The New University President: Communicating a Vision, Cultural Competency, and Symbolic Cultural Forms

DISSERTATION

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By

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ABSTRACT

University presidents are the institutional leaders responsible for guiding the direction of an institution. The president serves both as the symbolic leader of a university and as one responsible for directing change. When a new president arrives, the institution assumes and prepares for change and a new direction.

One measure of presidential effectiveness is the ability for a president to develop and communicate a vision. A new president can assist in making a vision understandable for a campus community by using images and symbols that not only represent the culture of the institution but also create a picture of the direction for the institution. An effective vision is one that creates meaning for the members of the institution and that illustrates direction in a way to which the campus community can relate (Nanus, 1998).

This inquiry examined the ways in which a new university president uses the existing cultural symbolic forms to communicate a vision. A model of presidential cultural competency was developed to illuminate the dynamics of how a president understands and uses the culture to present an institutional vision.

The results illustrate the importance of a new president learning the culture through listening in order to develop a level of trust with the campus community. Through understanding the culture, through performing the culture, and through feedback from the campus community, the new president develops a level of cultural competency.
that supports the president’s ability to communicate and implement a new institutional vision. The president uses tools to understand the culture, such as listening, conversation, observation, hearing stories, and the feedback received from campus community members. The campus members consider the presidential actions and decisions. Trust develops when actions are viewed as culturally congruent. As trust develops, the president can make decisions that may change the institution. When the president’s actions demonstrate an appreciation for the institutional values, beliefs and underlying assumptions, then the president can bring about change. The central insight revealed by this study is the critical importance of a president understanding the culture and relating the vision to the institutional culture.

The goals of this inquiry are to illuminate how institutions handle presidential transitions and how new presidents pay attention to institutional culture when attempting to bring about institutional change. The results can help inform Boards of Trustees to better appreciate the complexity of selecting a new president and the importance of selecting the appropriate match for the institution. Finally, the results can assist new presidents in examining the process of understanding the culture and using cultural symbolic forms to develop and communicate a vision.
Dedicated to

Waller Byrd Wiser, Ph.D.

1923 - 1997

Scholar, administrator, and father

Who shone the light on the path for me
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and focus to accomplish this goal. I can only hope to match the support you have given to me when it is your turn. I can’t wait to see what’s next in our life journey.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

“Leaders can nurture and influence organizational culture through the strategies that they implement” (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988, p. 22). This quote represents the importance of, and interaction between, leadership and institutional culture, and is critically central during times of institutional change. A president serves as a leader of an institution and is the one who, in conjunction with the Board of Trustees, the faculty, and the senior administrative leadership, creates the vision and direction for the institution.

The role of the president is not only to serve as the symbolic leader of an institution, but also to lead institutional change. A pervasive part of an institution, organizational culture guides and directs not only the small-scale decisions or actions that members of the organization make, but also influences the institution’s strategic direction and ability to successfully adapt to change. It can become such a driving force for the institution that organizational leadership must learn how to use this culture to create change and implement new strategies.

Understanding the patterns of presidential change is helpful in examining a president’s role in presenting a vision to a university community. With the arrival of a new president, an expectation of change is inherent. Presidents are the institutional
organizational leaders and serve in that role to manage change. Changes in university leadership happen for a variety of reasons. Presidents retire, seek new opportunities, or leave with the encouragement of the Board or the faculty. While the reason may vary, change of leadership comes with the assumption that the institution will somehow change with new leadership. Birnbaum (1992) described that “the arrival of a new president itself symbolizes institutional change and improvement” (p. 162). In other words, a change of leadership comes with assumptions from the university community that things will be different. Just how things will differ may be unclear, as the nature of changes will be based on a leader’s priorities and style.

The impact of presidential succession begins long before a president is named or arrives. It typically begins when a vacancy is known. The presidential search process commences with the Board and the search committee developing a presidential charge and examining institutional priorities. This process often challenges and questions practices and assumptions of the institution. It also defines the desired characteristics sought in a new leader. The value of this reflective time is best summarized by Zimpher (2004):

The search for a new president offers a unique opportunity for the entire campus and the community to reflect on and assess their mutual perspectives on the mission, values, and hopes for the future and to come together around shared goals. Since the success of the new president will, in fact, largely rest on how well his or her vision for the institution fits with that of the campus and the
community it is crucial that the campus community be able to present a reflective and considered image of itself and its expectations. (p. 113)

This process in higher education is often thought of as a time that readies the campus for change.

During times of presidential transition, institutional culture becomes a salient factor as an institution chooses a new leader and as a new president arrives at an institution and begins to assimilate into the community. Culture operates to maintain traditions, practices, beliefs and routines and can either strengthen an institution during a time of change or can inhibit a president’s efforts to bring about change. An institution’s dominant values, norms, and rules are characterized through the use of symbols, stories and legends that help define the institution (Bensimon, Neumann, & Birnbaum, 1989). Culture is described and reinforced through the use of symbols and symbolic representation. The tangible part of culture is referred to as cultural forms and can be made real through a variety of concrete forms such as symbols (Beyer & Trice, 1987). Symbols are embedded in all levels of an institution and are overt as well as hidden and exist whether or not institutional members recognize them (Tierney, 1989).

Statement of Purpose

Institutional culture is interwoven into the understanding of how a president uses symbols to communicate a vision. While a leader may work to present a vision in order to lead change, the culture of an institution is a recognizable force that influences the nature of change for a college or university. In order to communicate a vision for an institution and in order to be successful in leading change, leaders must understand institutional
culture (Schein, 1985). This study attempts to clarify the dynamics of the cultural understanding and communicating a vision through the use of cultural symbolic forms.

As a new president arrives and begins to formulate plans and a direction for an institution, the president employs strategies to share and explain those ideas and plans. Early in this process, members of the campus community begin to assess and generate opinions about the effectiveness of a new president and the ideas that are shared. One characteristic that defines presidential effectiveness includes a president’s ability to generate vision (Fisher, Tack, & Wheeler, 1988). Articulating a vision means that the president is offering a public statement that he or she understands how to maximize the potential of the institution. A vision can be described as a framework or a mental picture that helps campus members create a new metaphor for understanding the potential direction of the institution. An effective vision is defined as one that creates meaning for people in the organization, that is energizing, that brings the future to the present, and that creates a common identity for the organization (Nanus, 1998).

Presidents can assist in making a vision understandable for a campus community by using symbols and images to create a picture of an institution. It is the tangible image that takes the purpose and direction of an organization and brings them to life. To achieve this, leaders use language, ritual, stories and symbols that represent the institutional culture to represent the direction for the institution. This framing allows the president to manage the meaning by structuring where attention is directed and how information is gathered. As part of the tangible image, a leader creates a mission for the organization that serves to articulate the purpose in a way that is energizing for the organization. The
tangible images are the vivid descriptors used by a leader to transform the mission of the organization into images with which people can resonate (Smircich & Morgan, 1982).

The interdependency of the institutional culture and the action of developing and communicating a vision requires a level of cultural understanding on the part of the president. For the purposes of this study, the phenomenon and the process of a new president comprehending the institutional culture and relating cultural symbolic forms to the communication of a vision is referred to as presidential cultural competency. To illuminate this notion of cultural competency, this study is designed to examine how a president uses existing cultural symbols or creates new cultural symbols to communicate an institutional vision.

Cultural forms have been studied in order to understand ways that institutions maintain and sustain their institutional culture (Beyer & Trice, 1987; Schein, 1985; Tierney, 1989). While the study of culture and the use of cultural forms to communicate a vision are central to this study, understanding presidential leadership impacts the way in which a president interacts with the university community. A president demonstrates leadership through actions, through communication, and through the ability to construct meaning of the institution for others. A president who is willing to take risks, question the status quo and not shy away from change while projecting warmth and friendliness is deemed an effective collegiate leader (Fisher & Koch, 2004). Therefore, the president’s actions become symbolic and used in the communication of a vision.

Examining symbolic representations of the president’s vision allows for an opportunity to understand the institutional culture (or how the president wishes to
influence that culture) and to understand the interpretation of those within the institution in more tangible ways. Because these symbols, stories and rites work to maintain culture, they may impact the work of the president, in trying to influence culture in order to communicate an institutional vision. While previous research on symbolism describes ways in which presidents use symbols to communicate, and while previous research on culture examines the way institutional culture is manifested through the use of symbols, it is unclear how a college or university president uses these cultural forms to influence the culture with the goal of bringing change to the institution. In addition, it is also unclear how institutional members understand those cultural forms. This inquiry was designed to explore the perceptions of the university community to understand if cultural forms are effective means for developing understanding, particularly at a time when a new president was trying to help others comprehend and embrace a vision. Little is known about how institutional members interpret these symbols. This inquiry also illuminates how the president develops a level of comprehension and competence about the institutional culture.

Research Questions

This study was designed to explore the use of cultural forms (Beyer & Trice, 1987; Geertz, 1973; Tierney, 1988, 1989) at a four-year private university as a new university president presents a vision. This study explored how a new president used existing cultural symbols and how new symbols were offered in order to communicate a vision. In addition, this study examined how these cultural symbols are perceived and
interpreted by the institutional leadership group. Specifically, the study asked the following research questions:

1. How does a new university president use existing cultural symbols to communicate an institutional vision?
2. How does a new university president create and employ new cultural symbols in order to communicate an institutional vision?
3. How are these cultural symbols perceived and interpreted by the institutional leadership group (vice presidents, deans, the president’s executive management team)?

Prior studies have examined the role of the presidency and characteristics of an effective college or university president (Fisher & Koch, 2004; Fisher et al., 1988; Morrill, 2007). Existing research has also revealed the importance of a presidential vision and the role a vision plays in helping campus members to understand the president’s direction (Kotter, 1996; Morrill, 2007; Peck, 1983). Previous research about presidential succession has indicated that a president creates a vision and communicates that vision to the institutional members in order to help people visualize for themselves the institutional plan that the president envisions (Collins & Porras, 1998; Fisher et al., 1988). Research on college presidential visioning has revealed that successful presidents are the ones that understand their institutions (including the culture), where the institution is headed, and what the institution will become (Peck, 1983). In order to work within an institution’s culture to develop and communicate a vision, the shared norms and values that define culture must be affirmed and communicated in some tangible way (Beyer & Trice, 1987).
These concrete ways bring the culture to the surface so that institutional members can understand the message the president is communicating and how it relates to the institution’s shared belief system. As the leader of the institution, the role of the president is to help shape and interpret the direction of the institution for the campus community within the context set by the culture of the institution. In order for a president to use and work within the institutional culture while presenting a vision for change, the president employs cultural forms to affirm and communicate the values and norms of the institution. While a number of cultural forms exist that aid in understanding of the institutional culture, this study focuses on the use of symbols and symbolism by a president communicating a vision.

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach to closely examine one institution’s experience in the transition of a new president through a cultural lens as a way to examine the way a president uses cultural symbols to communicate a campus vision. Qualitative research allows a depth of understanding that helps describe and construct meaning. Qualitative research is grounded in constructivism that assumes multiple realities and that knowledge is co-constructed (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and is socially constructed out of human interaction (Crotty, 1998). Translating or interpreting individual social interaction in order to bring about or create a reality is the focus of the constructionist paradigm (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006).

In this study, an understanding of reality was created through the observation and the researcher/participant interaction. In order to understand the depth and intricacies of
how a president communicates a vision through the use of cultural symbols, studying a single case in depth allowed for that focus. A single case study approach is designed for the observation and understanding of one unit, in this case, an institution. To best understand that interaction, it is preferable to observe one institution to seek the depth of understanding that comes along with the high stakes of a president presenting a vision. Because “how” and “why” questions are the focus of this research, the in depth study of one case provides focus on a human dynamic within real life context (Yin, 1994). Data was gathered through participant observation, document analysis and through two rounds of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the president and members of the university leadership.

Significance

This study will help readers examine the dynamics of symbolic communication at one institution that has undergone a presidential leadership change. This inquiry offers a model of cultural competency that illuminates the way a president develops a level of cultural comprehension through feedback with the campus community. It explores the dynamics as a new president negotiates the culture and uses symbols and symbolism to communicate a vision to campus members. This study will potentially contribute to a conceptual understanding of the relationships between vision, leadership and culture. This study focuses on the experiences of one liberal arts college and institutional type is certainly a salient element in understanding the dynamics that may occur. Inquiry in the area of college or university culture can add to the comprehension of this fundamentally important aspect of higher education, especially when it can be better understood during
time of institutional change that comes with a new president. The literature currently does not address specifically how leaders use symbolic cultural forms to help communicate a vision.

This study will provide insights into the presidential transition process for new presidents. Exploring this phenomenon of cultural understanding and symbolic communication is critical as presidents rely on the visioning and the planning process to bring about institutional change. The study should assist Boards of Trustees to better appreciate the complexity of the change in presidential leadership and may contribute to their handling of the presidential recruitment and selection process. This insight will help new presidents and campus members examine the dynamics of institutional culture and change as they work together to advance their institution. New presidents arrive at an institution and must assess and understand the culture in order to be successful in transmitting the understanding of a vision. Presidents have only a short time to define and lay the groundwork for an institution’s vision as the typical presidency averages about 8.5 years (American Council on Education, 2007). This research can help new presidents have a more in depth understanding in order to take action or understand the dynamics at their own institution as they move forward.

