interaction with most of the executive leadership. I have some limited exposure to some of them but it's that which has been unchanged by the change in administration.”

Hierarchy and the multiple levels of management were perceived as an impact of executive leader support of the presidential change on faculty. One academic department leader shared,

I don't know how much the executive leadership deals with people on my level. I know for a fact that in my chain of command the executive person on the ELT doesn't know, all of the people on my level well. I don't mean to say that in a critical way. It's just a reality of how many levels of hierarchy we have and how big we are. But we don't, you know, for me to feel supported, and I think for faculty to feel supported, it's by my direct supervisor.

Another’s perception was that, “I do think that there is a disconnect between administrators and the direct service people I call myself an in-the-field person. And, that's always kind of problematic if the administrators get too far up there.” The levels of hierarchy and the disconnect caused by these levels led one academic department leader to say, “I’m in a chain of command, which sometimes make it feel like you can’t say what you think.” The difficulty of communicating between the number of layers between executive leadership and faculty was also pointed out, “… leading up to the change, it felt like our leadership was solid, but
communication’s always been difficult going from the top to the bottom of management and getting all the way to faculty.”

When sharing their thoughts on how the executive leadership has supported faculty during this presidential change, academic department leaders spoke mainly about two areas; how they perceive the reaction faculty have to Dr. Ralls and how they perceive the effect of the hierarchical levels of management. Table 4.3 shows the perceptions of executive leadership impact by analyzing the data through the lens of the sub-question: How do the academic department leaders perceive the impact of executive leadership support of the faculty they lead? The themes and subthemes that emerged from this analysis are displayed below with the positive, negative, and neutral effects shared by the participants added.

Table 4.3

Perceptions of Executive Leadership Impact – Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The President’s and executive</td>
<td>- Positive - when met in small group settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>leadership’s support</td>
<td>- Positive - Like the direction they are taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Positive - Influenced leaders in a positive way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchical levels of management</td>
<td>- Negative - Too many levels to feel support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Neutral - Non-intrusive, non-acting seen as support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Negative - Communication issues and mistrust from top to faculty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Executive Leadership Support

Sub-Question: In what ways can executive leadership support academic department leadership during a presidential change? One of the prompts used in the interviews directly addressed this question (see Appendix F). The participants did not react with sweeping responses like improved communication or larger budgets; rather, they were thoughtful and offered
insightful recommendations. Academic department leaders seek support through explanations, consensus, more visible and involved executive leadership, and a greater level of trust to reduce fear.

Academic department leaders seek more communication directly from the executive level, “I think somewhere down the line, we kind of lost some of that communication from upper administration to my level.” For example, policy comes from the executive level without explanation, “Okay, here's a new policy without much context of where it came from and what it's supposed to mean. So, I think a clear kind of understanding, providing more information about what the basis is for things.” The frustration felt by this academic department leader regarding a change in paperwork is expressed here,

It's a lot of providing support, trying to provide reasoning, even when reasoning isn't provided for what changes might be coming and why. So, I'd say that's probably the biggest thing that I'm you know, that's kind of the focus of what's going on is that I'm trying to provide the support, the reasoning, to the faculty, to help them understand maybe why it's occurring. And even if I don't necessarily know the specific reason, coming up with my best guesses for a reason, since it hasn't been communicated, you know, the accountability issue. I assume it's for accountability as to why we're seeing some of these changes. And it makes sense, and it's a wonderful reason. And so that's what I'm running with. Because that makes sense to the faculty as well. And it's a good goal, so it works out well.

Another academic department leader stated they are looking for the “why” of things,

… the one the one big concern that I have with the support from executive leadership is not always having a full explanation for the why of things. And even if that full
explanation is because, you know, we have to by law or you know, the regulations say so or even it just comes down as like, you know, this is just a change we're making, and I say, so like, that's fine. That happens, and that's perfectly fine. But it would be helpful to have a reasoning to pass on. That comes from higher up. That's not one that we are trying to create at the individual or departmental level, you know, this is the change that we're making. Why? Well, we don't know. But maybe it's this, this reason and that sounds good. Let's go with it. It would be good to have that communication.

One participant noted, “sometimes even just that being able to ask and find the why was helpful, and I think it helped morale a little bit to, you know, well, at least we know why.” An explanation of decisions is not the only explanation sought by academic department leaders,

I think over all it'd be helpful with transitions in leadership like this, that the college at large understands the role of the President and the role of the executive leadership, because often there's that image depending on who the President it is, it depends on how that individual is involved or to the extent the individual is involved into the everyday life of faculty.

It has been observed that Dr. Ralls is present for many activities around the college, “…and the fact that he has been willing to come to events that our department has hosted, that he has been visible, and they seem to be interested in learning more about it.” One academic department leader offered advice to the ELT to follow Dr. Ralls’ example,

I think for the ELT … you know, I was thinking about it the other day. Dr. Ralls is at almost every event. I'm follow him on Twitter. So, I see him at almost every event that I know about at this campus. And I don't even know how he does that. I mean, by campus, I mean by our 10 locations. I mean, I really don't know how he has time to do anything
other than going to events but he's constantly at events, tweeting and sharing what's going on. And I really had that thought the other day. Like, he's probably been to more events within many areas, than people way further down on that hierarchy, you know what I mean? And I'm, I'm not trying to say that in like a way of accusing anyone who hasn't been able to do that, because there are many reasons why sometimes you can't be available to do something like that. But it means a lot when you are. So, if that's something he can model that other leadership around the college can emulate. I think that would be really good. So that is helpful in the change process, that you feel like he's very connected. I do feel like he's very connected and that people have an opportunity to just meet him at all these events and know who he is and know that he's, you know, interested in interacting with the students and faculty and staff.

This is especially true of the listening sessions. When a listening session for academic department heads focused on upcoming program changes it was felt that,

if my executive leadership had been in that meeting with him for them to have heard concerns from the all the academic department heads, I think it would have been they’ve got my back they know what we're feeling, and they know what we're going through.

One academic department leader recalled Dr. Ralls saying that he was “… not going to be the kind of president that stays in my office”. This participant went on to say they loved “… that thing about the heroes in the hall and that the students are the important thing.” They felt that since the administrative building was built, “… it was almost like [the administrative building] is over there, and everything else is the campus, is out there.”

In contrast, another academic department leader stated, “I feel like the ELT … they’re keeping an ear to the ground. They’re looking for weak signals, what’s going on. They want to
hear input.” A participant recommended that executive leadership support could be found in “just being more open and allowing more sessions or talking about those plans for the college.” It is felt that, those listening trust sessions, they were small, and he really seemed to listen and follow up in some way, shape or form, even if it was like, yeah, we looked at that, but you know, it has to be this way because of this. At least that was a little bit more of an answer, as opposed to we're just doing it this way.

Another academic department leader also wanted more of these types of sessions and states, in my position, it seems like there's a lot of I'm just kind of told what is going on and I have to continue that message. And so sometimes that can be difficult when you don’t agree with a certain policy. And so, I think having more of those touch points, whether it be through meetings, or listening sessions, or even just workshops about here's what our goal is, here's how we're working towards this. And being invited to be a part of it some of those decisions is important.

And one more participant agreed, “I think having better understanding of what’s happening, why it’s happening, and maybe being able to have some input into it would be helpful.”

Creating opportunities for these types of interactions will not be as effective if the fear of speaking out is not eliminated. One academic department leader simply states, “There's a culture of fear that you're going to say the wrong thing to the wrong person. Something I would like for us to change at this college.” It was expressed by another participant that, “I'm in a chain of command, which sometimes makes it feel like you can't say what you think.” And, “I don't know how he can hear more of the voice of those of us at this level, because we are afraid to say
anything.” This academic department leader went on to offer this recommendation to Dr. Ralls as he seeks input,

He can listen to the retirees and actually, I heard he is going around and asking for advice from people. And I was fully prepared that if he asked me that question, I would say, go talk to the retirees, the ones who've been here for a long time, because they really know. I mean, you know, they kind of know what works and what doesn't work. And, I mean, they might have different perspectives. Of course, they will. But they will feel free to give you what they really think.

One academic department leader was advised to “… be open, but not too open. Because you don't know who's listening to you, on your level, and what you're saying … sometimes it can get twisted and turned around to something else.” When the executive leadership can support a culture where academic department leaders feel “… able to kind of openly say without fear of some kind of retaliation or anything, but just to say, you know, this process isn't working that good, will be a very helpful thing.”

Academic department leaders are seeking support from executive leadership during this presidential change and moving forward in three main areas; more complete explanations of decisions made, more exposure to the executive team and opportunities for their voices to be heard, and the creation of a safe environment where they can speak without fear. The three themes and their subthemes are listed in Table 4.4 are a result of analyzing the data through the lens of the sub-question: In what ways can executive leadership support academic department leadership during a presidential change?
Table 4.4

*Executive Leadership Support – Themes and Subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Explanations | - Direct communication between executive leadership and academic department leaders  
- New administration - new roles for the president and ELT?  
- Share the “why” so it can be shared with faculty |
| Exposure | - Be more involved and attend more events  
- Be more forward about listening  
- Academic department leaders want more opportunities to engage and be heard |
| Fear | - Eliminate the culture of fear to speak up |

*Overview: Department Leaders Describe Their Experience*

Main research question: How do academic department leaders describe their experience surrounding a presidential change? This is the main question this study seeks to answer. Answers to the sub-questions that support the main question have been discussed above where themes and subthemes have been identified. This section will pull in these themes and subthemes, while adding some additional structural and textural description to provide an overall description of the experiences and expectations of the academic department leaders.

As a general observation, the academic department leaders came into their interviews relaxed and ready to share their experiences and interpretations of the phenomenon of presidential change. They all confirmed that they felt safe to express their personal perceptions and interpretations of the experiences surrounding the presidential change phenomenon. Each participant expressed gratitude for the opportunity for their “voice to be heard.”
Most of the conversations were focused on Dr. Ralls. First impressions count. Overall the academic department leaders perceived that Dr. Ralls was straightforward, approachable, student oriented, calm, confident, and had a clear vision. The following comments highlight the impressions Dr. Ralls has made on each of the academic department leaders:

- “… in regard to Dr. Ralls, personally, I think those who have had exposure to him find him to be pretty straightforward and approachable.”
- “… it really started from Dr. Ralls setting the stage in the beginning. And that has influenced I believe, other college leaders in a positive way.”
- “I do feel like he's making an effort to know the place from the ground up.”
- “My impressions of him have been positive in the sense of that, he seems to be very approachable and able to connect, easy to talk to, and interested, you know, in what I had to say.”
- “You know, he’s such a personable person. I really like him. I think he’s a student oriented individual.”
- “It's my perception that this President seems more, more focused on the student.”
- “I actually got to talk with Dr. Ralls. He's very calm, very confident.”
- “I would say that the fact that he was consistent every time I met him from when he started to now. I mean, I mean, major win for me in terms of leadership.”
- “… we're now starting to see him become interested in looking at particular areas of the college.”
- “He was brand new coming in, he was still trying to figure out what all was happening.”
• “From my perspective, I saw Dr. Ralls come in with a really clear vision, and that was appealing to me.”