Finally, this inquiry can contribute to the methodological understanding of using a single case study to examine culture and college or university presidents. Case study has been used previously to examine university culture (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988) and this inquiry can contribute to the understanding of an important presidential action (communicating a vision) in the context of the institutional culture.
Potential Strengths of the Study

The role of the president is incredibly challenging at colleges and universities today. This study was intended to give voice and understanding to a fundamental role that the president plays at an institution. Presidents use the resources they have available to lead an institution and to honor its history. By investigating this phenomenon, the understanding of these research questions can add to the understanding of university culture as well as presidential leadership as it relates to communicating a vision.

An additional strength of this study was the examination of this topic through the lens of a seasoned university administrator. Because I have an understanding of university leadership and institutional culture as a result of working at four institutions and serving in a senior leadership role at one of the institutions, it allowed me to recognize and understand some of the nuances of university culture and work done at the senior administrative level.

Finally, this study employed new inquiry into institutional culture and attempted to examine a new model for institutional cultural competency. This suggested model dissected the lines of communication and examined the intersection between symbolic communication and institutional culture. Using case study as the method for the inquiry, I potentially can add to the understanding of using case study to examine research questions about a university president using a cultural theoretical lens.
Conclusion

This study was focused on understanding the perceptions of the campus community in order to reveal how a president may use existing or new cultural symbols to communicate a vision. Through the lens of culture, data from observation, document analysis and interviews were examined in order to advance the understanding of a president’s role in presenting a vision to a campus community and how the president’s use of cultural symbols was interpreted by the senior leadership group.

Chapter 2 provides the background literature that informs the study. The theoretical lens for this study was developed from the institutional culture literature. Additionally, the literature most applicable to this study comes from areas such as presidential succession, leadership, institutional vision and presidential effectiveness. Chapter 3 describes the details of this study’s methodology. In Chapter 3, the specific methods employed in this study are outlined as well as an analysis of the rationale for this methodological approach. Chapter 4 presents the findings of this inquiry as they relate to the research questions. Finally, Chapter 5 describes the discussion of the results as they relate to the findings, the literature and the implications for further study.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This inquiry begins with the examination of the literature about presidential succession, culture, presidential leadership and vision. Culture is the theoretical framework for this study and is defined and presented as an institutional stabilizer and as a vehicle for change. The literature on presidential leadership and vision is described in the context of higher education. Finally, an understanding of college and university presidential effectiveness is important as a backdrop to this inquiry.

Presidential Succession

The literature about presidential succession provides the context in which this study takes place. The transition of a college or university president is a momentous occasion for most institutions. It is a process that begins many months before a president arrives and frequently involves search firms, Board of Trustee members, and various university constituents. McLaughlin (1996) pointed out that “the presidential leadership transition is an intense experience, which has serious ramifications for the success of the president’s tenure” (p. 1). As a college or university president changes, so does the institution. The change of a president is a time of excitement and stress not only for the new president, but also for the members of the institution (McLaughlin, 1996).
Success in a presidential transition comes when an organized and deliberate approach is applied to the process. The change of a president should be viewed as a strategic action for the institution, with the most important groups key to achieving strategic change are the Board, the senior administrative leadership and the faculty leadership (Martin & Samels, 2004). A conceptual flowchart (Martin & Samels, 2004) illustrates the phases critical in the presidential transition process. These phases begin with the inclusion of faculty, staff, students and the board members in the search process in order to make strategic decisions during the transition to a new president. The chart includes seven phases that include steps in the process; beginning with agreement on what is desired in a new president to the interview process, concluding with the president’s integration into the college or university (Martin & Samels, 2004).

Presidential search consultants can play an important role in the success or failure to a presidential search. The selection of an appropriately matched consultant can engender confidence in the search process as well as provide the resource of an objective voice in the search process (Sanaghan, Goldstein & Gavel, 2008). Institutional type can also drive the role of the consultant and the level of campus participation, with private, liberal arts colleges more likely having a participatory process (Fisher, 1991).

One of the more comprehensive reports of college presidents comes from the American Council on Education (2007) and is “the only source of demographic data on college and university presidents” (p. 1). The report summarizes information collected from 2,148 college and university presidents. It found that the average tenure of presidents has risen with the average in 2006 of 8.5 years compared to a low in 1986 of
6.3 years (American Council on Education, 2007). While this figure has increased slightly over the past fifteen years, it represents the possibility of changing leadership twice every fifteen years. Another way to think about the more frequent change in college presidents is to examine the longevity of presidents. Of the nearly 1,500 four-year institutions in the United States, only approximately 100 presidents have served their institutions for more than 15 years (Basinger, 2002). These statistics provide the backdrop for presidential succession and acknowledge the fact that the length of time for the president to understand the institutional culture and present a vision is limited.

The prior experience of college and university presidents is changing as well as their tenure. Not only are presidents changing frequently (on average every eight years) but also their paths to the presidency are worth noting. Approximately 13 percent of college presidents in 2006 came from outside higher education. Additionally, more than 60 percent had some type of experience outside higher education (American Council on Education, 2007). This statistic is significant in anticipating the nature of the transition a new president faces entering an institution with his or her learning curve. While slightly more than half of the presidents in 2006 (52 percent) were either presidents or chief academic officers prior to their current presidency, half were not (American Council on Education, 2007). Because career paths to presidencies come in a variety of forms, the approach to communicating a vision and interacting with an institution cannot be assumed to occur in ways that are traditional to higher education or consistent among presidents. Nearly one third of presidents have never been faculty members, up from 25 percent in 1986 (American Council on Education, 2007). Understanding this history and
presidential backgrounds helps clarify the perspective that a president brings to the institution. Communicating a vision is universal to higher education as well as the non-profit and corporate sectors. However, institutional culture within higher education is unique and therefore can be understood in different ways depending on the past experience of the new president.

New presidents must focus their time on activities that move the university in the direction of the institutional vision. University presidents reported that planning, fundraising, community relations and the budget were the primary duties of a president and consumed most of their time (American Council on Education, 2007). Through these functions, presidents are often developing a vision and setting a direction (planning), communicating their vision both internally and externally (through fundraising and community relations), and working to develop shared goals with institutional members (budgeting). It is clear that a primary role of the president is to be involved in the direction of the institution by helping to be actively involved in shaping priorities. In order to be effective, a new president, therefore, must understand how to work within the institutional understanding and culture to communicate that direction.

As a new president arrives, an expectation of change grows in a university community. With a presidential tenure averaging 8.5 years, change can occur frequently in the life of an institution (American Council on Education, 2007). The early actions of a president are critical in the success of setting an institutional agenda. Understanding how a president develops and presents an institutional vision and uses cultural forms in that
communication is critical when attempting to appreciate the impact of presidential succession on an institution.

Definition of Culture

Culture is a humanly constructed understanding that may be explicit or may be assumed or understood in an environment. Culture functions for individuals to help bring understanding and make sense out of what is happening around them. Drawing from work in anthropology and sociology, culture is defined as “a perceptual construct in that the culture of any environment reflects the assumptions, beliefs, and values inhabitants construct to interpret and understand the meaning of events and actions” (Strange & Banning, 2001, p. 100). In higher education, organizational culture is the glue that holds an institution together and is based on shared beliefs and values (Kuh & Whitt, 1988; Schein, 1985; Tierney, 1988). These shared beliefs and values are held by members of the organization, and function on levels from observable to unconscious. Assumptions about the community are learned by members of the organization in response to dealing with problems or other activities in the organization, and they become the “taken for granted” actions within the organization. Campus culture “is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it. It concerns decisions, actions, and communication, both on an instrumental and symbolic level” (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988, p. 7). Culture operates to maintain the traditions, beliefs and practices of an institution or in other words, works to maintain the institutional identity (Birnbaum, 1992).

Organizational culture may be described in layers that exist in varying degrees of visibility from the obvious and perceptible to the most invisible and preconscious
(Schein, 1985). These three layers of culture consist of artifacts, values, and basic assumptions. The metaphor of layers is useful in understanding and visualizing the way in which culture operates. Each is critical in the strength of institutional culture. In order to understand culture, one must identify the most obvious and perceptible layer of culture but also understand the underlying assumptions in order to bring meaning to the outward and visible layer (Schein, 1985).

Artifacts are the constructed or physical parts of the environment as well as the visible and audible behavior patterns (Schein, 1985). Artifacts are defined as physical representations such as symbols or physical arrangements, demonstrated representation such as ceremonies and traditions, as well as verbal representation such as jargon and patterns of communication (Ott, 1989). Artifacts are useful in studying institutional culture because they can be readily identified and they do offer clues about the values and assumptions of the organization (Ott, 1989). While artifacts are easy to observe, they often are difficult to understand without understanding the other layers of culture.

The middle layer of culture is defined as beliefs and values. These are what people believe in their minds to be true or not true and they give justification for why people who are part of an institution behave as they do (Ott, 1989). These are widely held beliefs as part of an institution and they instruct institutional members how to behave in situations and they influence patterns of organizational behavior (Schein, 1985). Values provide the emotional justification for actions by institutional members while beliefs provide the cognitive justification for action (Ott, 1989). Understanding values helps to understand the meaning of the physical artifacts.
The deepest layer of culture consists of underlying assumptions of the institution. They are likely to have dropped out of consciousness and become an unspoken way of operation at an organization or institution. They tend to guide behaviors in the organization and as a result are not debatable or not confrontable (Schein, 1985).

Another way to view culture is through a model developed by Martin (1992) that conceives culture in a multiperspective view where culture can be seen through a number of lenses. This inquiry explores the same organizational case through these multiple frameworks (integration, differentiation, and fragmentation). Integration is described as an organizational culture that exhibits organizational consistency and consensus, differentiation is described as an organizational culture that exhibits cohesion in subcultures but lacks on overall integration, and fragmentation is described as an organizational culture that embraces ambiguity and demonstrates little consensus or consistency (Martin, 1992). The results of this inquiry find that the power of the model comes when organizational culture can be viewed through these multiple lenses as no organization exhibits a singular perspective.

Culture as an Institutional Stabilizer

The ways in which an institution engages in self-reinforcing processes and provides sustainability for the institution’s reality is expressed through the dimensions of its culture (Birnbaum, 1992; Morgan, 1997). The culture can serve as the conscious or unconscious ways in which an institution exerts its personality. Campus participants hold values about the institution and have an understanding of the nature of the institution that can be seen as the institutional culture. The culture is created over time and is developed
in learning to adjust and cope with institutional change, adaptation to the external environment. Institutions develop ways of perceiving themselves and these perceptions can be conscious or unconscious, thus creating a pattern of automatic assumptions about the institution (Schein, 1986).

The formation of culture can be described in a similar manner to the process of group formation (Schein, 1985). The key element to the formation of group identity is that members develop shared or similar values, and beliefs that occur because of shared experiences and common learning. In group formation, the leader’s individual ideas and values about the group become the “shared, consensually validated” definitions of the group. As the group understands how it will accomplish its core mission, the development of the group impacts how the external environment is perceived, thus forming the group’s culture (Schein, 1985). Once the culture is established in the form of shared assumptions, then those assumptions impact how the external environment is perceived. This cyclical reinforcement is the way that the organization stabilizes at a time of influences from the environment, as the shared assumptions are the lens through which organizational members view the environment.

An additional framework that can help operationalize organizational culture (Tierney, 1988) was developed through the analysis of a single case study of an institution. Elements of this model include examining the environment (what is the attitude toward the environment), mission (how is it defined and articulated?), socialization (how are new members socialized?), information (who has information and how is it disseminated?), strategy (who makes decisions?), and leadership (who are the
formal and informal leaders?). Tierney’s framework can inform this study because it provides an additional way to examine the president’s symbolic actions, communication and decisions in these five areas. The examination of the vision can be viewed in the context of information, the mission, strategy, leadership and ways in which the president uses the symbolic nature of the institutional culture to represent the meaning of the direction for the institution.

Symbolic actions

Institutional culture is also stabilized through the use of symbolic actions by members of the institution. These actions serve to represent the values and beliefs of the institution and are used as ways to reinforce those values. These symbols can be categorized into metaphorical, physical, communicative, and structural symbols (Tierney, 1989). Metaphorical symbols are used to paint pictures for institutional members and to provide images that help reinforce the culture. For example, by describing the institution as a team or by providing a metaphor of collaboration, a president can use metaphors to describe what is important to the institution, leading to reinforcement of the institutional assumptions. Physical symbols are ways in which an institution reinforces the culture by using objects to represent the institutional values and beliefs. The choice of buildings to construct or renovate, the presence or lack of computers, the conditions of the grounds, or the choices around the availability of parking spaces are examples of physical symbols that provide institutional stability and help send messages about the values and beliefs of the institution. Communicative symbols provide the same reinforcement, only through the means of the institutional discourse. Speeches delivered, written communication, and
dialogue about the institution provide descriptions that communicate the values and beliefs of the institution, which are part of the culture to the university members. Finally structural symbols are an additional means for the institutional culture to provide institutional stability. Examples of structural symbols include ways in which the personnel are organized, the type of positions that exist (i.e. having a senior administrator in charge of diversity) or making an appointment of an underrepresented person to a senior leadership position. The creation of task forces around special topic is another way that the values and beliefs of the institution are strengthened. In addition, governance and decision-making structures also serve to reinforce the culture and provide representation of support for the institutional values.

Symbolic actions can also be represented in the way institutional members are socialized into the institution. This socialization often begins in the search and interview process but continues in training and orientation. Socialization can happen as part of university traditions, such as convocation, graduation, athletic events and other traditional celebrations or activities. The existence of such events is symbolic in themselves but they also are used to transmit the institutional values to participants. It serves to reinforce how to be a member of the institution in a way that is congruent with the values of the institution. More simply, it can be seen as the way business is done at the institution.

Culture as a Vehicle for Change

Because culture is an institutional stabilizer and serves to reinforce the current institutional identity, a president must work with and understand the institutional culture in order to bring institutional change. The success of a president in bringing about change
is contingent upon the president understanding the layers of culture, especially the meaning of the underlying assumptions that are unconscious or unrecognizable. Because culture functions to maintain institutional meaning and identity (Beyer & Trice, 1987; Tierney, 1988), in order to bring a change in institutional direction the president must in some ways influence or modify the institutional culture. Effective organizational change can happen only when the institutional leadership demonstrates a cultural understanding as an element in communicating a vision (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). In order to understand or predict how an organization will behave under different circumstances, one must know patterns of basic assumptions (Ott, 1989). To present a vision, a president not only must negotiate but also influence the culture in ways to help institutional members understand the direction of the institution differently.

An institutional vision is a tool that a president can use to communicate the direction and a plan for an institution. It is imperative that a president possesses strategies to help the campus community both understand and buy into the direction of the vision. Since the culture helps define how institutional members understand the university, a president can define and illustrate that vision in terms of the culture. Artifacts are the most visible and outward layer of culture and by using these recognizable artifacts to translate the institutional vision, the community can make sense of this new vision by the community. Leaders are most successful when they understand the artifacts in their own cultures and use each artifact symbolically in a culturally consistent way (Tierney, 1988).
The literature presents the ways in which the culture is made visible through artifacts (Beyer & Trice, 1987; Ott, 1989; Schein, 1985; Tierney, 1989). Common artifacts that exist in organizations are described as cultural forms (Beyer & Trice, 1987; Ott, 1989; Schein, 1985). Cultural forms are defined as the tangible part of culture (Beyer & Trice, 1987) and include symbols as well as rites and rituals that represent the underlying meaning of the organizational values and assumptions. Cultural symbols are defined as “any object, act, event, quality, or relation that serves as a vehicle for conveying meaning, usually by representing another thing” (Beyer & Trice, 1987, p. 6).

The routines of procedures, rules, and institutional governance are repeated through rituals and customs. These routines are also deeply embedded in an institution’s history and tradition (Birnbaum, 1992).

A president can use cultural forms and symbols to describe and make meaning of the institutional vision that is created. As the president adjusts to the cultural environment and understands the existing culture, the use of symbolic representation aids in the comprehension of the direction by institutional members. Critical to this understanding is the fact that institutional members interpret and understand these symbols differently depending on their own history, roles and backgrounds (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993). Key to the understanding of institutional culture is the fact that understanding culture requires a comprehension of both the observable structure as well as the perceptions and interpretations of the institution.

The way in which a new president negotiates the culture was examined in one interpretative case study that examined the relationship between presidential leadership
and culture when a new college or university president is appointed (Neumann, 1995). In this case, the relationship between the new president and the campus community is described in five phases. Defining the setting reflects a new president entering the institution and attempting to make sense out of the institution; redefining the setting reflects a president reframing the institution in the context of the cultural environment; stirring things up is represented by taking action to change the environment; the stage of campus responses is characterized by the campus responding to changes; and the calibrating stage represents the presidential response to the campus community in response to changes. This framework is useful to examine the process of a president presenting a vision. In the use of symbolic forms to illustrate that vision, the president is redefining the setting as well as stirring up the environment. While this research focused on the entry of a new president, a more in depth understanding can be gained by focusing on what happens symbolically during these two stages.

An additional body of literature exists around the idea of framing organizations as a way to describe the organization as a mental map (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996). An organizational frame is a “set of ideas or assumptions that you carry in your head” (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 12). Framing helps to make sense of things, and the meaning, as chosen by the leader, is interpreted by choosing one meaning over another (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996). One key component of framing is language as a way of communicating the meaning that is constructed by the leader. The construction of the meaning requires leaders to employ a thought process and construct mental schemas or models to help explain the meaning they have constructed (Fairhurst & Sarr, 1996;
Senge, 1990). The value of framing is that it provides a way for a leader to help members understand the organization.

The symbolic frame is one way to describe an organization as cultural that is propelled by rituals, stories and ceremonies (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Symbols are used to make sense of the ambiguity and allow individuals to make meaning while expressing the organization’s culture. These cultural actions are the factors that bring meaning and direction to an organization, rather than rules and policies. Core assumptions exist about the symbolic frame of an organization including the fact that events and processes are more important for what is expressed than what is produced. In addition, at a time of uncertainty, individuals create symbols to help resolve confusion (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Symbolic forms can be expressed in symbolic events, such as rituals and ceremonies, which provide direction. Stories serve to resolve dilemmas and contradictions. These forms together help organizational members have a recognizable understanding of the organization because these outward demonstration of the culture can help to provide meaning to those institutional members.

Presidential Leadership and Vision

Understanding presidential leadership is an important aspect of this inquiry. As a new president arrives at an institution, the campus community looks to the leader to provide direction, help inspire the community, provide the structure for the direction of the institution and assist in interpreting the vision for the campus community. The vision becomes the roadmap for the president to describe the institutional direction for the campus community.
Leadership is described as “the process of influencing others to understand and agree about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, and the process of facilitating individuals and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (Yukl, 2002, p. 7). A leader is seen as someone who brings understanding and who influences members of an organization to accomplish something that is shared. This approach implies the need for the leader to be in relationship with members of the organization in order to facilitate understanding, and that some type of communication or dialogue about shared objectives exist.

The construction of leadership can be seen in terms of relationships as described as a “two-way influence between leaders and their constituents” (Bolman & Deal, 1991, p. 409). This relationship is “interactional” where the leader is shaped by the interaction with those in the organization, just as the organization is changed and shaped by the leader. It is not the actions of a leader or the actions or responses of constituents that create leadership. It is the interaction between the two that brings the capacity for change on both parts (Bolman & Deal, 1991).

Leadership can also be conceived as a social construction where a leader is defined through the interaction between the leader and the follower (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). In this social construction of leadership, there appears to be a negotiation where one emerges as the leader as the leader defines reality for others (Smircich & Morgan, 1982). Through relationship, leadership is shaped and defined as the followers look to the leader to construct an understanding of the organization and the dynamics within the organization. While this concept is not necessarily central to the
understanding of leadership, it does highlight the notion that leadership is a construction of one’s interpretation of an organization for others to comprehend.

Leadership has evolved from a traditional framework where a leader is seen as the one in control, where few key people have the information, and where the leader is seen as the stabilizer to a framework where the leader is seen as progressive and a change agent. In this view, leaders are seen as designers, creators, and where information is shared, where leaders empower others to make decisions, and where the leader leads by vision (Nanus, 1998). Leaders are seen as social architects of the organization where relationships are flat and power is distributed.

Central to understanding leadership is the nature of relationship with other people. In relationship, leaders articulate and demonstrate through their actions, a direction or a vision for where the group or organization is headed. The leader helps construct an agreed upon understanding of that direction for others to decide if they embrace. Through language, conversation and continual dialogue, this understanding of direction is discussed and debated so that others can create their own understanding. Leadership is that process to influence and communicate with others to bring an understanding of the organizational goals or direction.

This definition of leadership supports the notion of the interactive dynamic of the leader in organizational change. This interactivity, through language and conversation and through symbolic representation, can be achieved through interaction around a vision for the institution. In fact, the importance of vision and focus appear to be the most widely agreed upon leadership characteristic (Bolman & Deal, 2003). According to their
assessment of the literature, an effective leader articulates a vision, communicates the standards of performance, and helps to focus the direction (Bolman & Deal, 2003). This notion of leadership in relationship and leadership as the communicator of a vision is congruent with what a new president must do. Leadership can also be described as effective when presidents take a multidimensional view of the organization. Leaders that incorporate multiple viewpoints, are collaborative and that are reflective as seen as more effective than leaders that focus on one viewpoint or a singular approach to issues (Bensimon & Neumann, 1993).

As a president presents a vision with the idea of taking the institution in a new direction, the change may require more drastic change where the institution is “transformed” through the new direction of the leader. Transformational leadership is the theory that suggests that effective leaders create and communicate images of the institution that alter the perceptions and attitudes about the organization (Bensimon et al., 1989). Transformational leadership is described as the “metamorphosis” of a system that results in a quantitatively different organization (Cameron & Ulrich, 1986).

Transformational leaders as often described as being charismatic and change oriented. An agenda or steps that illustrate transformational leadership has been formulated from the examination of well-known leaders. These steps describe the process of one demonstrating transformational leadership (Bensimon et al., 1989). The steps include creating a readiness for change; overcoming resistance to change through non threatening ways to introduce change; presenting a vision by combining symbolic imagery and rational reasoning; generating commitment; and institutionalizing that
commitment (Bensimon et al., 1989). This model for transformational leadership is congruent with the concept of culture and understanding the relationship between the visible aspects of culture (artifacts) and the underlying assumptions, values and beliefs that must be recognized in order for a vision to be understood and embraced. Birnbaum (1988) noted that transformation leadership can be difficult to exercise at colleges and universities unless certain conditions exist. These conditions include institutional size (small institutions are more open to transformational leaders), institutional crisis (institutions in crisis are more open to transformational leaders) or institutional quality (those that find themselves needing to be upgraded).

Institutional Vision

The role of a vision is to provide a framework or a statement about the direction that the president intends to lead the institution. A vision is designed to provide a model that guides priorities and planning for the next steps that an institution will undertake. A vision is an outward and public statement of the president’s declaration of those institutional priorities.

An effective vision is one that people believe is a credible and realistic representation of the organization (Nanus, 1998). It represents the symbol for the institution and helps to define the path that the institution will follow to reach the vision. The vision serves to set goals for change, to help the institution make progress toward goals, to create a proactive environment and to help the institution move toward long-term results. It allows campus members to try on a new direction for the institution.
A vision provides direction and a roadmap for potential change. A vision can serve as the basis for interaction and dialogue for members of the institution. Dialogue or interaction through conversation enables groups within an organization to create common thinking or shared meaning (Schein, 1993). This phenomenon is described as a learning organization where members of the organization are continually exploring how they can construct their reality of their surroundings (Senge, 1990). Therefore, the vision can serve as a platform for communication about goals and priorities of the institution.

The ways in which a vision is communicated vary. Change in an organization can be described as “shifting conversations” where what is accepted as being reality is modified as the conversation changes about what is reality (Ford, 1999). Ford described it saying, “Since conversational (constructed) reality provides the context in which people act and interact, shifting what people pay attention to shifts their reality and provides an opportunity for new actions and results to occur” (p. 488). In other words, as new conversations take place in an organization and are repeated, then what is being said becomes naturalized in the organization and is accepted as the reality. The rate of change that occurs is a factor of the degree to which the conversations happen in multiple parts of the organization (Ford, 1999).

Change does not necessarily occur just because conversations are held (Ford, 1999). A great deal of flexibility and creativity can be used to achieve the change or the end result. There is no planned trajectory that is followed for change. As a result, management of the conversation needs to occur in order to construct this new reality. Those individuals involved in change must manage conversations in order to bring about
the appropriate action within the organization (Ford, 1999). Ford and Ford (1995) discussed change occurring as participants move between conversations. These conversations can be categorized as initiative, understanding, performance and closure. Initiative conversations are designed to lay the groundwork or begin the change process. Conversations for understanding can be seen as the way to make assertions or how claims are made. People in the organization are seeking understanding and clarification. This is also the time that a common language is developed. Conversations for performance are focused on producing actions and results that will bring about change. This is the time when conversations that provide feedback to the leader in order to monitor progress take place. Finally, conversations for closure provide some definitive definition of change and they solidify the newly created reality in the minds of those in the organization (Ford & Ford, 1995). The ability of the leader to move and shift between these types of conversations is what will bring about organizational change (Ford, 1999).

A new president can use these conversations and communication as additional symbols to communicate a vision. The content, the words that are chosen, the people included are all symbolic and strategic acts of communication. In presenting a vision, a president develops that vision, shares it with the community, spends considerable time talking with various groups to provide understanding, works on implementing the vision and then continually monitors the progress (Gaudiani, 1996). Presidents rely on others within the institution, beginning with the senior leadership, both faculty and administration, to understand the vision and incorporate it into the life of the institution. This process happens through on-going communication, primarily through conversation.
Presidential Effectiveness

Presidents that can view the institution through a variety of frames and can take a multifaceted view of situations are seen as possessing a greater cognitive complexity and therefore seen as more effective leaders (Birnbaum, 1992). Presidents can understand the organization through various frames, such as the political, bureaucratic, collegial and symbolic frames. These frames provide a president different ways of responding to organizational issues (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Because institutions possess multiple realities, leaders that can view the institution through multiple lenses or frames are able to make sense of and communicate more effectively than always viewing situations through one frame (Bensimon et al., 1989). Presidents in the process of presenting and communicating a vision demonstrate greater success by using these multiple frames.