• “I like the way that he explains things. I like that he comes from a place of knowledge. I like the way he's trying to right us in terms of what the purpose of a community college is and coming back to Dallas Herring. I think that's really smart.”

• “I had a chance to hear him a couple of times, when he was onboarding. And just hearing him speak, he speaks from the heart was something that hit me... It wasn't political gaming.”

There was a perception that Dr. Ralls was not going to make any changes his first year in office: This perception was based on comments Dr. Ralls made at a listening session or may have been interpreted from comments he made in the 2019 Wake Tech IGNITE video (2019), “Wake Tech is a purveyor of hope, Wake Tech is an engine of opportunity and Wake Tech is a pathway to jobs, and my number one goal as the new president of Wake Tech is to do nothing to mess that up.” Academic department leaders interpreted his listening session comments and other public comments this way:

• One academic department leader recalled Dr. Ralls saying, "I don't plan on making any changes for a while until I absorbed the environment and, you know, the activities.”

• “I think he initially said, you know, I'm not gonna make any changes, not gonna hire any new people or doing any new administrative stuff.”

• “I think he said he was going to come in the first year and not make a lot of big changes.”
• “I do like the fact that from the beginning he said, you know I can't imagine starting to make changes to anything. I don't plan on doing that.”

But changes were noted, and some of the academic department leaders perceived the changes as positive, needed, and timely:

• “… but at the same time, we noticed, you know, a number of changes and realignments within administration and which he very quickly qualified as there were opportunities to pursue some things and did not want to waste a year.”

• “My perception which may or may not be right, is that is that there still seems to be a search for more administrative people, and I don't think that's what we need.”

• “I have seen some changes that he has done that have been positive.”

• “One thing that he did that to me moving forward I think would be very impressive changes in graduation, for instance, small things that I think make a difference.”

• “Dr. Ralls was able to act quickly on some initiatives. Well, you know that that's not the norm. The norm is it takes much too long to get through what should be fairly simple processes that cause many frustrations and anxieties by the uncertainty of whether something will actually be processed in a timely fashion.”

• [It was] “… kind of refreshing to see that there are some, you know, what, hopefully will be positive changes that were made quickly.”

The former president’s influence was mentioned a number of times in the interviews with the participants. The comments were both positive and negative and some academic department leaders were strongly influenced by the previous president. Here are a sample of comments:
• “I think everyone had a lot of confidence in [the previous president] and all he had done for the college and for us, and there was a lot of trust there. And that doesn't come overnight.”

• “I guess one thing that [the previous president], you know, was always an advocate of is being better.”

• “[the previous president] was a great leader, like I, you know I think he had, you know, tremendous positive qualities.”

• “… I don't want to say a lapse of professionalism, but an ease of working with others under [the previous president].”

• “I was a big fan of [the previous president] when he stepped down. He was a big shaping part of my career.”

• “We had [the previous president] here for so long that you learned to know where he was coming from and what was needed. I still don't know, as we quite know, you know where we're going yet.”

• “… tenure here is very advantageous.”

When transitioning from the previous president to the new president, the following comments reflect the sentiments expressed by many of the participants:

I think there has been a change in, in tone at least that I've seen to be a little bit more of a focus on students. A little more. You know, I don't think it's stuck that he wanted us to call him Scott. I think a lot of us, you know reflectively call him Dr. Ralls because I think that's indicative of perhaps our previous culture was a little hierarchical. And I think one of the, from my perception, one of the things he's attempting to do is perhaps maybe shift away a little bit from titles and rank and position. And, you know, focus on the classroom
or, how is what we're doing, transforming or impacting the lives of students more. That's been my impression.

And another academic department leader said,

Trust is always important. Right? And you know, it's easy to say things like trust and transparency, but what does that look like, how do you establish that? And from what I have seen of Dr. Ralls, and seen of the transition, I'm inclined to think that he understands that and seems to want to build trust in like on a one-on-one and a personal relationship.

There is a strategic planning initiative at this college that began during the presidential search process. One of the demographic questions asked if the participant had been involved with any aspect of this strategic planning initiative. The thinking was that the strategic planning initiative may have provided a different experience of the phenomenon for the academic department leader since there was more access to Dr. Ralls, his vision, and the reasoning behind some of the decisions affecting to the academic department leaders. There were no outstanding differences in the perceptions of those involved in the strategic planning initiative and those that were not involved.

The major themes and subthemes are summarized in Table 4.5. This table draws from the other tables presented in this chapter and adds the overall themes and subthemes that were a result of analyzing the data through the lens of the main research question: How do academic department leaders describe their experience surrounding a presidential change?
Table 4.5

Overview: Department Leaders Describe Their Experience – Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New President has been Positively Received</td>
<td>-Straight forward and approachable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Student oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Calm and confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Clear vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes Initiated</td>
<td>-Perceived no changes in the first year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Changes occurred – positive, needed, and timely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous President’s Influence</td>
<td>-He was well liked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-There is a change in culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-A change in focus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Major Influences

| Listening Sessions                           | -Positive - Influenced support                                           |
|                                             | -Positive - Affected faculty                                             |
|                                             | -Positive - Specific session for Academic Department Leaders             |
|                                             | -Positive – New president demonstrated listening skills                  |
| Hiring Process                              | -Positive - College was listening                                        |
|                                             | -Positive - Demonstrated transparency                                   |
|                                             | -Positive - Wait and see                                                 |
|                                             | -Positive - Claimed no influence but felt it was important enough to mention |
| Divisional Changes                          | -Negative - Just one more change to deal with                            |
|                                             | -Negative - Hard to discern where the change comes from                  |
|                                             | -Positive - Not related                                                  |
### Table 4.5 (Continued)

**Overview: Department Leaders Describe Their Experience – Themes and Subthemes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Major Influences (Continued)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convocation</td>
<td>-Negative – we are not making a difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Negative – a lot of problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Positive – Reach and Rally message</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation</td>
<td>-Positive – celebrating students</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Perceptions of Executive Leader Impact</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The President’s and Executive Leadership’s Support</td>
<td>-Positive - when met in small group settings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Positive - Like the direction they are taking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Positive - Influenced leaders in a positive way</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchical Levels of Management</td>
<td>-Negative - Too many levels to feel support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Neutral - Non-intrusive, non-acting seen as support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Negative - Communication issues and mistrust from top to faculty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Executive Leader Support</strong></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Explanations</td>
<td>-Direct communication between executive leadership and academic department leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-New administration = new roles for the president and ELT?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Share the “why” so it can be shared with faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exposure</td>
<td>-Be more involved and attend more events</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Be more forward about listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Academic department leaders want more opportunities to engage and be heard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fear</td>
<td>-Eliminate the culture of fear to speak up</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Summary

Table 4.5 summarizes the themes found through the analysis of interviews with 13 academic department leaders and the transcripts produced by those interviews. (For this section, themes and subthemes will be *italicized* and the lens through which they were identified will be **bolded** to facilitate reading.) The descriptions shared by the academic department leaders of their experiences weave these themes together to provide a more complete picture of their perceptions. The *Listening Sessions*, listed as a theme under **Major Influences**, played a large role in Dr. Ralls being positively received. A variety of types of listening sessions contributed to the president being perceived as straightforward and approachable, student oriented, calm and confident, and having a clear vision for the future of the college. Some of the listening sessions were open to all employees, some were devoted to engaging academic department leaders, while others were set up for entire departments or divisions. Those that attended the listening sessions felt that Dr. Ralls demonstrated good listening skills, “… he really seemed to listen and follow up in some way, shape or form.” The listening sessions also spawned one of the sub-themes under the **Executive Leader Support, Exposure** theme. Academic department leaders felt that they were heard and want more opportunities to engage and be heard.

The *Changes Initiated* theme was also closely tied to the **Major Influences’ Listening Sessions** theme. The subtheme of *Perceived no changes in the first year* surfaced during conversations surrounding listening sessions. The listening sessions also brought forward the subtheme of *Positive when met in small group settings* under **The President’s and Executive Leadership’s Support** theme. The *Changes Initiated* subtheme of *Changes occurred – positive, needed, and timely* also related to the **Major Influences** of *Convocation* and *Graduation*. The
“Reach and Rally” message at convocation was positively received and the change in the recession at graduation was seen as positive and celebrating students.

Although the Hiring Process theme under the Major Influences happened before the timeframe defined for this study, it had an effect upon perceptions surrounding the ELT that carried over into the presidential change phenomenon. Since the executive leadership demonstrated transparency through the process and created a perception that the college was listening, academic department leaders were able to adopt a “wait and see” attitude with more confidence. This confidence was described by one participant this way, “… leading up to the change, it felt like our leadership was solid.” While some participants claimed the hiring process had no influence on their perceptions of the presidential change phenomenon, they still felt it was important enough to mention. However, one academic department leader felt that “… the whole transition just went on too long” which may have led to “… like not knowing who’s in charge is, is draining.”

The Previous President’s Influence was a theme that both stood alone and led into other themes. He was well liked. The previous president had a “particular style of leadership” and “a big following.” This created one of the Major Influences, Convocation. One academic department leader reported that their faculty thought that “… it was not the supportive convocation that they’ve gotten in the past” which “… led them to believe that there was a lot of problems with the college.” This led to the Perceptions of Executive Leader Impact section’s subtheme that Dr. Ralls sent an unsupportive message during convocation. Another participant mentioned the previous president created the “… feeling of kind of a small company” at the college while others noted a change in culture, “it’s brought some of the professionalism back” and a change in focus.
The Hierarchical Levels of Management theme in the Perceptions of Executive Leader Impact section tied directly into the Explanations theme in the Executive Leader Support section. The recommended remedy for the subthemes of Too many levels to feel support and Communication issues and mistrust from top to faculty under the Hierarchical levels of Management theme were the subthemes of direct communication between executive leadership and academic department leaders and share the “why” so it can be shared with faculty under the Explanations theme. And although the hierarchical levels of management were seen as support because they were non-intrusive and non-acting, there were others that wanted the roles of the new president and ELT clearly defined since they represented the new administration.