The literature that describes an effective president, particularly as it relates to how a president relays a vision, provides an understanding of what is important in the role the president plays. One significant study was conducted by Fisher, Tack, & Wheeler (1988) that used an inventory developed for this study to examine presidential effectiveness. Until that time, studies conducted on presidential effectiveness focused on relationships with boards (Kerr, 1984), selection of presidents (Fisher, 1984), and presidential profiles (Bolman, 1965; Cohen & March, 1986). In this study, the researchers conducted a four-phase research study that involved developing the sample through nominations, surveying the population, interviewing a subset of the sample (eighteen presidents thought to be among the nation’s most effective presidents) and finally analyzing the data. The results of this study are significant as a profile of an effective president was
developed, with effective being defined as presidents nominated by peers as being effective. The profile is a compilation of personal and professional traits and experiences that set them apart from their representative counterparts. Among other characteristics, the findings that an effective president can be defined as one that is committed to a vision for the institution and that is planful in communicating to the campus members (Fisher et al., 1988). This finding supports the notion that skilled communication is an important factor in the effectiveness of a president. Shaw (1999), in his case study of one university president, articulated that unless an institution’s vision is communicated clearly and often, then the president is not deemed effective.

Two particular concepts discussed in the literature about university presidents are significant in understanding the background of presidents in their roles: not only does the presidency change frequently but connecting this rapidity of change with research on effectiveness gives us greater understanding of the incoming presidential dynamics. As a president enters an institution, he or she has limited time to understand the institution in order to effectively communicate a vision. Presidents defined as effective are planful and deliberate about communicating a vision. The literature, however, does not speak to the level of detail about how that communication happens in order to be effective.

Summary

In order for a president to communicate a vision effectively, the president must demonstrate some kind of cultural competency about the institution. This competency allows the president to use culturally appropriate symbols and cultural forms to represent meaning of the vision for the campus community. Through understanding the layers of
culture at an institution, by recognizing the ways in which the institutional culture can stabilize an institution, the president can also use the symbols inherent to the institutional culture to articulate and represent a new direction for an institution.

Communicating the vision, symbolic actions, and conversation from the president become artifacts that both represent and are influenced by the institutional culture. The university community that views the president’s vision does so through these artifacts of the culture. This means that the culture can serve two roles: to provide a way of interpreting the vision as it relates to the existing institutional culture and to understand change as it is presented through the use of the cultural artifacts. These artifacts have meaning because of the values and beliefs of the culture that are stabilized by the underlying assumptions of the institution. The university community translates conversation as well as views the symbolic representation through the culture as a lens to interpret the vision. The viewpoints of the community are filtered through the institutional culture and the responses are influenced by the underlying assumptions of the culture. In addition, the president possesses a referent culture that comes from past experiences and the president’s own values and beliefs influence the president’s actions and conversation.

This concept of cultural competency can be represented through a model that is a compilation of the understanding of the culture, leadership and institutional vision literature, as represented in Figure 2.1.
The understanding of the underlying assumptions as well as the values and beliefs of the institution is made visible through the artifacts. The president uses the cultural frames and represents the culture through actions that become symbolic of the culture. The actions that are congruent with the institutional culture can also be used to represent change or a new direction. This process involves two-way communication and occurs through conversation, through symbolic representation, or through articulation of an institutional vision. Presidents that can demonstrate this institutional cultural competency can prove to be effective in using cultural forms to help the campus community.
understand and hopefully resonate toward the vision.
CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to describe the research methodology, the research methods, data collection, and data analysis strategies to be used in this study. This chapter first addresses the purpose of the study and reviews the research questions. A discussion of the research design includes a description of the epistemology informing the study. The research methods, including the sample, data collection, and data analysis, are illustrated. Finally, the reliability of the study, trustworthiness, ethical issues, and limitations are presented.

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to explore the use of cultural symbols and symbolism as a new university president presents and implements a vision at a higher education institution. A president is the communicator of the university’s direction and must engage in the institutional culture in order to communicate a vision. In order to legitimize the communication, the use of cultural forms such as symbols allows the president to acknowledge the institutional culture work within the culture. This study looks closely at those dynamics within one higher education institution, a four-year private university, in order to provide an understanding of how one communicates and implements a university vision.
The three questions that guide this study are:

1. How does a new university president use existing cultural symbols to communicate an institutional vision?

2. How does a new university president create and employ new cultural symbols in order to communicate an institutional vision?

3. How are these cultural symbols perceived and interpreted by the institutional leadership group (vice presidents, deans, and the president’s executive management team)?

Research Design

Overview

A qualitative research approach is employed to explore the questions in this study and is an effective way of examining these questions for three reasons. First, qualitative research allows for inquiry in a naturalistic setting as a way to understand how people interact with their world. In this study, a qualitative approach allows for observation and dialogue with the campus community as members work together in order to advance the institution. It is especially applicable to this cultural inquiry because qualitative research can be seen as inquiry within a system or culture, with the goal of understanding, not predicting, the dynamics affecting individuals or processes in the system (Janesick, 1994). Second, qualitative inquiry focuses on how people understand the world and uses questions about what people think or how people feel as way to bring about understanding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). It can be described as the social construction of understanding through the interaction that people have with their world (Glesne, 1999).
This approach allows for multiple perspectives to be considered in order to bring a new insight into one’s environment. Finally, in qualitative research, themes emerge from the inquiry through an inductive process where gathering and analyzing data result in a new understanding of the themes (Patton, 1990). Only in qualitative research can these data represent the nuances of human interaction that allows for this new understanding of the themes to emerge through this inquiry.

In this study, I used document analysis, observation and interviews to create the data. The observation and interviews allowed for an up-close and detailed understanding out of which themes about the interaction developed. The analysis of these data were best represented by thick description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as a way to characterize the thoughts, actions and perceptions of the president and the campus community.

Institutional cultural competency, as conceptualized in Chapter 2, is a social phenomenon and can only be examined in a way that allows for the understanding of the perceptions of institutional members. Because the nature of this inquiry focuses on the revelation of new insights and awareness of the ways a president symbolically presents a vision, qualitative inquiry was the best means to construct that meaning.

Epistemology

A constructivist epistemology is used in this study. This constructivist paradigm is one that values the creation of reality that is generated through interaction and is a composite of individual understandings. This relativistic ontology is based on the belief that reality is created through an individual’s own way of sensemaking (Crotty, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The reality of what is real is constructed by participants, and it
does not exist out of the context of the social realities through those interactions. To understand the nuances of these realities, the researcher talks and interacts with participants about their perceptions (Glesne, 1999). In addition, reality is understood only in relation to language or culture of the one interpreting (Schwandt, 1997). In this epistemology, understanding is co-constructed through interaction with participants and the researcher. Because people construct meaning in a variety of ways even around the same idea or situation (Crotty, 1998), a new reality is revealed through the interaction of campus participants and the researcher. Out of this relationship between the researcher and those in the study comes a newly constructed understanding of reality. The role of the researcher, among many things, is to facilitate the multiple realities where findings are created and knowledge is produced (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

In this study, the goal of the inquiry was to create new insights into the dynamics of how the president understood the campus culture and used symbols in the culture to communicate a vision. Additionally, the perceptions of the campus community leaders about the president’s communication of a vision were important to understand. During the interaction that I observed as a researcher and during the interaction that I had with the president and the campus community, I was a participant in enabling the dialogue about the president’s vision with the campus community. This inquiry focused on the meaning making about the way in which the president utilizes cultural symbols to communicate a vision. This meaning came from the interaction of the president and the campus community around this topic.
Method

The method for this inquiry is instrumental case study. A case study can be broadly described as the examination of the complexity and the particulars of a single bounded system, allowing for the understanding within its natural circumstances (Stake, 1995). The goal of an instrumental case study is to provide insight into a particular issue and most importantly to facilitate understanding of something other than the case itself (Stake, 2000). For example, in this study, the interest in an instrumental case study is not in the institution itself but in the dynamics that occur at the institution.

Case study makes sense in this inquiry for several reasons. First, the case study focuses on an in-depth understanding and the opportunity to discover the nuances in the interactions between people. Attempting to understand ways in which a president utilized symbols and other cultural forms requires the study of the dynamics. Case study research strategy is best constructed when data are gathered from a variety of sources and when the case is studied through a theoretical lens that can guide the inquiry (Yin, 1994). The cultural theoretical lens guides this case study inquiry and data were gathered from observation, document analysis, and interviews. Second, case study is an appropriate way to examine the research questions proposed in this inquiry because it allows for focused understanding about the complex interactions between the president and the campus community as a vision is presented. Third, case study allows the links to be examined through questions, observation, conversations, and interaction.
Case study is an effective method to examine the institutional culture. In Chaffee and Tierney’s (1988) study on collegiate culture and leadership, case study method was used to bring an awareness of institutional culture to the forefront in an effort to strengthen and improve leadership strategies. It was noted that case studies was the best way to generate the personal interaction with the institutional community in order to understand the complexity of the organizational life or culture (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988). In this inquiry, case study as a method fits well as it required an intense examination of not only the voices of the participants but also institutional assumptions known as culture that the president attempted to manage or influence in guiding an institution with a new vision.

Site Selection and Sampling Strategies

Selection of the site

The site for this case study was selected using critical case sampling. Critical case sampling is a strategy employed to select a case that best illustrates an important point (Patton, 1990). Schwandt (1997) stated that,

the site or place is chosen on the basis of a combination of criteria including availability, accessibility, and theoretical interest. A single place may be chosen because in that site one has good reasons to believe that the human action or social process going on there is critical to understanding, testing or elaborating on some theory or generalized concept of that social process. (p. 141)

A single case was appropriate for this study because the research questions attempt to explore the complexity of understanding the nuances in the perceptions of the
campus leadership as well as understanding the dynamics between the president and the

campus community. This inquiry can best be achieved by focusing attention in one
institutions. In addition, the model of institutional cultural competency proposed in
Chapter 2 should first be examined at one institution or using one case before attempting
to examine it in multiple sites. Higher education studies using a single case study
approach exist and provide in-depth understanding of the institutional intricacies
(Burrows, 1998; Smith, 2002; Tierney, 1988)

In this study’s site selection, a list was produced of all institutions within the
Midwestern and Eastern regions of the U.S. that announced a new president within the
past twenty-four months. I prioritized the list by the potential access to the president by
sharing it with higher education colleagues, asking which presidents they may know in
order to facilitate access. I made inquiries to three institutions seeking the president’s
willingness to have the institution serve as the inquiry site. The president of Midwestern
College, the site that was selected, agreed to allow this inquiry to occur on his campus.
Through an exchange of email and a telephone conversation about the nature of the
project, the president agreed to provide access to the College.

Site description

Midwestern College is a liberal arts college, whose president arrived at the
institution prior to the 2008-09 school year. Midwestern College has an enrollment of
more than 1,500 students from states across the country as well as from more than 40
countries outside the U.S. Half of the students come from the state where Midwestern
College is located, and are traditionally aged with nearly all of the students being under
25 years old. The institution offers no graduate degrees and has a curriculum that focuses on undergraduates exclusively. Three undergraduate degrees are offered through more than 20 academic departments and a variety of interdisciplinary programs.

Midwestern College is selective in its admission of students. The College received more than 4,000 applications for admission and admitted approximately 65% of those students who applied. The average SAT is close to 1200 (critical reading and math) and the average ACT of the entering class is over 26.

Most students live in campus housing, which is comprised of residence halls, small living units and residential fraternity houses. The College sponsors more than 100 clubs and organizations for student involvement. Approximately one-third of students are involved in the Greek system and approximately 80 percent participate in some form of organized recreational activity. The College’s intercollegiate athletes earned recognition by receiving their athletic conference All-Sports trophy. The student body is heavily committed to service and volunteerism with more than 85% of students involved in some type of community service or spiritual development. This characteristic has earned Midwestern College recognition for its community and spiritual development programs.

The faculty at Midwestern College is comprised of more than 100 full time members, nearly all of whom have a Ph.D. or accepted terminal degree in their field. Two thirds of the faculty members are male and one third are female, with more than 10% of the faculty from underrepresented groups. The faculty is an accomplished group, with faculty winning fellowships from the National Institutes of Health, the National Science Foundation, the National Endowment of the Humanities, and the Fulbright Foundation.
The average class size at Midwestern College is approximately 20 and the student to faculty ratio is 12 to 1. Midwestern College’s campus is located on 200 acres in a small community. Several of the campus buildings are on the National Registry of Historic Landmarks.

The alumni of Midwestern College number more than 30,000. The alumni are active and connected to the College. Nearly one third of alumni contributed to the College in the most recent fiscal year, and nearly two thirds of alumni have contributed to the College since their graduation. The institutional endowment is reported at more than $140 million.