Another theme under the Major Influences section was Divisional Changes. A majority of academic department leaders that participated in this study experienced some sort of divisional change. The changes were described as mild to disruptive; some spoke of a change in middle management while others spoke of restructuring entire divisions and departments. These changes were perceived as not related to the presidential change phenomenon and were viewed as Just one more change to deal with.

The remainder of the themes and subthemes stood alone. Under the heading of Perceptions of Executive Leader Impact, Dr. Ralls was cited to have Influenced leaders in a positive way as a subtheme to The President’s and Executive Leadership’s Support theme. And under Executive Leader Support two of the subthemes to Exposure surfaced as recommendations to the ELT: Be more involved and attend more events and Be more forward about listening. Both of these subthemes were inspired by Dr. Ralls’ example. The Fear theme popped up in a variety of topics covered by the interviews. The subtheme to Eliminate the culture of fear to speak up surfaced every time.
Each of the 13 academic department leaders that described their perceptions surrounding the presidential change phenomenon had their own stories and shared their interpretations of the events and communications that have affected those perceptions. Each participant spoke openly and with a passion for the work they do at Wake Tech. Everyone mentioned student success as a motivating factor in their work experience during their interview.

**Conclusion**

This study described how the strategies, tactics, and actions employed by a new president and the ELT of an institution of higher learning created and shaped the perceptions academic department leaders have of their workplace. Focusing on the phenomenon of presidential change, this study took a qualitative approach to discover how academic department leaders perceive their organizational climate (Denison, 1996; James, L.R., James, L.A., & Ashe, D.E., 1990) during the early months of a new president’s leadership.

Thirteen academic department leaders shared their perceptions and interpretations of the communications, events, and announcements that have defined the first months of Dr. Ralls’ tenure. They have been positive in their reception of Dr. Ralls and mixed regarding the actions of the executive leadership. The participants have offered recommendations for better support and requested a change in the current culture of fear that keeps some from speaking out.

The next chapter provides a discussion around the findings and how they tie back to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks. Recommendations for application of these findings, and future research studies are also discussed.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

According to Yin (2003), a case study approach is appropriate when the study is to answer “how” and “why” questions, the researcher cannot manipulate the behavior of the participants of the study, and the contextual conditions are relevant to the phenomenon under study. The phenomenon for this study was defined as the presidential change at a large community college located in the southeastern region of the United States. This research was approached through the lens of transcendental phenomenology (Husserl, 2004, p. 179). This approach focused on the descriptions of the interpretations and perceptions of the academic department leaders as they experienced the first few months of working under a new president.

Moustakas (1994) recommends organizing and analyzing data to create both a structural and a textural description of the phenomenon experienced by the participants. The structural description is derived from a description of the context, situation, and conditions surrounding the participants’ experience. The textural description is derived from descriptions of the lived experiences of the academic department leaders as they shared them in one-on-one semi-structured interviews.

This chapter will provide a summary of this presidential change process as it has been experienced by the academic department leaders at Wake Technical Community College. This examination of the structural description of the context, situation, and conditions surrounding the phenomenon, and the textural descriptions of the lived experiences of the academic department leaders through the lens of the conceptual framework that supported this study conveys the overall essence of the experience of the participants (Creswell, 2013). And later in the chapter, recommendations for practice, theory, and future research will be discussed.
Summary of Findings

The section will provide an overview of the data used to create the structural description and textural descriptions surrounding the presidential change phenomenon at this large community college located in the southeastern portion of the United States. A description of the case in this study, based on observation and artifacts, created the structural description. The themes and subthemes found in the interview data summarizes the lived experiences of the participants and created the textural description.

Summary of Structural Description

Some structural description was provided by the participants during the interviewing process. They described their reaction or perception of a specific artifact or event (Bevan, 2014). A large portion of the structural description came from artifacts collected by the researcher. These artifacts included items such as:

- email sent to all faculty and staff personnel (examples can be found in Appendices G, H, and I);
- invitations sent to all campus employees;
- press releases;
- social media announcements;
- transcripts of videos posted on the college’s public website.

As an employee of Wake Tech, the researcher had access to all of the internal communications shared with the faculty and staff of this college. The press releases are a matter of public record and the social media and video transcripts are routinely posted on this college’s public website where they were easily collected. These data combine to describe the following case.
Wake Technical Community College (Wake Tech) was chartered in the late 1950’s as an industrial education center focused on training adults in the vocational and technical skills needed by emerging industries within the region (Wake Tech History, n.d.). It followed a similar path as many other technical schools and junior colleges across the United States and grew into an institution that addressed the needs of its community. In 1980, “College” was added to its name and Wake Tech continued to grow with its community. By the early 2000’s, Wake Tech had grown to 50,000 curriculum and continuing education students (Fact Book, 2004). In 2003, the third president of Wake Tech was named after a search that involved a professional executive search organization that focused on finding someone that could take the College to the next level (Ireland, 2010). Under his leadership, this third president saw enrollment increase by almost 20,000 students and six campuses in 15 years (Fact Book, 2017) creating one of the largest community colleges in the Southeast. One academic department leader noted that “… he had a big following”, and another said he was “so loved” and called him “the patriarch”. Another academic department leader stated, “I think everyone had a lot of confidence in [the third president] and all he had done for the college and for us, and there was a lot of trust there. And that doesn’t come overnight.” And there was a familiarity with him, “We had [the third president] here for so long that you learned to know where he was coming from and what was needed.”

Upon the announcement of the third president’s retirement in the early spring of 2018, preparations were initiated by the Board of Trustees and the executive leadership to conduct a search for the fourth president of Wake Tech. The search was designed to give all employees of Wake Tech the opportunity to provide input regarding the selection criteria (email from 4-17-18 in Appendix H) and the final list of candidates for the position. It was “the goal of the Board of
Trustees to make the presidential search process as thorough and transparent as possible.” (email from 11-20-18 in Appendix I). One academic department leader commented,

I was very interested in what the ... what you call the search committee? Yeah, I guess it was the Presidential Search Committee. I was really eager to see where they were with their steps and who they were looking at. I was ... I want to say that I was not a major part of that at all, but I definitely appreciated the college sharing where they were at each step in the project's process. And when it came down to the last, I think it was maybe two or three, I just felt like I was a part of the change. I felt like the college was listening. Not that it was my hope, but I felt that the college was … was really trying to be transparent.

Another commented,

I think there was a conscious effort on trying to be transparent in the sense of through the process we received as a college general emails of saying, this is where the search is, or the committee, you know, we have this many candidates or applicants, or three have made it to the final round.

On December 18th, 2018, an announcement was sent to all employees of Wake Tech regarding the selection of its fourth president, Dr. Scott Ralls (see Appendix A). Dr. Scott Ralls became president of Wake Tech on April 11th, 2019. Early that day, he sent an email to all employees of Wake Tech (see Appendix B) to introduce himself and share his thoughts about Wake Tech, its impact on the community it serves, and his admiration of Wake Tech’s students and employees. Dr. Ralls asserted how he would “listen closely to your [the employees] ideas on how we can further our impact as a college” and how he would “look forward to meeting and getting to know each of you personally.” He indicated there would be future “listening sessions” and encouraged everyone to approach him in hallways or reach out to him with their ideas. Dr.
Ralls acknowledged that Wake Tech was a “very big college” and asked for patience as he learned how it operated and attempted to remember all of their names.

The “listening sessions” mentioned in Dr. Ralls’ email were conducted in a townhall format. The first listening sessions were offered at a faculty professional development event less than a week after he assumed the role as President during the spring faculty professional development events in mid-April and additional listening sessions continued through the summer and into the timeframe of this study. The listening sessions were scheduled in advance, and participants could select an event that fit their schedule and sign up to attend through an electronic registration system. Dr. Ralls hosted more than 15 of these listening sessions for faculty, staff, and students across five of Wake Tech’s campuses. Three of these sessions were specifically for students on three different campuses who made up more than one-third of the attendees. Close to 300 have attended these sessions at this writing (See Appendix L). These listening sessions will be identified as a major influence by the academic department leaders as a part of the textural finding discussed later. As an example, one academic department leader said,

I think one of the major influencing events was his intentionality from hearing from all parts of the college in these small groups, listening sessions, if you will. Because I had been in the college for so long, I really hadn’t been in a session where I sat around with other colleagues and talked to the President. You know, so, for me, I that, that was a plus, that was a plus to me that this President was really interested in hearing. Not the overall pulse of the college, but kind of from every area of the college, what people were feeling. And so, by him doing that, I ... it's really influenced ... my support, I should say, my support of him moving forward.
Another communication from Dr. Ralls influenced the perceptions of the academic department leaders. He sent an email on August 15th of 2019 (Appendix J) to inform the College of some organizational changes. Attached to that email was a MS Word document (see Appendix K) detailing those changes. The changes not only detailed replacing higher management positions that had been vacated, they introduced major structural changes to the College. They introduced and justified a new provost, dissolved a division, and named a new Special Assistant to the President who will serve in Dr. Ralls’ cabinet. Dr. Ralls also took this opportunity to introduce his vision of integrating degree and non-degree programs.

These artifacts provide the context, situation, and conditions of the structural description of the phenomenon. Although the data surrounding the previous president and the presidential search process were not a part of the time frame for this study, this data had an influence on the perceptions and interpretations of the academic department leaders as they revealed in the descriptions of their lived experiences.

**Summary of Textural Description**

The textural description is entirely based on the data collected through semi-structured interviews with the 13 academic department leaders. The interviews were recorded, then transcribed. An analysis of the transcriptions was performed by first coding the interviews utilizing descriptive and in vivo coding methodologies during the first cycle or pass through the data (Miles et al., 2014). A second pass or cycle through the data yielded themes and subthemes that addressed the following research question and sub-questions this study was designed to answer:

How do academic department leaders perceive and describe their experience surrounding a presidential change?
• What do academic department leaders describe as major influences on their perception of the presidential change process?

• How do academic department leaders perceive the impact of executive leadership support of the presidential change on the faculty they lead?

• In what ways can executive leadership support academic department leadership during a presidential change?

The themes and subthemes of the sub-questions combined with the themes and subthemes of the main research question provided a textual description of the perceptions and interpretations that the academic department leaders shared of the presidential change phenomenon.

The following Table 5.1 gathers all of these themes and subthemes together in an organized fashion so that the relationships between the themes and the research questions can be more easily seen. The themes are listed on the left-hand side of the table under the research question with which they were associated. They start with the main research question and then move to the sub-questions. The subthemes are listed to the right of the themes and help to describe the theme. Under the sub-questions that focused on the major influences that the academic department leaders described and the impact of executive leader support on faculty, the terms positive, negative, and neutral precede the subtheme. These terms identify whether the subtheme was linked positively, negatively, or in a neutral way to the theme that emerged.
Table 5.1

Summary of Textural Descriptive Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How do academic department leaders perceive and describe their experience surrounding a presidential change?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New President has Been Positively Received</td>
<td>- Straight forward and approachable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Student oriented</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Calm and confident</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Clear vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Changes Initiated</td>
<td>- Perceived no changes in the first year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Changes occurred – positive, needed, and timely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Previous President’s Influence</td>
<td>- He was well liked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- There is a change in culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- A change in focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>What do academic department leaders describe as major influences on their perception of the presidential change process?</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listening Sessions</td>
<td>- Positive - Influenced support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Positive - Affected faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Positive - Specific session for Academic Department Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Positive – New president demonstrated listening skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hiring Process</td>
<td>- Positive - College was listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Positive - Demonstrated transparency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Positive - Wait and see</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Positive - Claimed no influence but felt it was important enough to mention</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5.1 (Continued)

Summary of Textural Descriptive Themes and Subthemes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What do academic department leaders describe as major influences on their perception of the presidential change process?</strong> (Continued)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divisional Changes</td>
<td>-Negative - Just one more change to deal with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Negative - Hard to discern where the change comes from</td>
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<td><strong>How do academic department leaders perceive the impact of executive leadership support of the presidential change on the faculty they lead?</strong></td>
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<td>The President’s and Executive Leadership’s Support</td>
<td>-Positive - when met in small group settings</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>-Negative - Communication issues and mistrust from top to faculty</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.1 (Continued on next page)
Table 5.1 (Continued)

*Summary of Textural Descriptive Themes and Subthemes*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **In what ways can executive leadership support academic department leadership during a presidential change?** | - Direct communication between executive leadership and academic department leaders  
- New administration = new roles for the president and ELT?  
- Share the “why” so it can be shared with faculty |
| Explanations | - Be more involved and attend more events  
- Be more forward about listening  
- Academic department leaders want more opportunities to engage and be heard |
| Fear | - Eliminate the culture of fear to speak up |

In the first cycle, the heuristic analysis of interview data was accomplished by using descriptive and in vivo methods of coding. In the second cycle, themes and subthemes emerged as the data was applied to the research question and sub-questions that drove this study (Miles et al., 2014). The themes and subthemes summarized above combined with the structural description summarized in the previous section will be discussed in the following part of this chapter.

**Overall Essence of the Experience**

The purpose of this study was to describe how the strategies, tactics, and actions employed by a new president and the executive leadership of an institution of higher learning create and shape the perceptions academic department leaders have of their workplace. Focusing
on the phenomenon of presidential change, this study took a qualitative approach to discover how academic department leaders perceive their organizational climate (Denison, 1996; James, L.R., James, L.A., & Ashe, D.E., 1990) during the early months of a new president’s leadership. The study gave voice to this level of management through semi-structured interviews of academic department leaders that have experienced the phenomenon from the beginning of the presidential change.

**Conceptual Framework Discussion**

Figure 5.1 is a graphical representation of the conceptual framework that describes this research. It is the same representation that was introduced in Chapter 1 of this dissertation. The perceptions of the academic department leadership were at the center of this study because academic department leaders have a direct influence, as indicated by solid arrows, on the department level climate. The climate in each of the academic departments contributes to the organization’s climate which is why the department level of climate is shown as a subset of the organizational climate. This study focused primarily on the influences of executive leadership team, and the new president. But, the influence of organizational culture and the academic department leadership’s supervisors and co-workers are also important to consider. Note that the influences of the new president and the executive leadership team are connected by dotted lines because they can vary in importance for each individual academic department leader.
This conceptual framework was supported by the findings in this study. There were a number of themes and subthemes that validated the conceptual framework and its importance to this study. Starting at the top of the graphic, the “Hierarchical Levels of Management” theme directly addressed the dotted-line influence of the new president and ELT, and how they can vary in importance for each academic department leader. One academic department leader said,

I don't know how much the executive leadership deals with people on my level. I know for a fact that in my chain of command the executive person on the ELT doesn't know, all of the people at my level well, ... It's just a reality of how many levels of hierarchy we have and how big we are.
The subtheme of “Too many levels to feel support” answered the question posed on the graphic of, “What is the influence?”. The academic department leaders asked for support from the executive level of leadership in the theme of “Explanations.” They wanted to solidify the dotted line by asking for more “Direct communication between executive leadership and academic department leaders” by seeking to “Share the ‘why’ so it can be shared with faculty” subthemes. The theme of “Exposure” also addresses the dotted-line relationship between the new president, the ELT, and the academic department leaders. The subthemes of “Be more involved and attend more events” and “Be more forward about listening” directed at the ELT coupled with “Academic department leaders want more opportunities to engage and be heard” directed at all of the executive leadership speak to strengthening the communication lines between these two levels of management.

The main topic of this study, “Academic Department Leadership Perceptions,” can be found in the middle of the conceptual framework. Surrounding and influencing these perceptions are “Organizational Culture” and, “Supervisor & Co-Worker Influence.” Under “Supervisor & Co-Worker Influence,” the theme of “Divisional Changes” is highlighted. The academic department leaders undergoing mild to disruptive changes in their divisional structure and leadership expressed their perception of the new president’s actions and communications in the subthemes “Just one more change to deal with” and found it “Hard to discern where the changes were coming from.” Many noted that the divisional changes were not related to the new president, but the academic department leaders did not have the time, energy, nor opportunity to participate in activities the new president had to offer, like listening sessions.

The other influence on “Academic Department Leadership Perceptions” was “Organizational Culture.” The theme “Fear” speaks directly to an aspect of the culture of the
organization. And more specifically, the subtheme “Eliminate the culture of fear to speak up” highlights the specific fear shared by some of the participants. This fear revolved around the academic department leaders’ perceptions of what may happen to their career paths if what they had to say was viewed negatively by someone with power over them. Another aspect of culture that emerged through the interviews with the academic department leaders was the focus on students and their success. This focus on students and their success was a lens through which the participants perceived and interpreted all communications and actions, especially those from the ELT and new president.

The very center of the conceptual model is the academic department leadership perceptions that were shared by 13 academic department leaders at this large southeastern community college. They spoke openly about how they perceive their work environment and interpret the communications and actions of the new president and the ELT of the college. Although each experience was unique to the individual some very board themes and observations emerged as the structural and textural descriptions are combined.

One theme that arose and had a major influence on the academic department leaders that participated in this study was the “Hiring Process.” This was an interesting theme to emerge because the presidential search process to which this refers happened before the timeframe of this study. Although the subtheme “Claimed no influence but felt it was important enough to mention,” the other subthemes spoke to how this theme influenced the perceptions and interpretations of the academic department leaders in this study. Two subthemes, “College was listening” and “Demonstrated transparency” spoke to how the college’s ELT and board of trustees created a climate of acceptance for the new president since the participants had the opportunity to be a part of the decision-making process. The presidential search process gave
everyone the opportunity to interact with the three finalists and review their resumés (Appendix I). This sense of familiarity led to the other subtheme under “Hiring Process”, “Wait and see.” Participants seemed more willing to adopt the wait and see attitude since they met the new president prior to his arrival and had already been exposed to background and opinions. One academic department leader said the search process created “… as positive a place to enter as Dr. Ralls could have.”

Dr. Ralls has made very favorable impressions with his listening sessions that were mentioned in his “Greetings” email of April 11th, 2019 (Appendix B). The dotted line between the “New President” and “Academic Department Leadership Perceptions” was highlighted by the theme “Listening Sessions.” The subthemes of “Influenced support,” “Specific to Academic Department Leaders,” and “Demonstrated listening skills” support this association of how Dr. Ralls affected the perceptions of these participants. The subtheme “Positive effect on faculty” points to the perception of the academic department leaders that Dr. Ralls had a direct influence upon the faculty.

Strengthening the dotted line association between the “New President” and the “Academic Department Leadership Perceptions” was the “Update and Organizational Changes” email (Appendix J) and its attachment of August 15th, 2020 (Appendix K). Through the search process candidate interviews and the listening sessions held by Dr. Ralls, there was a perception that he was not going to implement any changes through the first year of his service. This was highlighted by the “Changes Initiated” theme and the subtheme of “Perceived no changes in the first year.” Although this was the original perception, the change actions outlined in the memos were perceived as positive as reflected in the subtheme “Changes occurred – positive, needed, and timely.” Another change that Dr. Ralls made that addressed the dotted line to the academic
department leader and speaks to the influence of “Organizational Culture” is found in the “Graduation” theme and subtheme of “Positive – celebrating students.”

The bottom section of the Conceptual Framework indicates that the perceptions of the academic department leadership has a direct influence on the organizational climate at the department level. Although this was not directly addressed as a part of this study, the academic department leaders shared their observations of their faculty’s reaction to the communications and actions of Dr. Ralls and the ELT. The “Convocation” theme came from conversation involving perceived faculty reaction to Dr. Ralls’ message and how it was delivered during the convocation event held four months after he took office. The subthemes of “Negative – we are not making a difference” and “Negative – a lot of problems” were both generated from perceptions of how faculty reacted to the event.

One theme, “Explanations” spoke directly to the academic department leaders’ perception of how they influence their faculty. They feel they have a direct influence on how faculty receives communications from Dr. Ralls and the ELT and affects their perceptions of their workplace. Two of the subthemes “Direct communication between executive leadership and academic department leaders” and “Share the ‘why’ so it can be shared with faculty” exemplify this perception. One academic department leader simply stated they felt faculty were “… impacted most by your direct supervisor … if your direct supervisor hears that that’s the way that the person at the very top thinks, that’s going to influence faculty.” The feelings expressed by these academic department leaders supports the findings of Stringer (2002) and Tierney (1999) that there is a direct link between the relationship an employee has with his or her immediate supervisor and the organizational climate they perceive.
**General Description of the Phenomenon**

This study looked at perceptions and observations of the academic department leaders as they experienced the phenomenon of presidential change. The perceptions the academic department leaders have of the actions and communications of a new president and the ELT of a college play an important role in creating an organizational climate ready for the changes that come with a new president. The Aspen Institute has set the expectation for new presidents to “… lead transformational change aligned to student goals and community needs (Aspen CEP, 2019). Gonaim (2016) cites the academic department as “… the fundamental unit for transforming the university’s visions and goals into reality.” Since the theories around organizational climate indicate that local leadership has the greatest influence on developing an organizational climate ready for change (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2008; Tierney, 1999), and Smith and Abouammoh (2013) state that the achievement of a university’s mission depends heavily on the success of faculty members influenced by effective academic department leaders, it is important to examine how the academic department leader perceives and interprets this phenomenon of presidential change.