*Institutional history and mission*

Midwestern College was founded in the 1800’s by a religious denomination. The College began with less than 30 male students and three faculty members. Within 10 years, a separate college for women was begun on the campus. Before the turn of the century, the two merged to become a co-educational institution. True to its religious roots, Midwestern College has been recognized in its history for producing a large number of graduates who eventually become missionaries or who serve in agencies such as the Peace Corps. The College charter notes that Midwestern College is to be true to the liberal principles, to be open to all beliefs and to provide an education that benefits citizens. This history informs the description of the College as a community of faculty and students dedicated to the “free pursuit of truth.”

The institutional mission describes the work of the College in three areas: to impart knowledge, to develop and enhance important capabilities in students, and to place
education in the context of values. Enhancing the development of students translates into helping students to think critically, employ methods of inquiry across disciplines, and communicate effectively. Finally, the objective of the mission to place education in the context of values is consistent with the religious tradition that founded Midwestern College. The College encourages students to examine their own views and demonstrate concern for all religious and ethical issues. Sensitivity to ethical issues along with an understanding of various cultural heritages is important for students to develop into responsible citizens.

*Presidential history*

The institution has named 16 leaders to serve as presidents in its history. While the College has had a successful reign of presidential leadership, there are several times that were noted when the College was met with particular challenges. The institution operated without a president for a period of time during WWII. The faculty essentially had to take over the leadership of the institution. The College also was met with two periods of financial difficulty within the past 30 years, which resulted in the elimination of more than a dozen tenure track positions and some administrative cuts. Various academic programs, as well as tenure faculty positions, were eliminated during one time of financial difficulty, while significant administrative cuts were the result of another time of financial difficulty.

Since the early 1960’s, five presidents have served Midwestern College. Most presidents served for a period of 10 years or more, with one serving six years and the other serving 3 years. Two of the five presidents were graduates of Midwestern College.
Since the mid 1980’s, the president of Midwestern College has not been previously affiliated with the institution.

The current president of Midwestern College assumed the position officially in 2008. The College was led by an interim president, after the former president announced plans to leave the College after a short tenure. A search for a permanent replacement commenced within a few months of the president leaving, and the announcement of the new president of Midwestern College came six months later.

**Sampling strategies**

Sampling in this inquiry occurred on two levels. In addition to selecting the site, the selection of the participants to be interviewed was an important part of the research design. While there is no one approach to sample size and composition in qualitative research, decisions are made based on the nature of the inquiry, the setting, and the available resources (Patton, 1990). In this study, the goal was to understand the perceptions of those who are in leadership roles and who assist the president in the implementation of the vision.

**Criteria for participant selection**

To achieve this goal, the interview selection resulted in choosing individuals whose positional experience was valuable to this inquiry. Following Patton (1990), I used the sampling approach described as purposeful sampling. The power of purposeful sampling is the selection of information-rich cases that help in creating meaning. Purposeful sampling guides the selection of participants that are known by position to be important. The interview sample included the president, the senior administrative
leadership team which is comprised by the provost, vice president for student affairs, vice president for resource management and vice president for university relations, and three key faculty members. These faculty members serve on faculty governance committees and one faculty member served on the presidential search committee. In addition to purposeful sampling, I also employed snowball sampling. Snowball sampling allows the researcher to use participants in the inquiry process to identify other key individuals that may be information-rich informants (Patton, 1990). In this study, one of the three faculty members was identified through snowball sampling. This faculty member was made known after having conversations with the president about having a broader faculty voice and was added to the sample because this faculty member was a newer member of the faculty and served on a different faculty governance committee.

**Participants**

The participants included the president, four senior administrators and three faculty members. The composition of the participants was driven primarily because of leadership position and faculty governance affiliation. Therefore, I had little control over the gender and racial or ethnic identify of participants. An attempt was made to seek representation of a number of disciplines in selecting the faculty who were involved in faculty governance committees. Therefore, attention was paid to seeking faculty who taught in the broad areas of the sciences, the social sciences and the humanities. This goal was met with the exception of identifying faculty members who taught in the humanities. The access to these participants came through the president. Using a description that was in my letter of introduction to him, the president invited participants to take part in the
study. Once a participant replied yes to the president, I followed up with an email of introduction about the project. Prior to the interview, a letter of introduction about the study, co-signed by my advisor and me, was given to the participants, along with the consent form.

Because of the sensitive nature of discussing the institutional direction and the history that Midwestern College recently had a change in leadership, it was important to be diligent in shielding the identities of these participants. The discussion around institutional culture can be sensitive because a full understanding of culture requires explicit description of the inner workings of a campus and of its individuals. The participants were open to sharing their opinions and therefore it is important to limit the reader’s ability to attribute quotations to any one individual, other than their role as president, faculty member or administrator. The only descriptive characteristic is the gender of the president, which was included as participants made direct references to him.

Data Collection

Data in this study were collected from observation, document analysis, and interviews.

Observation

Observation is critical to understand the setting or the field in which this study occurs. Direct observation provides the researcher with a better understanding of the context in which people interact because it offers first-hand information (Patton, 2002). It also allows the observer to be discovery oriented and inductive. Most importantly,
observation allows the researcher to see the campus community members in a variety of settings rather than being restricted to information provided in an interview interaction. Observation also provides clues about the culture through examining the rites, rituals, and symbols that help reinforce the culture and that help to define the new vision.

In this study, both formal, structured events and informal observation at the institution made up the observation. I attended several formal events that provided an excellent insight into the symbolic culture of the institution. These events included the new student welcome for students and parents, the opening convocation and the inauguration of the president. I took field notes during these observations, making notes of the actions during the events and the symbolic representation of the historic references and of the ways participants in these events described the institution as a way to not only understand the culture but to begin to get clues about the direction or the vision for the institution.

Equally important is the informal or ad hoc observation that is important to see the communication outside the formal institutional meeting structure. This informal observation began by simply “hanging around” the institution and helped to develop into gaining access to conversations that occur outside meetings that provided some clues into the dynamics of communicating a vision. During these times of informal observation, the purpose of this time was less about collecting data as was about learning the institution and understanding the dynamics of interaction. These times occurred in between interviews and before. They resulted in informal conversations with people who I met as
a result of being on campus. They were valuable to hear voices and opinions that
provided a more complete insight into the history and culture of Midwestern College.

Data was collected from observation in the form of field notes. These field notes
were dated and the event was noted. The field notes included a description of what was
observed, including dialogue observed. Additionally, the notes included observer
comments (Glesne, 1999) that were my own reflections after a period of observation.
These notes were used as a supplement to the interviews and helped to sharpen my ability
to listen during the interviews about the president’s actions and the institutional culture.

*Document analysis*

Cultural communication is a powerful means of transmitting meaning to
institutional members and is best done when the president uses the cultural language (Ott,
1989). Documents represent artifacts of an organization and often reflect viewpoints of
various constituents of the organization (Hodder, 2000). On the surface, documents
represent the facts about the vision and provide the information that the institution or the
president wishes to proclaim about the institutional direction. In addition, documents
provide insight into the culture of the organization as they are often crafted to express
viewpoints of the organization or viewpoints of individuals. These documents are
representative of the unspoken and as they are separated from their authors, there is
increased likelihood of multiple interpretations. Such an artifact also allows language and
meaning to be carefully crafted by creating a more permanent record of meaning
(Hodder, 2000).
In this study, I analyzed documentation of presidential communication that appeared in a variety of published forms, including the alumni magazine and the College website as well as documents and communication associated with the president search process. These presidential search documents described what the board or the institution values in a president and the culture of the institution, setting the stage for a presidential vision. In addition to these official communications, I reviewed emails from the president providing updates and status reports to the campus community through the academic year. I analyzed speeches delivered by the president, including the messages conveyed at convocation, the inauguration and at graduation, which contained statements about the intended institutional direction and the history and characteristics of the institution. I read the documents for themes and I took notes about what I read in order to include my observations about the contents of the documents. A complete list of documents is found in Appendix F.

**Interviews**

Interviews can be viewed as a way to construct meaning through dialogue. As a complement to observation and document analysis, interviews provide a means to construct knowledge through conversation and language. Interviews serve as a way to understand the perceptions of the participants. An interview is described as a negotiation of meaning through discourse, with meaning being created through language (Kvale, 1996). Meaning generated through an interview conversation establishes an interrelation between the person and the world, thus creating some understanding through that
conversation. The goal of the interviews is to collect the participants’ perceptions of the institution, the president, and the proposed institutional vision.

I conducted two rounds of interviews six months apart. The first round of interviews took place with the administrative and faculty leadership and the president. The interviews took place individually and each interview took place in the office of each participant. The first fifteen minutes of the first round interviews was spent building rapport with participants, attempting to make connections with them in order to build trust and confidence in the project. Time also was spent reviewing the consent form. The formal part of the interviews lasted between sixty and ninety minutes. After the first round, on-going document analysis supplemented the review of the first round interview transcripts in order to provide the emerging understanding of the research questions that informed the second round interview questions. The second round of interviews took place six months after the first round of interviews. The first fifteen minutes of the second round interviews was spent catching up with participants from the last conversation before the questions were discussed. Again, these interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and took place in each participant’s office with the exception of the president’s second round interview, which took place in the living room of the president’s home.

Each interview was semi-structured with some questions that were predetermined that attempt to address the actions and the communication of the president with the leadership of the institution as well as the perceptions of the president from the faculty and administrative leadership. While some questions were predetermined, additional
questions emerged in the interview designed to tease out additional information from the participants’ stories. The predetermined questions were informed from an understanding of the cultural literature as well as from the understanding of effective presidential leadership.

The first round interview questions for faculty and administrative leaders were designed to examine the presidential search process and the institutional culture through an understanding of how the institution is run. In addition, the first round interview questions attempted to focus on understanding how communication occurs at Midwestern College. Finally these questions explored how members of the community understood the emerging vision of the president to be. The first round questions for the president were designed to understand the president’s priorities for the institution, what attracted him to the institution, and what he has gleaned about the culture of the institution. In addition, the first round of presidential questions began to inquire about the president’s vision and how the president planned to develop that vision and communicate it. The purpose of the second round of interviews was to learn more about the vision and about the perceptions of the senior administrative and faculty leadership about the communication of the president’s vision during the school year. The second round of the president’s questions focused on decisions made and actions taken in the past that illustrate the priorities of the vision in addition to actions taken to communicate the vision. All interviews were taped and transcribed. The interview questions are found in Appendix D and Appendix E. The data from the interviews were supplemented, whenever possible, with journal entries that reflect my reactions to the interviews.
Data Analysis and Interpretation

Data analysis involves organizing notes about observations, conversations and discussions, and documents, in a way that allows meaning to emerge (Glesne, 1999). While there is no prescribed way to carry out data analysis for qualitative research, it involves organizing the data in such a way as to discover patterns and themes. Three common components of qualitative research exist and include data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing/verification (Miles & Huberman, 1994). I used these approaches as the broad approach for data analysis in an effort to apply an organized approach to the analysis.

Field notes were a source of data from observation and document analysis. My impressions and reactions from the document analysis and to observation were recorded and analyzed as a form of data. Document analysis produced themes and key words that were blended with the other data collection methods. Notes taken during observations and a researcher journal were kept to provide a way to reflect on what was observed. As a way to reduce the data in the observation and the document analysis, the field notes were read and coded for themes that emerge from these two sources. These themes resulted in keywords that were grouped together and coded in order to provide a visual summary of the data.

Interviews were transcribed after each round of interviews was completed and coding was employed as a way to see emergent themes and new understandings. Coding requires the establishment of codes based on themes and then the assigning of the codes to places in the data where those themes appear. The coding was also informed by the
cultural theoretical framework and keywords relating to artifacts, values and beliefs and underlying assumptions were connected with the themes that appear in the transcripts and field notes. A systematic coding scheme was developed after reading and rereading interview transcripts, field notes, and documents. This coding was applied to the transcripts of interviews by coding the text line by line. The same approach was employed in reviewing communications and documents, such as speeches and letters to the campus community.

Because of the enormous amount of data generated through interviews, observation, and document analysis coming from a case study, data management is key and all the sources of data were brought together in one database (Merriam, 1998). Data from document analysis and observation, copies of communications from the president, along with the transcriptions from interviews were entered in NVivo, qualitative research analysis software. This software allowed for a systematic way of coding and searching documents for themes and keywords found in reading the data. The data were then coded and categorized into these themes. The coded data were then reviewed within each theme or keyword, resulting in the further analysis of the data.

Researcher Subjectivity

The researcher in a qualitative project is a co-producer of meaning and knowledge, just as the epistemology, the theoretical framework, and the data collection and analysis feed that understanding. The researcher and participants are “co-producers” in the meaning in inquiry (Fine, Weis, Weseen, & Wong, 2000). As a result, just as the
participants thoughts are described in a study, it is critical to identify myself and where I sit as I have a lens through which the observation and conversation is filtered.