As prescribed by Moustakas (1994) and Lauterbach (2018), the perceptions of the academic department leaders were gathered through semi-structured interviews that began with a social conversation and created an informal, interactive process to gather demographic information, and define the timeframe and nature of this presidential change phenomenon. Open-ended questions were then used help the participants reconstruct their perceptions of the communications and actions of Dr. Ralls and ELT during the first few months of Dr. Ralls’ tenure. The interviews focused on the concrete details of the participant’s lived experiences. These details helped to understand the opinions and attitudes of the participant (Seidman, 2013).
When a structural description created from the collected data of emails, video transcripts, press releases, and researcher’s observations are combined with the textural description provided by the academic department leaders through their semi-structured interviews and viewed through the lens provided by the conceptual framework, a very general description of the phenomenon can be assembled.

A general description of the phenomenon starts with actions and communications taken by the ELT prior to the timeframe of this study. Much like Ross (2004) described the transparency and engagement provided by the presidential search process created an organizational climate that was open and receptive to the message and actions of Dr. Ralls. This was the first step in creating an organizational climate that would support the third order changes a new president brings (Burke, 2011). Dr. Ralls launched into his new position building upon the transparency and engagement initiated by the search process that put him in his new position. By hosting a variety of listening sessions designed to engage general, divisional, departmental, faculty, and academic department leader audiences, Dr. Ralls was able to demonstrate his interest in every segment of this large college, Wake Tech, and make a personal connection with many through these small group interactions. Academic department leaders felt that they were able to showcase their departments and be heard by Dr. Ralls. They were impressed that they heard a consistent message and felt the new vision for the college shared by Dr. Ralls would lead to more opportunities for students to succeed. Since organizational change happens at the individual level (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2008; George & Jones, 2001; Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Armenakis, 2013; Weiner, 2009), it is important that each employee perceives an organizational climate that is supportive of the changes that may come.
The academic department leaders also noted Dr. Ralls was present at many college events. Wake Tech has a variety of campuses and education centers. It was noted that Dr. Ralls showed up at events that had not drawn the president’s presence in the past. One academic department leader mentioned that a popular web-based social application placed Dr. Ralls at more college events than they could imagine Dr. Ralls could attend while performing the other functions usually associated with presidential duties. It was viewed positively that Dr. Ralls was participating in activities across the college that involved faculty, students, and the community partners that both supported and benefited from these events. It was also recommended that the ELT embrace a similar level of presence to demonstrate interest and involvement with college activities.

It is difficult to generalize the perceptions of a change initiative. The first perception that seemed to be held universally was that there would not be any changes in the first year of Dr. Ralls’ tenure, but changes occurred. Four months into Dr. Ralls’ administration, he announced major changes in managerial structure and operating philosophy to move the college into the future. The changes were in response to regional and national trends that affected business and industry in the community (Appendix J; Appendix K) (Walker, 1981). Reactions to this change were enthusiastic support, fear of the ramifications on their department, or the perception that a “wait and see” attitude. These were the different interpretations academic department leaders in this study carried back to their departments. Since organizational climate strength is determined by how well individual psychological climates align in terms of consensus (Bercovitz & Feldman, 2008; Ehrhart et al., 2014; Tierney, 1999), these differing interpretations could have affected the strength of the organization’s climate for change.
One of many suggestions one former university president made to new leaders as they establish themselves is, “Do not violate tradition” (Martin & Samels, 2004b, p.233). The convocation that launches Wake Tech into the new academic year each August if felt by some to be a tradition. Dr. Ralls changed the format of the convocation and some of the participants felt the convocation of August 2019 brought a negative message that there was much more work to do and that academic department leaders and faculty did not matter. Another perception of the same event was a feeling of support from the “Reach and Rally” perspective offered by Dr. Ralls. In general, the communications and actions of Dr. Ralls and the ELT have been perceived positively and supportive of the changes in structure and future vision of the college. Dr. Ralls has made a good impression on the academic department leaders of Wake Tech. They perceived him as straight forward and approachable, student oriented, calm and confident, and with a clear vision for the future of the college.

**Recommendations**

If the executive leadership of an institute of higher education can gain a better understanding of how academic department leaders perceive the ELT’s attempts to strengthen the organizational climate for change readiness, they can adjust their strategies, tactics, and actions to be more effective. This study gave voice to the academic department leader level of management to tell how they perceive and interpret the communication and actions of executive leadership that they perceive. They are the least studied level of management in higher education, yet they play a fundamental role in transforming the vision and goals of executive leadership into reality (Clegg & McAley, 2005; Gonaim, 2016; Riggs, 2009).

Case study methodology was utilized to examine how the phenomenon of a presidential change was perceived by academic department leaders. By focusing on a single case, the case
itself played an important role in understanding the phenomenon by providing the data that created the structural description of the contexts and influences surrounding the presidential change process at this college. It is important to point out that Wake Tech was in a very stable condition during the timeframe of this study. It was stable in its financial condition, enrollment was on the rise, and a strategic planning initiative was underway. The academic department leaders provided a textural description of the phenomenon through their lived experiences and perceptions of the actions and communications of Dr. Ralls and ELT. The following recommendations for practice and future research are based on the data gathered and analyzed in this study.

**Recommendations for Practice**

As many community colleges across the nation will be experiencing the same leadership changes in the near future, new presidents and executive leadership teams may be able to use the insights gained from this study to develop and refine their strategies, tactics, and actions to support change in their organizations. Although this case focused on the activities and communications of Wake Tech’s new president, Dr. Scott Ralls, many of these recommendations for practice may be appropriate for other institutions.

First, the ELTs and Boards of Trustees of colleges preparing for a presidential search should begin early to create a transparent and engaging environment. The timeframe for the focus of this research began on the first day of Dr. Ralls’ tenure. Although this timeframe was clearly defined for the academic department leaders at the beginning of their interviews, many reached back to the presidential search process to describe their perceptions of the Dr. Ralls and the ELT. The transparent and engaging presidential search process orchestrated by the ELT and Board of Trustees of Wake Tech created a climate ready for a new president that wanted to
engage and listen. Faculty, staff, and students had the opportunity to share their input into the search process and were invited to open interviews with the final three candidates. The academic department leaders felt that they were a part of the selection process of Dr. Ralls and were more open to his arrival. This created a welcoming and accepting climate for Dr. Ralls.

ELTs also have the opportunity to break down the hierarchical levels of management that sometimes create communication issues and mistrust. They can be more involved with various activities and engage with academic department leaders, faculty, and staff in educational and social events. Executive leaders can be more forward about listening and create more opportunities for direct communication between executive leaders and academic department leaders. Sessions like the listening sessions created by this new president will give the opportunity for the ELT to share the “why” of decisions and give academic department leaders the opportunity to engage and be heard. ELTs need to take active steps to create the trust that will eliminate the culture of fear to speak up that was expressed by the participants in this study.

The listening session format can be employed by all levels of the management hierarchy. I would encourage use of this format to breakdown the fear of retribution for sharing one’s ideas. Executive leadership and the various layers of middle management could hold sessions to listen to the concerns and ideas of hierarchical levels two or three level separate from them without immediate supervisor presence. If, as Dr. Ralls has demonstrated, the listening sessions are held in the spirit of truly listening and action is taken on concerns that are raised, they would aid in building the trusting relationships that will eliminate the fear to speak up.

New presidents should employ the use of listening sessions to engage the college community at large and specifically the academic department leaders. The listening sessions had a very positive effect on the perceptions and interpretations of the academic department leaders.
It was not just the fact that Dr. Ralls had listening sessions that made them influential. The listening sessions were held for a variety of groups allowing everyone the opportunity to engage. The academic department leaders made note that there were sessions for all faculty and staff, sessions held for just their division or department to showcase their programs, and most importantly sessions held for just academic department leaders to give voice to their questions and concerns, and to listen to their recommendations. It is important that the new president be consistent with their message and vision, and that they take the time to listen to what the academic department leaders have to share. If action can be taken on a complaint, create a solution. If action cannot be taken on a complaint for a specific reason, take the time to explain why. Another recommendation associated with the listening sessions is that members of the ELT attend so that they can hear the concerns and questions voiced by the academic department leaders. This will be seen as overcoming the hierarchical structures of the institution and cutting through the layers of management to improve communications. Listening sessions that promote open dialogue without fear of reprisal will also help to eliminate a culture of fear in a college.

Additionally, if a new president plans to change the structure of a long-standing institutional event like convocation, they may want to promote that change in advance. Employees rely upon the consistency of institutional events for stability during disruptive change like the arrival of a new president. Small changes, like the one demonstrated in this case with the change in graduation, are more easily accepted. However, some institutions may need a disruptive approach, so this recommendation should be taken as appropriate to the institution.

I will advise new presidents transitioning from other college executive leadership positions to focus on what is before them and seldom refer to how things were done at institutions they have served in the past. Although community colleges may look similar on the
surface, they are unique to their community. The faculty and staff are vested in that community. In my observations of Dr. Ralls during this study, he focused on the concerns and questions of the people in the listening session, or meeting, and did not draw any specific comparisons to his previous experiences as college president.

My recommendation to current presidents is to develop a systematic method of listening to your academic department leaders, faculty, staff, and students. Utilize the listening sessions that have been shown here to effectively open lines of communication and create a climate ready for change. This should become an activity that happens in an ongoing and regular basis that is not connected with any particular change initiative. When major change initiatives present themselves, having this foundational communication pipeline in place helps the change initiative flow more smoothly.