I am a white, middle class, mid-career, educated woman. I wear the hats of administrator, graduate student, parent, child, and woman as I related to individuals in this study. Understanding these multiple identities and the fact that they exist, helps put into context the way in which I interacted with those I encountered in this study. I found in this study that the combination of these identities helped me in gaining access to the research site. For example, by virtue of being an administrator with more that two decades of university experience, combined with the role of graduate student, this identity helped provide some credibility to my ability to understand the dynamics of institutional culture and the complexity of an institutional planning and visioning process.

The identities that most significantly impacted this inquiry are the identities of administrator and woman. I served as a vice president at a small comprehensive university that worked with four presidents in five years. Under one of these presidents, the institution invested time in a strategic planning process that was successful in some ways but fell short in others. Therefore, I bring a professional interest in investigating these dynamics, especially at an institution that has already begun a planning process and can provide some insight into the dynamics of interaction between the senior leadership and the president and the campus community. My bias in coming with “baggage” about how a process was handled at one institution helped in this investigation because I could understand it from a fellow colleague standpoint. However, I was aware that this baggage could cloud my ability to gain a clear understanding without jumping to conclusions.
when I hear or see something that is familiar. I was continually conscious of this tension through the research. Being forthcoming about my role and using that experience to help develop a relationship with participants was helpful in gaining access and in interacting with the campus community.

The other salient fact about coming into this research as an administrator was the fact that my first year as a director of admissions at my current institution paralleled the president’s first year. Issues of culture, of understanding an institution, and attempting to develop direction were the identical issues that I experienced during the inquiry period. The reality of the similarities made for a clearer understanding as I saw many of the same issues arise in my own work situation. I worked to keep the scenarios separate by talking through the journaling process and discussion with the president about the similarities. My goal in this study is to participate as an equal with participants so that there is no sense of researcher dominance. While this inquiry does not have feminist roots, as a woman researching these questions, my way of knowing and understanding information is one that is collaborative and allows for multiple voices. Kirsch (1999) described research as being “collaborative with participants” as a way to generate understanding that is mutually beneficial. As a female investigator, I was in the minority as I interacted with the president and the institutional leadership. The impact of my female identity is unknown given the dynamics of the institution. However, this did not appear to limit my access to information at the institution.
Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness and authenticity are key elements to strengthening the foundation of this constructivist inquiry. Trustworthiness is defined as the quality of an inquiry and the quality of its findings (Schwandt, 1997). This element of trustworthiness is often seen as similar to validity in a quantitative research paradigm (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and is a way to ensure the value of the inquiry approach. Widely accepted criteria to substantiate the quality of the data collection and analysis in qualitative inquiry include credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility

Credibility refers to the fit between the respondents’ views and the researcher’s representation of those viewpoints (Schwandt, 2000). In order to ensure credibility in qualitative inquiry, I can undertake certain activities in the field to contribute to this credibility. Member checks, prolonged engagement and triangulation are some of the most significant activities to ensure credibility (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I satisfied the requirements of credibility first by conducting member checks that took place after each round of interviews. These member checks consisted of a document that summarized the themes of what each participant said, organized around the research questions. These summary documents also provided me a way to begin to develop themes and interpretation from the data. The member checks also occurred during the interviews by summarizing the discussion with participants. I also demonstrated credibility through prolonged engagement. Prolonged engagement allows researchers enough time in the field as to get a reasonable understanding of the dynamics
at the research site. It is described it as sufficient time to learn the culture, to test misinformation and to build trust (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I was in regular contact with my research site over the course of eight months, engaging in two visits that involved two to three days. In addition, I was present for institutional events such as the new student welcome, convocation and the presidential inauguration.

Finally, I employed triangulation as a way to demonstrate credibility. Triangulation of methods refers to the researcher employing a number of approaches in order to collect multiple perspectives. Triangulation brings complexity of thought and understanding in order to provide a depth of understanding (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This inquiry is strengthened when information and perceptions come from multiple sources. I collected data from three sources that include participant observation, interviews, and document analysis. The combination of these approaches provided multiple perspectives, thus providing an opportunity to hear multiple points of view. In addition, gathering data from a variety of sources allowed me to see the same dimension expressed in several ways, as a way to confirm and broaden understanding about themes and concepts.

Transferability

The fundamental question that transferability attempts to address is whether or not inquiry results can be applied to another’s unique context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Transferability deals with the degree to which the information in the study provides enough detail in the results to help anyone reading the text to decide if the results can be transferred to a particular situation (Schwandt, 1997). The use of thick description is a
common way to ensure transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, I used broad questions and wrote the results in such a way as to thoroughly describe the findings in order to bring to life what I heard and observed. In addition, I provided direct quotes from the interviews as another way to demonstrate detailed description.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the steps the researcher has followed to ensure that the research process is traceable and documented (Schwandt, 1997). The primary technique that I used to ensure dependability is an inquiry auditor. I asked another recent graduate to review my transcripts and coding. This person has followed my literature review and my research design, thus having someone familiarity with the study. This individual examined my work to ensure this qualitative form of reliability.

Confirmability

Like dependability, confirmability is focused on establishing that the results of the study are products of the data and not simply my own biases. A peer debriefer was used to assist in establishing confirmability through providing an outside review of my data. I used another recent doctoral graduate who was previously a member of my writing group to review my findings and discuss them for clarity and presenting evidence of how I arrived at the conclusions presented. In addition, my reflexive journal was another means to document my findings and address biases as they appeared throughout the project.

Ethical Considerations

One of the fundamental ethical considerations of qualitative research has to do with claims to understanding. It is described as what understanding actually means and
more importantly making claim to understand (Schwandt, 2000). As a researcher, I must struggle with the question about authority to make the claim of understanding. This debate centers on my decision to be distant or be engaged with the participants at the research site. This dilemma presented itself as I encountered people that I had come to know through the research project. It was important to be engaged as we were discussing the topics of the research during the times I was on campus. I made a decision to refrain from engaging in the business of the institution as well as the people while not on campus, outside of emailing the president to get more information. This balance felt comfortable and did not cross lines that were inappropriate.

Access to the institution and to the president can be an ethical issue. In this study, it was less so because of the entrée established with a gatekeeper at the institution with whom I had prior professional relationships and who worked directly with the president. This connection was enough for me to make the initial inquiry with the president. A letter of introduction describing the study, with the support from my adviser legitimizing the nature of the research, was sent followed by a meeting in order to describe the research proposal.

A related ethical consideration was the voluntary nature of the participants other than the president. Since the initial invitation was sent from the president inviting people to participate, I was concerned that participants felt like they had the opportunity to say no, even when the new president was sending the invitation. Two people were invited who did say no because of scheduling conflicts. A Consent for Participation in Research form (Appendix C) was signed by each participant, as required by the Institutional
Review Board at The Ohio State University, ensuring that the participants understood that their participation was voluntary.

An additional ethical consideration was the concern over anonymity. While this study is designed to bring understanding to the research questions, the research requires asking questions about the perceptions of the president’s vision. To insure anonymity, a pseudonym for the institution was used in writing the findings and I omitted identifying characteristics for the participants. With the exception of the president, each participant was given a gender-neutral pseudonym as a way to conceal identity. Transcripts were kept in a secure location so that only the person who transcribed the interviews (someone who does not reside in the area of the country where the institution is located) and I were the ones who had access to the transcripts that contain references to the institution’s name and the president’s name.

Related to anonymity was the ethical dilemma of what information to share with the president after the interviews. The president was interested in the topic and therefore interested in what I was learning. The participants spoke to me understanding that what they each said was confidential. To honor this while recognizing the benefit to the president to receive feedback about a topic that was important to his success, I shared general observations about what I was hearing without sharing what any one individual was saying. This sharing was done very briefly without going into any depth about any one topic. Each participant expressed an interest to read the results.

Another ethical issue in this study has to do with entry and exit of this project. Investigating dynamics and interaction of the actions and conversation of the president
and senior leadership requires some degree of intimacy around an important activity of an institution. The negotiation of planning typically is something done internally before it is made public to constituents outside the institution. As a researcher, I kept issues of engagement at the forefront by reminding myself to respect and honor a process of the integration of a new president that is important for the future of an institution. As a researcher, my engagement is limited, but the outcome of the communication of a vision is long term and I must be sensitive to that fact. To bring closure to the project, I sent summaries to each participant as a final member check. I also sent thank you notes at the conclusion of the second round demonstrating the end of our time of formal conversation.

Potential Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on one institution and therefore provides one institution’s experience. For the reasons articulated, conducting a single case study makes sense in this case. However, further investigation warrants examining this issue at additional institutions. With the diversity of types of institutions and with the diversity in institutional cultures, this same study at another institution could provide a very different understanding. In studying the culture of an institution, understanding cultural forms and symbols is only one representation of culture. While it is important to examine the ways in which the use of cultural symbols impacts the communication of a vision, culture is a multifaceted concept and can be examined from multiple perspectives.

Another limitation of this study relates to researching presidents. At an institution, the president is perhaps one of the most difficult subjects to study. Because of many professional obligations required of the president and because of the important role that
the president plays, the in-depth access important to examining culture can be limited. In
addition, because senior leadership commented on the president’s vision, this kind of
inquiry could be seen as a commentary on the president’s effectiveness. Senior leadership
could be more cautious in their comments about the communication of the president’s
vision. In this inquiry, I found the president to demonstrate an incredible availability and
was very responsive in sending information that he thought would be helpful in this
project. Even with this great access, there is a limitation to what can be discussed and
observed in the limited time allowed for interviews and observation.

While these limitations exist, they did not diminish the importance of this inquiry.
By using rigorous inquiry methods, the depth of understanding in a single case mitigated
the limitations described. Much can be learned from this focused approach. In addition,
as a researcher, I worked hard to gain the trust of the campus participants and work
closely with the president and the president’s staff to make this inquiry project workable
for the campus community.

Summary

As a study designed to explore the communication of a presidential vision through
a cultural lens, I employed a constructivist epistemology in order to investigate my
research questions at a single institution. This case study method allowed for an in-depth
examination of one institution’s experiences. This analysis yielded thick description and
themes that can address the research questions posed.

It was a goal to bring forth the voices of the participants in order to illustrate the
institutional culture as well as the presidential actions. It also was my goal to highlight
the voice of the new president who skillfully analyzed the culture and understood how to synthesize many viewpoints at the institution. The case study method and the use of interviews, document analysis and observations provided means to bring forth the findings in this inquiry. Those findings are summarized in the following chapter.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

This chapter will present the findings of the inquiry conducted at Midwestern College. The chapter begins with an overview description of the six themes that emerged from the analysis of interviews, documents and observations in this study. This description is followed by an explanation of the institutional culture as context for understanding the research questions. Five dimensions illustrating the culture of the College emerged from this analysis. The remainder of the chapter provides the findings of this study that help to bring an understanding of how the president uses cultural symbolic forms to communicate a vision and how these cultural symbols are interpreted by the leadership group. The six themes that emerged will be examined through the lens of these cultural dimensions. Finally, I will present the viewpoints participants who described where a lack of support might exist around the president’s vision. While the evidence is clear about how a president communicates a vision using the culture, it is important to present the viewpoints of those who may question the feasibility of the vision.

Each participant provided a unique view of presidential leadership, the institutional culture and the strategic planning process. Through observation, interviews with participants and through the review of institutional documents and communication, a
rich understanding of the complexities and the power of culture became evident. Because each participant had a varying degree of history with Midwestern College, the perspectives varied but clear themes emerged about the presidential search process, presidential leadership and the action and communication of the president that impacted the exchange of ideas around the vision. These processes and actions clearly related in a congruent manner to the culture of Midwestern College, enabling the president to use the culture as a vehicle to illustrate the vision to the campus community.

Themes in the Findings

The first theme that emerged from the data tells us that understanding how a president communicates a vision using cultural symbolic forms actually begins in the presidential search process with the ability for the institution to define the important characteristics it seeks in a new president. The characteristics sought in a new president should fit the culture of the institution. A strong search process is one that corresponds with the culture as well as one where participants agree upon the desired characteristics of a new president. The second theme is the importance of recognizing and acknowledging presidential fit in the institution. Fit is a result of a congruence between the presidential priorities and characteristics and the institutional personality. The third theme emerged from the actions that the president exhibited during the search process as well as in his early days and months on campus. These actions demonstrated his desire to understand the culture. The president took action to understand the culture and the campus community started to assess the fit of the president with the institution. The fourth theme recognizes that the strategic planning process used by Midwestern College
matters, and a successful planning process uses aspects of the culture. In other words, the
degree to which the planning process that was used to develop the vision fits the culture
influences the outcome acceptance of the vision. The fifth theme is the importance of
listening by the President and developing trust with the campus community, which is
critical to the success in communicating a vision. Finally, I will discuss the use of cultural
symbols to communicate the President’s vision. This discussion will conclude with
examples of fit and acceptance of that vision by the campus community.

Understanding the Institutional Culture

The institutional culture is born out of Midwestern College’s history and serves as
a way to sustain its personality and mode of operation over time. As the leadership
changes and as the students enroll and graduate, the culture of the institution serves as a
stabilizer across time and has developed some identifiable and unique characteristics.
Five dimensions that describe the culture of Midwestern College emerged from
participant interviews, observation and from a thorough review of university documents.
These characteristics are summarized as: strong sense of community and relationships,
participatory decision making, strong university governance process, an egalitarian
culture and a siloed culture. These themes are illustrated through the words of the
participants.