The academic department leader should take the opportunity to voice their concerns and questions when given the opportunity. They play an important role in implementing the changes a new president brings. The academic department leader should take the time to listen to the concerns and questions of their faculty. It is the responsibility of the academic department leader to act as a conduit to convey administrative decisions to their faculty and convey faculty concerns up to administrative leaders (Gonaim, 2016). In larger departments, utilizing a listening session format as exemplified by the Dr. Ralls in this study, may provide the opportunity to listen to the concerns and perceptions of faculty so that they may be shared with the upper levels of management. In smaller departments, time should be spent one-on-one or in small groups to discover how the faculty are perceiving the actions and communications from management.
Recommendations for Future Research

This study was designed to give voice to academic department leaders, the level of management farthest removed from the president and ELT of an institution of higher education. The focus was on how the phenomenon of the first months of a new president’s tenure was perceived and interpreted by this level of management. It has already been recommended that this study be repeated at the same college near the end of the president’s second year to see how, or if, the perceptions have changed. This may be a format that other colleges want to consider.

Since the format of this study only provides a snapshot of the perceptions of academic department leaders at a given point in time, it is important that the study is executed immediately following the phenomenon under investigation. This project looked at the first few months of a new president’s tenure. This study could also be run again after the first or second year of the new president’s tenure. Some presidents may want to conduct this type of study after five years in office to continue to evaluate how they are connecting with the biggest influencers at their institution.

Other projects may focus on the presidential search process and the perceptions surrounding the onboarding of a new president, and others may focus on major change initiatives outside of presidential change. The timeframe is important for gathering the structural data that provides the context surrounding the phenomenon and timeliness is important, so the perceptions and interpretations of the participants are still fresh in the minds of the participants.

The format of this study could also be used to give voice to the director level of management for the staff that supports the many processes necessary to run an institution of higher education. The director level of management is equivalent to the academic department leader level of management in that they have a direct influence upon the front-line employees
and are the most removed from the executive level of leadership. Running the two studies simultaneously would give a broader voice to the perspectives of this level of management in an institution of higher education.

This study format can be used to give voice to this level of management for any major change initiative undertaken by an institute of higher education. If this study as performed at the six-month point of a major change initiative, the president and executive leadership could gage how their communications and actions were being perceived and interpreted. They would be able to adjust their strategies, tactics, and actions to be more effective in supporting change in their organizations.

Adding to the Literature

Daniel Denison wrote a seminal piece in 1996 for the Academy of Management Review that provided a meta-analysis of the research done on organizational climate and culture. He identified that culture researchers were concerned with the evolution of social systems over time and climate researchers were focused on the impact that organizational systems have on groups and individuals. However, the climate researchers migrated to measuring this impact in the aggregate, or as a group rather than at the individual level. This type of measurement only provides the result of actions already taken to produce an organizational climate, or sub-climate.

When the executive leadership of an organization assesses their organizational climate and sub-climates for the purpose of managing change (Sullivan et al., 2005), they need some direction in the development of actions and communications that will be effective in creating or enhancing an organizational climate for change. This study created recommendations for new college presidents, transitioning college president, current college presidents, members of executive leadership teams, academic department leaders, and other members of the hierarchy of
college management experiencing a major college change initiative. These recommendations are based on the data provided by the level of management that has the greatest influence on creating a climate for change in an academic institution, the academic department leader.

**Conclusion**

As the immediate supervisors of the largest segment of the employee population at an institution of higher education, academic department leaders play a fundamental role in transforming the vision and goals of executive leadership into reality (Gonaim, 2016; Stringer, 2002; Tierney, 1999). Since new presidents bring their own strategic visions to their new appointments, gaining an understanding of how the academic department leader perceives the communications, actions, tactics, and strategies is important to changing the direction of the institution. These perceptions have a direct influence on the organizational climate because there is a direct link between the relationship an employee has with his or her immediate supervisor and the organizational climate they perceive (Stringer, 2002; Tierney, 1999). An organizational climate demonstrating a readiness for change begins with the individual (Bercowitz & Feldman, 2008; George & Jones, 2001; Rafferty et al., 2013) and will be more highly influenced by relationships with local leadership than by executive leadership actions. Giving voice to the perceptions and interpretations of local leadership, academic department leaders, of the largest group of employees at an institution of higher education, the faculty, was the purpose of this study.

A qualitative approach was utilized to discover how academic department leaders perceive their organizational climate (Denison, 1996; James, L.R., James, L.A., & Ashe, D.E., 1990) during the early months of a new president’s leadership. Treating the first few months of a new president’s administration as a phenomenon allowed this study to use the lens of
transcendental phenomenology (Husserl, 2004) to understand the perceptions and interpretations shared by the academic department leaders of the communications and actions of the executive leadership during a specific timeframe. Case study research methods were employed to collect the structural data and textural data needed to describe the perceptions of the participants of the study. Structural data in the form of email communications, video transcripts, researcher observations, social media communications, and press releases helped to provide the context surrounding the phenomenon. Textural data was collected directly from the academic department leaders through semi-structured interviews where open-ended questions were used to prompt the conversations.

Many themes arose through analysis of the interviews. All of the themes addressed the research question and sub-questions providing valuable feedback on how the communications and actions taken by executive leadership were perceived by academic department leaders. Although the findings of this study reflect the actions of a single community college, they can be used to guide executive leaders of other institutions in the development and implementation of their change initiatives.

This type of study could be repeated at any institution of higher education that has just brought a new executive leader on board. It appears that there will many opportunities for other institutions to perform this type of study with the number of presidential changes projected in the near future. This study, and ones like it, will assist executive leadership in developing strategies and tactics that will create a more receptive organizational climate for change.
REFERENCES


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https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726701544002


APPENDICES
Appendix A: Dr. Ralls Selected - Press Release

From: Comm & Marketing
Sent: Tuesday, December 18, 2018 11:05 AM
To: All WTCC Exchange Users
Subject: Wake Tech Names New President

Importance: High

Colleagues,

We wanted you to be among the first to know that the Wake Tech Board of Trustees has selected Dr. Scott Ralls to become Wake Tech’s next president. The Board approved his selection at its meeting this morning. Thank you all for your input and participation throughout the search process. For more details, please read the press release below:

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dr. Scott Ralls Selected as Next Wake Tech President

RALEIGH, NC (December 18, 2018) – Dr. Scott Ralls will be the next president of Wake Technical Community College, effective May 2019. The Wake Tech Board of Trustees has approved his selection, pending final approval by the State Board of Community Colleges later today. Dr. Ralls currently serves as president of Northern Virginia Community College (NOVA), one of the largest and most internationally-diverse community colleges in the United States. He has more than 20 years of experience in community colleges, including seven years as president of the NC Community College System, and has worked for the North Carolina Department of Commerce, the U.S. Department of Commerce, and the U.S. Department of Labor.

“Scott Ralls is the right person at the right time for Wake Tech,” says Wake Tech Board Chair [Name], “and I’m thrilled about his selection. With his extensive record of achievement and leadership at one of the nation’s largest community colleges, he will be able to build on Wake Tech’s solid foundation and continue its tradition of excellence. Throughout the selection process, Scott Ralls stood apart. He knows our region’s economic landscape, understands our workforce training needs, and works effectively with elected leaders on both sides of the aisle.”

Dr. Ralls will become Wake Tech’s fourth president, succeeding Dr. Stephen Scott, who led the college for 15 years before his retirement in August. Dr. Bill Aiken is currently serving as interim president.

At NOVA, Dr. Ralls created a new Information and Engineering Technology Division and led the construction of three new advanced training facilities. He helped grow NOVA’s cybersecurity program into one of the largest and fastest growing in the nation, and established the first Cloud Computing associate degree program in the country, in collaboration with Amazon Web Services. He created a new workforce division at NOVA, fostering innovative relationships that included the first east coast apprenticeship program with Amazon Web Services. Dr. Ralls developed new articulation agreements with universities and engaged the NOVA community in developing a new strategic plan. He was named one of the Washington Region Power 100 Leaders by Washington Business Journal in 2017.
From 2008 to 2015, Dr. Ralls served as president of the NC Community College System, leading the state’s 58 community colleges through a period of enrollment growth and budget challenges. Before that, he served as president of Craven Community College in New Bern. Dr. Ralls holds a bachelor’s degree from UNC-Chapel Hill, and master’s and doctorate degrees in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from the University of Maryland. He will begin at Wake Tech May 1, 2019; until then, he will visit Wake Tech periodically to meet with trustees, administrators, faculty, and staff.

Dr. Ralls was selected to lead Wake Tech after an extensive nationwide search that attracted a diverse pool of more than 60 applicants. The search was led by the nationally-recognized firm, AGB Search, which conducted an extensive series of listening sessions with faculty, staff, students, and key community partners to develop a presidential profile. A Search Committee comprised of trustees, faculty, staff, and community leaders narrowed the field to the top three candidates and made the final recommendation to the Board of Trustees.

“As board members we knew we had an important responsibility,” says Looney. “Wake Tech is our community college, and the state’s largest, serving more than 74,000 students. Our goal was to make the selection process as thorough and as transparent as possible. This has been an inclusive and collaborative community exercise that has identified a visionary and transformational new leader. I’m very proud to have led this search process and even prouder of the great choice we’ve made for Wake Tech’s future.”

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Appendix B: Dr. Ralls “Greetings” Message

Subject: Greetings from Scott
Date: Thursday, April 11, 2019 at 7:00:04 AM Eastern Daylight Time
From: President’s Office
To: All WTCC Exchange Users

Dear Colleagues:

I am honored and humbled to join the Wake Tech team today. For years I have been impressed by the tremendous impact of Wake Tech on the lives of students and the prosperity of the Wake County region. During my recent weeks of engagement, I have been awed by the commitment of the students, faculty, staff and board members, and by the respect that Wake Tech has engendered within our community. That is why today I am so proud to proclaim that “I’m a Wake!”

Having worked with community colleges for over twenty years, I come into this role with some strong biases about the importance of colleges like ours. At very few places can you find the daily inspiration that exists in our hallways, classrooms, shops and labs. The beauty of community colleges like Wake Tech is that we embrace students of all abilities and backgrounds, and consistent with our original mission “take them where they are and carry them as far as they can go.”

Regardless of our students’ circumstances in entering our doors, I’m always struck by the unity and sincerity of their goals – to better their lives and the lives of their families through opportunity in higher education. I believe their ambitions and efforts to succeed, often in the face of significant obstacles, are heroic. This is why you will frequently hear me refer to our students as the “heroes in the hallways.”

Since you have chosen to work at Wake Tech to help our “heroes in the hallways,” and because you so often go above what is expected to put wind in their sails, I find your efforts to be heroic as well. My role is to do whatever I can to further your collective impact in helping our students and communities thrive. Over the next several months, and hopefully years to come, I will listen closely to your ideas about how we can further our impact as a college.

I look forward to meeting and getting to know each of you personally. I hope you will be assertive in participating in listening sessions, approaching me on campuses and in hallways, and reaching out to me with your ideas and thoughts. Please be patient as I strive to learn a very big college, how it operates, and attempt to remember all of your names.

Thank you in advance for welcoming me into your community and allowing me to be a part of this amazing team.

Warmest regards,
Scott
Appendix C: IRB - Participant Invitation to Participate Email

Greetings!

My name is Doug Hummer. I am a full-time employee of Wake Tech and a doctoral student at NC State in the College of Education. I am contacting you because I am conducting a qualitative study focused on the presidential change process at community colleges. As an academic department leader, you have a unique perspective on this phenomenon. Academic department leaders play an important role in the management of structure of all higher education institutions but are seldom given the opportunity to share how phenomenon such as this effect their work environment.

I am inviting you to participate in a voluntary research study. If you agree to participate, I will conduct one 60- to 90-minute interview at a mutually agreed upon time and place. I will record the audio portion of our interview with a digital recorder, no video or still images will be captured. The recording will be transcribed with any identifying names or references omitted or replaced with gender neutral pronouns. You will have the opportunity to review the transcript and offer any corrections, changes, or clarifications to the data. I may request a second interview to either expand upon an idea or clarify statements you made.

The interview will consist of 7 open-ended questions that I will use to simply guide the conversation. I will provide the questions ahead of time at your request. Participation in this research study is completely voluntary and you are welcome to withdraw at any time before, during, or after the interview. If you elect to withdraw during or after the interview, any recordings, transcripts, or any other data referencing your participation will be deleted or shredded.

Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary and any personal information obtained about you will be kept strictly confidential. I will store audio recordings and transcripts on a personal password protected computer. There will be no identifying information associated with any of the files. Hard copy information will be kept in a locked file cabinet at my home. When findings are shared, all names and identifying information will be omitted or changed (including academic discipline, gender, etc.). If you need any further clarifications or have any questions, please contact me.

To maintain confidentiality, I will only use this email account or my personal cell phone to communicate with you regarding this research project. You are welcome to respond to this invitation through a personal email account and/or provide a preferred email account for future correspondence.

Thank you for considering my invitation.
Sincerely,
Doug Hummer
Doctoral Candidate, North Carolina State University, dahummer@ncsu.edu
Appendix D: IRB - Email to Schedule Interview

Dear Dr./Mr./Ms. XXXXXXXX,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study. Is there a time in the next few weeks that we can schedule an interview? I am willing to meet at a location of your recommendation in order to maintain anonymity and decorum. I may recommend a public place close to your campus or I can arrange for a meeting room at the James B. Hunt Library on NC State’s Centennial Campus.

Please let me know what time and place will work best for you and if you would like a copy of the interview questions ahead of time. I have attached the consent form that I will review with you before we begin our interview.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate,
Sincerely,
Doug Hummer
Doctoral Candidate, North Carolina State University, dahummer@ncsu.edu
C. (919) 621-9020
Appendix E: Consent Form

Participant Informed Consent Form

Title of Study: Community College Presidential Change from the Department Leader’s Perspective: A Case Study (eIRB # <Insert eIRB number>)
Principal Investigator: Douglas A. Hummer, dahummer@ncsu.edu, (919) 621-9020
Funding Source: None
Faculty Point of Contact: Dr. Diane Chapman, ddchapma@ncsu.edu, (919) 513-4872

What are some general things you should know about research studies?
You are being asked to take part in a research study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You have the right to be a part of this study, to choose not to participate and to stop participating at any time without penalty. The purpose of this research study is to gain a better understanding of how academic department heads perceive the presidential change process in a community college. We will do this through interviewing academic department leaders across a community college in the process of changing presidents.

You are not guaranteed any personal benefits from being in this study. Research studies also may pose risks to those who participate. You may want to participate in this research because it gives voice to a level of management in higher education that is not usually studied. You may not want to participate in this research because you fear a breach in confidentiality would compromise your work situation.

Specific details about the research in which you are invited to participate are contained below. If you do not understand something in this form, please ask the researcher for clarification or more information. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you. If, at any time, you have questions about your participation in this research, do not hesitate to contact the researcher(s) named above or the NC State IRB office. The IRB office’s contact information is listed in the What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant? section of this form.

What is the purpose of this study?
The purpose of the study is to understand how the strategies, tactics, and actions employed by the executive leadership of an institution of higher learning to create an organizational climate of readiness for change during a presidential change, shape the perceptions academic department leaders have of their workplace.

Am I eligible to be a participant in this study?
There will be approximately 12 to 15 participants in this study.

In order to be a participant in this study, you must agree to be in the study, and you must have been an academic department leader at Wake Technical Community College since January of 2018 and are currently serving in that position today.

You cannot participate in this study if you do not want to be in the study or you do not meet the parameters outlined above.

What will happen if you take part in the study?
If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to do all of the following:

Updated 7/12/2019
1. Participate in a one-on-one interview with the researcher
2. Asked to review a copy of the transcript of that interview
3. (Possible) Asked to participate in a follow-up interview to clarify or expand upon statements made in the first interview
4. Asked to review a copy of the transcript of the second interview

The total amount of time that you will be participating in this study is 2 to 4 hours:

**Recording and images**
If you want to participate in this research, you must agree to be audio recorded. If you do not agree to be audio recorded, you cannot participate in this research.

**Risks and benefits**
There are minimal risks associated with participation in this research. The risks to you as a result of this research include an association with this research study; however, no personal data will be released therefore the risk is minimal.

There are no direct benefits to your participation in the research. The indirect benefits are as a result of executive leadership gaining a better understanding of how their actions and decisions are perceived at this level of management. This may create better communication and support mechanisms for this level of management in future change initiatives.

**Right to withdraw your participation**
You can stop participating in this study at any time for any reason. In order to stop your participation, please make the researcher aware of your desire to withdraw. If you choose to withdraw your consent and to stop participating in this research, you can expect to have any record of your participation and/or data collected will be purged then deleted or shredded.

**Confidentiality, personal privacy, and data management**
Trust is the foundation of the participant/researcher relationship. Much of that principle of trust is tied to keeping your information private and in the manner that we have described to you in this form. The information that you share with me will be held in confidence to the fullest extent allowed by law. Protecting your privacy as related to this research is of utmost importance to me. However, there are very rare circumstances related to confidentiality where I may have to share information about you. These are limited to instances in which imminent harm could come to you or others.

How we manage, protect, and share your data are the principal ways I protect your personal privacy. Data generated about you in this study will be de-identified.

**De-identified.** De-identified data is information or bio-specimen(s) that at one time could directly identify you, but I have recorded this data so that your identity is separated from the data. I will have a master list with your code and real name that I can use to link to your data. While I might be able to link your identity to your data at earlier stages in the research, when the research concludes, there will be no way your real identity will be linked to the data I publish.
Data that will be shared with others about you will be de-identified because you may share information of a personal nature about yourself or others that may affect your relationship with them and/or your relationship with your employer.

**Compensation**
You will not receive anything for participating.

**What if you are a Wake Technical Community College employee?**
Your participation in this study is not a requirement of your employment at Wake Technical Community College, and your participation or lack thereof, will not affect your job.

**What if you have questions about this study?**
If you have questions at any time about the study itself or the procedures implemented in this study, you may contact the researcher, Douglas A. Hummer at dahummer@ncsu.edu, (919) 621-9020 or Faculty Advisor, Dr. Diane Chapman, ddchapma@ncsu.edu, (919) 513-4872.

**What if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**
If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact the NC State IRB (Institutional Review Board) Office. An IRB office helps participants if they have any issues regarding research activities. You can contact the NC State IRB Office via email at irb-director@ncsu.edu or via phone at (919) 515-8754.

**Consent To Participate**
By signing this consent form, I am affirming that I have read and understand the above information. All of the questions that I had about this research have been answered. I have chosen to participate in this study with the understanding that I may stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which I am otherwise entitled. I am aware that I may revoke my consent at any time.

Participant’s printed name

Participant’s signature ___________________________ Date ____________

Investigator’s signature ___________________________ Date ____________
Appendix F: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Introduction:
Hi. I am Doug Hummer. Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study focused on the presidential change process at our community college. I am working toward a doctoral degree in Adult, Workforce, and Continuing Professional Education in the Educational Leadership, Policy, and Human Development department of the College of Education at NC State University. This interview is a part of my dissertation research.

Consent Form:
Review Consent Form. Answer any questions and gain the participant’s signature before proceeding.

Small Talk:
Have a short discussion with the participant to gain a little background and put them at ease.

Gather the following demographic data on paper:
- Position
- Department
- Campus
- Other descriptive information

Begin Audio Recording

Review the Phenomenon:
Review the following bullets to frame the phenomenon:
- Announcement of Dr. Ralls hired as our 4th president
- Meet and greet opportunities
- Other correspondence

Interview Questions:
1. What were/are the major influencing events of this presidential change process and how are they affecting you?
2. How did you prepare for this presidential change?
3. How has your faculty reacted during this presidential change process?
4. How has this presidential change affected your approach to the duties of your position?
5. How successful has the executive leadership been in supporting you during this time?
6. How can executive leadership have better support you during this time?
7. Do you have any other thoughts you would like to share about this presidential change?

Thanks, and Next Steps:

Thank the participant for sharing their thoughts and impressions.

Tell the participant that you will be transcribing this interview over the next few weeks and would like to provide a copy to them for their review and comment. Ask if you may send an electronic copy to the email address they provided.

Ask if you may contact them with any questions or if you need any clarifications. Remind them that another short interview may be requested and that their participation is voluntary.

Again, thank the participant.
Appendix G: Dr. Ralls’ Study Invitation

Subject: Study Invitations

Academic Department Leaders,

You may receive an email from Doug Hummer inviting you to participate in his dissertation research for his Ph.D. studies at NC State. Because of the central role that you play in our college’s culture, Doug is interested in hearing your impressions of the presidential transition. I hope that many of you have been able to attend one of the listening sessions that I've held over the last few months, but Doug's study will offer you the opportunity to provide more detailed feedback. Your participation is completely voluntary and confidential, so I encourage you to play a role in Doug’s research efforts as he gives a voice to this level of leadership.

Scott
Reach and Rally
Appendix H: Presidential Search Memo

Presidential Search Update
Tue 4/17/18 8:35 AM

Dear Faculty and Staff,

After thoughtful consultation with the North Carolina Community College System, the UNC System, and the Association of Community College Trustees, the Wake Tech Board of Trustees has decided to hire a search firm to lead the search for Wake Tech’s next president. Four Trustees will work with [redacted], Director of Business Services, to begin an RFI/RFP process for hiring this firm. The RFI (Request for Information) has been posted, and the RFP (Request for Proposals) will be posted later this month.