Description of institutional identity

Understanding how campus members portrayed the identity of Midwestern
College lends additional insight into the culture of the College. The president described
Midwestern College as, “It’s a very strong undergraduate residential liberal arts college.
It has a tremendous heritage of academic strength.” The mission of the College is firmly grounded in the liberal arts. One administrator noted:

I don’t think that the College has ever struggled with its identity. We are a small liberal arts college. That’s what we want to be. That’s what we want to remain. We just want to do that as well as anybody else in the country or around the world can do it. So it wasn’t so much that you needed to articulate the specifics of what the vision was. You kind of know what the place is.

Similarly, a faculty member stated that the institution understands its identity and simply needs to do a better job of describing itself:

It’s rigorous academics, its internships and mentoring and liberal arts and world applications and being able to communicate. The real basics of liberal arts. What makes us a little unique on this campus is that there are pockets of different programs that we need to do a better job in promoting.

Integrating theory into practice is an important tenet in combining the liberal arts with applied experience at Midwestern College. One administrator noted:

There’s a theory to practice connection. I think historically, as I understand it, and I don’t know the actual jargon that was used but it was basically the notion of taking a liberal arts education and practically applying it to the real world kinds of problems and situations and that within our heritage, I guess, at Midwestern College, that’s a tenet of what we’re about.

In this area, one administrator described Midwestern College as, “we would have the distinction of being the institution – the college and university in the country that has a high number of graduates who went to the Peace Corps.” The president described this historical feature of Midwestern College by stating:

There is an understanding that the motto was education for leadership and service. I have found people who have deep and long connections to the institution who have never heard that, but they would agree that it does reflect the culture of the place. That this is a place with a rigorous liberal arts curriculum, but one that prepares students to go on and become great leaders and servants in society.
Strong community and care for students

Midwestern College has a strong sense of community, and relationships are highly valued among the people. Words such as “family”, “connectedness”, mutual respect”, “warmth”, and “community” described the environment at the College. The President, in his first speech to the entering class, described the importance of people in the environment of Midwestern College.

The students at lunch seven weeks ago told me to tell you that your professors at Midwestern College will become some of the most important people you ever meet. They will be your teachers, they will be your mentors, they will be your friends, and at times they may even be your adversaries, but only because they want you to fulfill your great potential. Get to know them. They are our most treasured asset, and they are your most valuable resource.

In addition to this sense of community, a focus on students and the development of students is central to the Midwestern College culture. One faculty member described:

We really care about our students and put our students first in ways I haven’t always seen. We tailor to a student’s experience to what benefits them. We excel not in teaching the students that anyone can teach, the honors students, the ones that are easy, because they are motivated and they’re so smart. But in taking the diamonds in the rough and polishing is what we’re really known for, and people who know liberals arts colleges, is the kid who have had some problems and turning them around….That’s a lot of work but those are the students we kind of love the best, and that’s kind of special about us.

With the sense of community and support for developing students, there is an expectation that participants engage in and believe in the community to be successful. An administrator described the environment of the College as one that is warm but has the expectation of members to be part of the community:

We have people who have been here – people come and stay and they stay because it is a relatively warm environment here and so, to be someone who’s accepted by these people who’ve been here 20 or 30 years, you have to show that commitment to the community, to the college – if you want to be here.

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The campus community has been described as “the entire family of the College”, creating the image that the people are connected and that they support each other. This imagery of family was expressed literally as a way they relate to each other and the expectation that to be part of the culture, there is an expectation of a commitment to the institution. A faculty member noted:

Another thing about the College is no matter what – like family – no matter how much we gripe about it, we love this place. The faculty and staff love this place….If you’re in the family – see we can gripe because we’re in the family. But we all know that we, at the core, love it.

This sense of family results, as one administrator describe it, as a connected and supportive group of alumni:

It is a very special place that has a real sense of family and a real sense of connectedness that I think ultimately is translated into just an amazingly successful and amazingly supportive group of people who leave this place.

In summary, this aspect of Midwestern College’s culture illustrates that the College is very people-centered. The development of students is central to their mission and that they view themselves like a family. It is assumed that people within the community are dedicated to each other, and are interested in service to the community, both internally and externally.

**Participatory decision-making**

Another quality of the culture is the value placed on participatory decision-making. It is fundamental part of the culture to have input into decision making about things as they relate to running the institution. Autocratic decision-making is not part of the fabric of Midwestern College. The culture is one where people are consulted and
opinions are sought. The decision may lie with individuals but is not done without consultation. The President described it several different times:

It certainly is the culture of Midwestern College to engage in a wide range of constituencies and processes concerning virtually all aspects of the governance and the leadership of the university.

You talk about it. You look for opportunities to introduce topics of conversation. You could make autocratic decisions. I don’t think that would work well in this climate.

A faculty member reflected that, “The biggest way you show you don’t get the ethic in terms of how this place runs is simply to ignore process and to make decisions without any consultation.”

This participatory approach to decision making in the culture was noted as something that does not always serve the institution well. One administrator noted that:

The historical reticence to make any kind of decisions without an immense amount of leg work in order to build buy in and have a very collegial process, to have a committee that officially kind of endorses what you’re doing that comprised all of the different groups on campus.

Similarly another administrator noted the impact of this cultural approach:

That kind of very participative by many too participative I think and it’s not just the faculty, its our clerical staff – we’ve created a situation here – we kind of bind ourselves up with administrative details that we don’t need to go through.

*Strong university governance*

A strong faculty governance exists at Midwestern College and, like the participatory decision making process, is a central theme in the institutional culture. The President described it as “A powerful component of the culture is related to governance and to planning.” One administrator noted that “We’re not a top down organization, which gives faculty and students, I think, a tremendous sense of commitment to the
institution, and a tremendous learning experience.” The institution was described in the presidential prospectus in this way:

Midwestern College has a strong tradition of shared governance. Faculty, administrators and students actively participate in trustee, faculty and University committees and contribute to the crafting of both long-term institutional priorities and short-term objectives.

Another administrator noted the faculty governance presence in the culture of the College in a number of ways, such as, “The faculty members here are all pretty strong. The university governance process has had a significant – always had a significant input from the faculty in terms of the overall decision making process.” The President noted that, “This is a campus that has a high premium on shared governance and on decision making that is transparent and that involves the community.” Likewise, a faculty member described the reach of the university governance structure by describing that, “We have a very strong university governance structure and committee structure where faculty make a lot of decisions both in academic and non academic areas.” Another faculty member described the expectation of the role of the university governance and its significance as:

We have a very strong history of faculty governance here. We rule by committee, which is not to say that the administrators don’t have tons and tons and tons of clout in making the important decisions but there are a lot of faculty committees and – as I like to put it – we don’t expect to be listened to as the faculty but we expect to be heard.

This strong faculty governance has become part of the culture because of some events in the history of the College. One administrator noted:

Midwestern College has gone through periods where the leadership has been missing and there was one where we went without a president for two or three years and at this point the faculty essentially took over and ran the place. Somebody needed to run it, and they ran it and – and from what I know about that
time I don’t think any of us can look back and say that was a bad thing. But it just created an imbalance that still exists today.

A third faculty member noted the benefit to the College that comes from this strong university governance system:

I think a lot of schools the faculty are involved, but when we sort of compare notes – like what committee work here is versus what committee work is there, and how much the faculty play a role in that – its different here. And I think that makes for a really strong community.

This strong university governance system has provided significant faculty input into processes and decisions at Midwestern College. It has developed out of history during times when the administrative leadership may have been missing. It has continued and is accepted as a way of doing business on matters that are both academic and non-academic.

_Egalitarian culture_

Midwestern College’s culture is also described as a very egalitarian. This characteristic has played out in treating all people and all programs the same, making changes incrementally rather than strategically. One faculty member named it clearly when it was stated that, “We have a very egalitarian system here among the faculty.” The President commented about this feature of the culture:

I think liberal arts colleges tend to be more egalitarian. They tend to value equal treatment of all people, in ways such as no differential compensation for faculty based on discipline, even when the market is leading it another way. Midwestern College is an extreme version of that general tendency.

The impact of this approach in the culture of the institution is the reluctance to treat one area different than another, thus making decisions that may be less strategic. For example, the President reflected as he described this aspect of the culture:
But we’ll have to favor some individuals and some dimensions over others, at least initially, in order to do this in a robust way. That will be countercultural in an institution that’s very egalitarian and has had nothing but incremental budget increases for 30 years.

Treating areas and people equally is a strong value of the Midwestern College culture. The culture of the College is to approach departments and administrative areas in the same way, whether it is in staffing or in budget allocations. To move away from this would be a significant change to how the institution has behaved in the past.

*Siloed culture*

One contradiction of the culture that presented itself was the description of silos as a way that the institution operates. As an institution that has very participatory decision-making and values relationships, the conclusion could be made that the culture would be very collaborative and integrated. However, several participants noted that the institution operates in a siloed manner, with people focusing very locally with their own work or projects, and less on cross departmental work. Participants used words like “silo”, “compartmentalized”, and “insularity” to describe this phenomenon of the culture.

One administrator noted that, “We’re pretty siloed, the faculty has taken a stance very strongly that we want to be a pure liberal arts institution. We want to have each department siloed.” Another administrator described this phenomenon as:

> We have, right now, historically some silos administratively and academically and part of the challenge we have, and part of the vision I guess is that while we maintain that vertically, if you will, on our organization, just by academic discipline or administrative functions that we also need to look at the horizontality of that.
This siloed culture has resulted in an approach of self-preservation rather than innovative approaches across campus and grew out of past experiences that caused a mentality of everyone looking after their own interests. The president described this phenomenon as:

I think a result of those experiences from the past was a lesson learned about protecting your own turf and across the campus there is not the kind of creative, innovative, entrepreneurial, cross departmental thinking that I have seen at other places. My sense is that partly as a result of those experiences, there’s been a bit of a defensive posture in terms of planning and a bit of a sense that everything is a zero sum game. That is you take from one party in order to make an investment of some sort in another party, then former party will never regain the loss.

Summary

The five themes that emerged about the institutional culture helped to define the personality of Midwestern College. These ideas provide a backdrop to understanding how the president uses symbols of the culture to communicate the vision. These themes also help provide an understanding to planning process fits with the institution.

The culture has served Midwestern College well in moving forward through times of challenge. The culture must be acknowledged and understood during times of change and transition, especially as a new leader arrives. One administrator also noted the impact of the culture in trying to bring about change:

But what’s surprising is some of the weird things that have come out of that culture in terms of business practices and systems of operating and decision making processes and so forth that over time have just you know been crafted by a culture that once you’re here awhile you understand it. You get the culture pretty quick. But its like trying to unravel all the stuff that the culture created is a real challenge and some of the surprising things you find when you start digging into it. So you can blame it on the culture in part, yes, but its also – then how do you work to convince the people in that culture that maybe created some of this stuff that there might be another way of doing things. And that’s, I guess, always the challenge.
It Begins with the Presidential Search

The first theme that emerged from the analysis was the importance of the presidential search process in communicating a vision to a campus using cultural symbols. The clarity of the qualities desired in a new president as well as using a process that fits the culture of the institution are important. At the same time, the actions of the presidential candidate in attempting to understand the institutional culture are equally important.

Selecting the president

The presidential search process at Midwestern College positioned the institution for success, both because of the actions of the institution and because of the actions of the candidate who became the elected president. Many participants described the goals of the search process in very similar ways. In other words, there was a great deal of agreement about institutional needs. A faculty member noted:

We were in the fortunate position that we were looking for the same thing. We came into the search, not maybe 100%, but 93% in agreement about what we were going to look for and that’s not always the case on important searches. Sometimes the room really is divided in half where you’ve got one group wanting one thing and one group wanting something else but we were not in that situation at all. It was very pleasant being on the search committee because the truth is, there were very few disagreements.

This unity and agreement on the priorities of the presidential search committee, made up of faculty and trustees, was significant because it allowed the committee and everyone involved to articulate institutional concerns to potential presidential candidates. Midwestern College demonstrated a clear understanding of itself and what it sought in a new leader.
It appears that this understanding originally emerged from the consultants used in the search process. The consultants spent time with many constituents on campus as well as with alumni off campus seeking feedback about key institutional priorities. With an institutional culture that puts value on participatory decision-making and that values community and relationship, a search process that honored these qualities was a success. Several participants commented on the role of the consultants, with some reference to the last search process that hired the former president four years earlier:

The search for this president was different than the last one. I think that you know they hired, at least more visibly hired consultants. I think there were consultants in both but I think there was a lot more. They wanted to meet with a lot of different constituents on campus. I think they did a lot more this time to make sure we were getting someone that one, knew what he or she was getting into. The consultants really helped, I think, to make sure that the group we got in – because you know we had several good candidates on paper. I went to all their talks. I’m like ‘Well they seem…’ you know the first time around when we had the previous president I went to all of them and through ‘well yeah they’re all pretty good’ but not one of them in that last group was as good as any of the three in this group. (faculty)

The person who we had hired as a consultant to run the search disabused them of that. I mean I’ll say the consultant was very instrumental in disabusing them of that.” (referring to requiring that the president is a sitting president.) (faculty)

President characteristics

The formal presidential search prospectus described the ideal candidate as someone who could engage the campus in discussions and who would be able, after careful listening, make informed decisions and explain the rationale for decision making to the campus. The institution was looking for someone who could develop a vision, communicate it effectively, and use the vision as a basis for the institution’s next fundraising campaign. The presidential prospectus also noted that the College was
looking for someone who has vision, energy and creativity and will “inspire the best
efforts of others, will take pleasure in being a visible and active presence on campus, and
will be interested in making a long-term commitment to the institution.”