In addition, Board members have agreed to seek community input on the development of the Presidential Profile, identifying required qualifications and preferred characteristics of the ideal candidate.

Finally, a Presidential Search Committee will be appointed to assist in the selection. This committee will include trustees, a faculty representative, a staff representative, a student/alumnus, and members of the community. Details of these steps are still being worked out. It is the goal of the Board of Trustees to make the presidential search process as transparent as possible, so we will share more information as it becomes available.

Thank you,

[redacted]

Vice President, Communications and Marketing
Appendix I: Presidential Finalist Announcement

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wake Tech Announces Three Finalists for Next President

RALEIGH, N.C. (November 20, 2018) – Three exceptional finalists have been named in the search for the next president of Wake Technical Community College. “It is my pleasure to announce that after a thorough and transparent search process by our committee guided by AGB Search, we have identified three excellent candidates who will come to campus for final interviews to become the next leader of Wake Tech,” said Board Chair Tom Looney.

“This has been an inclusive and collaborative community exercise that has resulted in identifying these three finalists.”

The three finalists are:

- Dr. Natalie Harder, Chancellor, South Louisiana Community College
- Dr. Andrew Bowne, Senior Vice President Chief Operating Officer, Ivy Tech Community College
- Dr. Scott Ralls, President, Northern Virginia Community College

More information about the finalists can be found here: https://www.waketech.edu/presidential-search.

The finalists were selected after an extensive nationwide search that attracted a diverse pool of 60 applicants. They will come to Wake Tech in the coming weeks to meet with students, faculty, staff and key community stakeholders. After their visits, the Search Committee will discuss all feedback and make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees. The Board will make the final decision at their regularly scheduled meeting on Tuesday, December 18. That decision then goes to the State Board of Community Colleges for final approval.

Wake Tech’s next president will succeed Dr. Stephen Scott who served for 15 years as president. Dr. Bill Aiken is serving as interim president until the vacancy is filled. The Presidential Search Committee is comprised of trustees, staff, faculty, and community leaders, including Nathan Becker, Project Manager at ABB and Wake Tech Foundation Board member; Adrienne Cole, CEO, Greater Raleigh Chamber of Commerce; Lew Ebert, CEO, NC Chamber of Commerce; Donald Gintzig, CEO/President, WakeMed; and Judge Keith Gregory, NC Superior Court Judge.

It has been the goal of the Board of Trustees to make the presidential search process as thorough and transparent as possible.

###
Appendix J: Update and Organizational Changes Email

Dear Colleagues,

I’m writing to update you on some organizational changes that are occurring. As I asserted when I interviewed, I am being slow and cautious about making changes during my first year, but over the summer there have been a series of circumstances that present both necessities and opportunities for organizational changes that I have decided to make as we enter the fall semester. These include the elimination of our Corporate and Business Solutions function and a Senior VP position, the naming of a new Provost and Chief Campus Officer for our RTP Campus, and the addition of a Special Assistant to the President position for Apprenticeship, Work-based Learning, and Customized Training.

Please invest time into reading the attached document which details my reasons for the organizational changes. Thank you.

I’m excited to be back in North Carolina and leading such a strong educational organization that plays a vital role in our region and our state. At this point I don’t anticipate any additional organizational changes in the immediate future, unless as in this recent situation, there are retirements/resignations, and/or funding opportunities/challenges that necessitate a re-evaluation.

For the longer term, I believe a smooth programmatic and communications integration of degree and non-degree options will make us even stronger and offer our students the best range of opportunities, but the steps to achieving those goals will take open dialog and feedback, and careful and deliberate operational planning.

I’m grateful for your impressive talent, motivation for our students, and for your support. I look forward to a rewarding new academic year.

Reach and Rally,

Scott
Appendix K: Changes Email Attachment

August 15, 2019

Dear Colleagues,

I’m writing to update you on some organizational changes that are occurring. As I asserted when I interviewed, I am being slow and cautious about making changes during my first year, but over the summer there have been a series of circumstances that present both necessities and opportunities for organizational changes that I have decided to make as we enter the fall semester. These include the elimination of our Corporate and Business Solutions function and a Senior VP position, the naming of a new Provost and Chief Campus Officer for our RTP Campus, and the addition of a Special Assistant to the President position for Apprenticeship, Work-based Learning, and Customized Training.

Reasons for making these organizational changes at this time include:

Retirement of a Senior VP and Additional Student Services Focus Areas. At the end of the year, Dr. Sam Strickland, our Sr. Vice President for Veterans Services, retired after a stellar career at Wake Tech and years of outstanding service to our students in a variety of roles. Rather than rehiring a position at the Vice President level, we are reorganizing our Veterans program within our Student Services division. This in no way represents a reduction in priority for these vital programs but rather an attempt to promote greater integration with our various services to students. Outreach and service to our Veteran students will be an important priority for me and for our college as we move forward in our strategic planning.

In addition, we will be making efforts to increase our outreach to students in our service area where going to college may not be as much the norm for their families and their communities. We will also give renewed attention and take steps to eliminate equity gaps in student outcomes. Therefore, in addition to and as part of her role as Sr. Vice President for Student Services, I have asked Dr. Rita Jerman to lead our efforts in diversity, equity, and inclusion. Now that our RTP Campus is up and running after its first successful year of operation, Dr. Jerman will relinquish her additional role as Chief Campus Officer for the RTP Campus, so that she may dedicate her focus to these and other strategic priority areas.

State and National Trends. Across the country workforce development is becoming a greater priority, as evidenced here in North Carolina, where the proposed state budget includes full parity funding for workforce continuing education, meaning that for the first time, workforce continuing education programs would be funded at the same FTE levels as curriculum degree programs. This is a milestone that has long been a goal within the North Carolina Community College System. The opportunities provided by increased funding for workforce continuing education also increase the financial viability for providing short-term training in high demand areas that may have not been feasible under previous funding formulas, and eliminate the funding differentials that have too often kept degree and non-degree based opportunities programmatically isolated. In addition, there has also been increased focus on apprenticeship, and emerging opportunities at the national, state and local areas, with potential application and opportunities for degree and non-degree models.
Integration of Degree and Non-degree Programs. As we begin our new fall semester, it’s time to take advantage of parity funding in the field with the most job openings in Wake County – Information Technology. WCE and CU employees in IT will become one team offering a host of degree and non-degree options. The new RTP Campus, focused on IT, will serve as the focal point for their efforts. Our goal will be to present a more unified and coherent “cafeteria” of education and workforce development opportunities, to students and particularly employers, who frequently become confused by our multiple channels of outreach. Because of the new funding opportunities, there should also be increased opportunity for instructors in some fields to provide both curriculum and continuing education instruction. Other groups of faculty and staff in WCE and CU will be asked to come together over the next year to discuss future program integration opportunities, but IT will lead the way.

A Provost for IT and the RTP. With such critical IT needs and this integration of degree and non-degree programs within IT, it’s time for the RTP Campus to have a Provost, like the Perry Health Sciences Campus. The Provost will also serve as CCO, now that [redacted] has assumed responsibility for Veterans [redacted] retirement, plus a new role as Chief Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Officer.

After internal interviews of existing IT deans, [redacted] has been chosen to be promoted to Provost with responsibility for both degree and non-degree programs. Time and care will be taken to ensure successful collaboration among WCE and CU programs in the IT areas.

Corporate and Business Solutions. Our Corporate and Business Solutions Division was created to be a profit center for the college but has struggled to reach self-supporting status after several years in operation. Rather than self-supporting training being a lead program of focus, we will continue to provide job training in this format, but only when it is not feasible to provide short-term workforce development under our current funding models. Parity FTE funding for workforce continuing education opens new doors for providing workforce development that previously would not have been financially feasible under the formula models, and this consequently lessens the practical necessity for the Corporate and Business Solutions model. Because of this change and the struggles to reach self-supporting status, CBS is being dissolved as of August 31.

Special Assistant to the President. While we may be putting less emphasis on selling self-supported training directly to corporations, we will put an even greater emphasis on our economic and workforce development role for employers, potential and current workers, and for our county and state. In doing so, we will be increasing our programs and efforts around apprenticeship and work-based learning, along with a continuing strong emphasis on customized job training. Beginning September 3, [redacted], a leader in apprenticeship and workforce training at the industry, state, and national levels, will join our team as Special Assistant to the President for Apprenticeship, Work-based Learning, and Customized Training. Reporting directly to me, she will have responsibility for growing and developing opportunities for work-based learning and apprenticeship across degree and non-degree delivery platforms, and help facilitate our customized training initiatives. Current program areas of apprenticeship, work-based learning, customized training, and BioNetwork will report to [redacted], starting in September. The Small Business Center and Entrepreneurship will continue to report to VP [redacted]
More biographical highlights for both Keith and Pam will be forthcoming.

I’m excited to be back in North Carolina and leading such a strong educational organization that plays a vital role in our region and our state. At this point I don’t anticipate any additional organizational changes in the immediate future, unless as in this recent situation, there are retirements/resignations, and/or funding opportunities/challenges that necessitate a re-evaluation.

For the longer term, I believe a smooth programmatic and communications integration of degree and non-degree options will make us even stronger and offer our students the best range of opportunities, but the steps to achieving those goals will take open dialog and feedback, and careful and deliberate operational planning.

I’m grateful for your impressive talent, motivation for our students, and for your support. I look forward to a rewarding new academic year.

Reach and Rally,

Scott
### Appendix L: Dr. Ralls’ Listening Sessions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Listening Session Name</th>
<th>Session Date</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Number of Attendees</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Forum with Dr. Ralls</td>
<td>3/11/20</td>
<td>PHS Campus</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Forum (Pizza with the Prez)</td>
<td>3/10/20</td>
<td>RTP</td>
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<td>Faculty Forum with Dr. Ralls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student Forum (Pizza with the Prez)</td>
<td>3/6/20</td>
<td>South Campus</td>
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<td>Faculty Forum with Dr. Ralls</td>
<td>3/4/20</td>
<td>PSEC</td>
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<td>Student Forum (Pizza with the Prez)</td>
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<td>Listening Session with Dr. Ralls</td>
<td>9/25/19</td>
<td>North Campus</td>
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<td>South Campus</td>
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<td>Listening Session with Dr. Ralls (Faculty PD Conference)</td>
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<td>PHS Campus</td>
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