Consistent themes develop from listening to the participants talk about the
characteristics they were looking for in a new president. Fortunately, most of their
priorities agreed with those in the presidential prospectus. The first characteristic that
emerged was someone who could provide leadership and commitment to the strategic
planning process. Like the prospectus, members of the institutional community
mentioned that it was important to hire a president that would devote time to see the
strategic planning process to completion. An administrator described this as, “One
characteristic was clearly vision, or the ability to clearly identify a vision for the
institution. Second, strong day-to-day leadership. Strong – no management necessarily
but leadership and defining those differently.” This same administrator noted:

Someone who we felt, coming in, had a commitment to see the plan through. To
be able to spend a number of years doing the work that needed to be done, and to
make sure that the plan got carried out….I was looking for, and I think many of
the folks who were involved in this process, was someone who could invest the
time and was smart enough to be able to get a sense of what we are quickly. And
then to be able to take that – take that understanding and build a case or cases for
change….And someone who was courageous enough but also with enough vision
to be able to take on some of those challenges. But do it collaboratively.

Similarly, a faculty member noted the importance of leadership in strategic planning
process on behalf of the faculty, as it related to the relationship with the trustees. This
faculty member noted:

Someone who is an advocate of the faculty to the Board of Trustees. Someone
who can interpret what the Board of Trustees really want to the faculty. Just a
general nice leader who’s strong enough to make some hard decisions but is also willing to explain them.

The second characteristic centered on the desire to hire a strong fundraiser. Most participants mentioned that, after leadership and the ability to build community, a priority in the presidential search process was to find someone who had the ability to raise money for the institution. This characteristic was linked to the fact that a successful president in this arena would need to be someone who understood the institution and who could relate to the people connected to Midwestern College. Both faculty and administrators noted that they sought, “Someone who understands the importance of fundraising and likes to do it”; “Kick start the capital campaign”; “Not only a scholar and an administrator, but what we were looking for was a fundraiser”; “We also in general need always a good fundraiser.”; “Someone who is a pleasant individual, who can fundraise, and who has a rapport with alumni.”; and “One of the major criteria in the current presidential search was we need someone who can get out there and raise money.” One administrator noted:

You still needed somebody who had the appropriate administrative skill set and all those – you know the actual hard skills and there – along with the personality and public relations aspect, there was probably some awareness that there needed to be somebody with a comfort level with university relations, alumni relations, fundraising, and all those sorts of things as well.

Likewise, a faculty member shared:

We were looking for someone we felt would be a fabulous fundraiser, someone that we thought would just resonate with our particular batch of donors in different places. We have different types of donors – but someone who would resonate with our alums and our donors.

A third characteristic desired in a new president was someone who could help the institution regain the sense of community that defined Midwestern College. The
university had a former president that stayed a short period of time and fractured parts of the community. The culture of Midwestern College is one that values community and defines itself by its communities. Several participants spoke to this desire to regain community:

We are looking for someone who could pull us back together again. We wanted someone who could come in and immediately capture the trust and the confidence of the faculty and staff, and someone who would steer up in the right direction. (administrator)

A desire for someone who can-somewhat in the president as well as with the staff that he’s selecting – to be able to develop some good relationships within the institution and to work collaboratively and in partnership with not only individuals but also with departments. (administrator)

It was important as we searched for a new president that we wanted somebody that would, as most any president would, bring a breath of fresh air and an optimistic outlook, and energy that I think was deemed to have been lacking in the past. (administrator)

As we looked for a new president, it was a really critical time for us to get someone who was a good fit for us. Because people were getting very demoralized, I think, about our – you know where things were going or not going. (faculty)

A fourth characteristic that was important in a new president was the desire to hire a president who possesses strong communication skills. A successful candidate would be someone who understood the institution and who was able to be a strong communicator about the values of the College. One faculty member described:

We were really looking for a good communicator – and well you’re really interested in communication and whether I’ve used that word or not, a lot of this boils down to a good communicator. Someone who wants to communicate, not just – part of that’s listening – but also bothering to get back to people.

This same faculty member described the importance of what the new president should be able to communicate by stating, “We were looking for a new president who would be a
good communicator. It is important someone who can describe what we think of as a liberal arts school culture and certainly Midwestern College’s culture.”

The presidential prospectus was clear about desiring a presidential candidate who can engage the campus in conversation and communication:

The campus is united in its desire for a president who will engage the campus community in discussions about matters of importance to the institution. The community seeks a president who shares those values, embraces the culture of a small liberal arts college, enjoys discourse about ideas, and appreciates (and can provide leadership within) the context of the College’s tradition of a collegial and participatory approach to planning and governance.

Several participants also pointed out qualities they sought in the new president that fit well with the themes of the institutional culture. For example, several participants talked about the need for someone who supported participatory decision-making and a strong faculty-lead university governance system. One administrator noted that a new president would exhibit:

Organizational soft skills in terms of building consensus around decisions and those sorts of things. Previously, so many things were done in a unilateral way, and there may have actually been good decisions but ultimately did not turn out well because they didn’t start the right way. So I think it was a big recognition of that sort of skill set being needed in a new president.

And similar to the culture of the institution, one faculty member mentioned that:

We really were looking for someone that would bring the entire campus together, from buildings and grounds through students through staff through faculty through trustees, we really were looking for a consensus candidate if we could find one. That was an ethic on the search committee. We want a strong leader – we know we have to change and improve and we just need someone who can do it within our – who likes us and will do it within our métier.

One of several influences in Midwestern College’s ability to very clearly articulate the presidential search priorities was the dissatisfaction expressed over the
former president and that president’s perceived lack of understanding of the culture of Midwestern College. Participants described the former president as a poor match for the institution. A lack of agreement on the selection of the former president between the faculty and campus members and the choice of the trustees set up a dynamic where the president had to earn the support of the campus community. Participants noted that the former president’s actions, in terms of running the institution and interacting with the campus community, did not match their expectations. Participants offered their thoughts comparing and contrasting their clear priorities for a new president and the demonstrated fit of the new president with their experience in the former presidential search. Most participants stated that they believe it was a combination of both. The institution had a clear understanding of what they wanted in a new president, in part because of this past experience, but the fit also was because of the person that the new president is and how he reached out and embraced the people and the culture of Midwestern College. One administrator noted:

There probably had to be a certain amount of feeling goodwill that this guy’s a good bet anyway. But I think that that could have easily dissipated very rapidly if it were not for his behavior to reinforce that. Because I think that there are some folks in the organization who look at people in his position with a jaded eye and are just waiting for him to slip or waiting for him to – and it may be even kind of hopeful that he does kind of thing and there are probably still those people out there. But I think that the kind of way that he’s handled himself, as president, really has not given those naysayers a reason to do that.

Summary

The communication of the vision begins in the presidential search process. The selection of the president and the actions by the campus community that occur in this stage can impact the success of this communication. When the campus is united in the
characteristics desired in a president and as those characteristics are communicated clearly, then the best candidate for the job can be chosen. The presidential search consultants who help develop the priorities for the institution in the presidential search prospectus can aid this clarity. This prospectus becomes the public statement about the leadership priorities and serves as the impetus for the institution to engage in this important discussion of presidential qualities. It can also be influenced by past experience, which was the case with Midwestern College who recently experienced a presidency that was a less than desired match.

Several cultural dimensions identified in this analysis were evident in Midwestern College’s search process. The process itself involved the community and honored the strong university governance by providing an equal voice of the faculty representation in relation to the trustee opinion. The characteristics sought in a president matched the cultural values, such as a strong communicator, a builder of community, someone who could work with and appreciate the strong university governance that exists, and someone who supports participatory decision-making. While the presidential search process itself did not address the communication of the vision, the fact that the process had such clarity about the important presidential characteristics led to someone who was a cultural fit contributed to the cultural understanding by the president.

Presidential Fit

With clarity about what the institution was seeking, the search process yielded the kind of candidate that best matched the institution’s priorities. This match can be described as fit, which occurs when characteristics and priorities of the presidential
candidate match what the institution has laid out as priorities. In addition to fit, the
president took action early in his presidency that demonstrated an understanding of the
institutional culture. These actions and patterns of engagement reflected a level of
consistency with the beliefs of the campus community about the characteristics of the
president and his own sense of himself as a leader.

Fit also is a congruence of priorities, of institutional values, and of a personal
style that aligns with culture of the institution. Participants overwhelmingly talked about
the strong fit of the new president and the institution. One administrator described this
idea of fit by stating, “It feels right first of all, which in my experience is sometimes the
most important. In the gut it feels right, in the head it feels right and also, in the heart it
certainly feels right.” Other participants reflected on the fit:

When he came into the room and began to talk, he was captivating. His
interpersonal skills are very good…Faculty as well as trustees just were
mesmerized by him and his personality, and his ability to communicate. I think
people see him as very honest, very sincere. I think that was probably very
important to look to the character of the person and see if they would match. And
he stood out among the other candidates as someone who understood the liberal
arts, recognized and appreciated the culture. (administrator)

I’ve never seen such optimism here in the years I’ve been here awhile - some of
it’s him. I think he’s just been himself and he’s absolutely the right person for the
job, which is he gets up there, and he’s so genuinely warm and sincere. He’s
either the world’s greatest actor, which I don’t think is the case, or he just gets up
there and when he says to you things like ‘I put down deep roots.’ But really
when all he has to do is be himself, because he so obviously means what he says
and believes everything we want him to believe, the way you are a successful
leader is to convince people you know that we’re all in this together and that we
all have to pull together and that this is in our collective best interests, and
everything should be done in the collective best interest. I have to give him an A
triple plus. He hasn’t made a single misstep as far as I can tell. He’s just done
everything right. Because there were other candidates I don’t think as good as the
president, but there were other candidates that the faculty really liked but the
trustees couldn’t stand. And then there were candidates that the trustees really
liked that faculty you know were like “Oh my god.” The president was the one
candidate that really everybody loved, which is great because again, he’s starting
off not polarizing. He’s not a trustee candidate, he’s not a faculty candidate. I
mean everybody loved him so it’s not like – it is not that we got somebody and
we decided to love him because we’d better love him. We lucked out. We lucked
out. Because this guy had to work. But then we were given a gift. (faculty)

He’s got a lot of it figured out because he’s done his research, and he’s read the
books and he’s read the history. That’s another aspect of the president that I’ve
been very impressed with. It’s not just reading it but he’s touched by a lot of it. It
obviously has had an impact on him, and I think from what I understand – and I
mean he’s said this a couple times, to me personally and to groups of people, that
without that – without that special nature of this institution we would never have
been able to convince him to come. He really has very broad experience and he
brings that to bear. He’s a good guy in general. He’s very truthful. I think there’s
a strong sense of ethics. I don’t think he’s anything different – he’s not created a
different persona coming in here. He has not tried to fit himself to the institution.
There’s a match so that’s important. So he hasn’t had to change himself in any
way, shape or form. He’s pretty close to perfect in terms of his make up and in
terms of what he brings to the table and in his experience. What I was always
interested in was the response of the faculty. He has no classroom experience.
He’s not an academic, although he can converse with academics and he
understands that side of it. He doesn’t come out of the faculty, and for the faculty
to embrace him – more than embrace him – to sell him to the rest of the campus,
was really amazing to see. People who – trustees, other people who were on the
search committee certainly liked him and he was their number one candidate but
and some faculty members who fell in love with him, with what he represented,
and I just say that figuratively. But there was – it was obvious that something
special was going on there. Because it’s very clear he’s had a strong
understanding of the culture of this place, and the personality, and appears to be
working with it. (administrator)

We feel very comfortable that he understands kind of what’s important to us. But
right away I felt really comfortable, and crossed my fingers, that this would be the
person who would be offered the position and that he would take it. He really just
resonated – everything he said resonated. It said “I think that would work here at
Midwestern College and I think he really gets it and I think he has clever ideas.”
And he just – it really just felt very right. We were really excited when he came
on board. With this new administrator I think part of the difference is just great
transition. We have – you know we now appreciate a good fit for this college.
(faculty)
Similarly, the president also described the fit from his vantage point. The fit arose from a clear self-assessment of strengths and abilities from the president, combined with a clear articulation of the institutional priorities, and understanding if there was a match.

I have felt like I would fit most well in a residential environment that was a more traditional instruction with undergraduate, residential, liberal arts students. Where I could among other things participate in shaping the life of a community that involves its students in all aspects of their lives in effect.

I also felt that I would want to be in an institution that had strength – strength from which to build. But also had potential to build on that strength in a significant way.

So if there was an opportunity, where from a position of strength an institution could propel itself forward in a dramatic way, that would be appealing to me. Also as one who comes not through the traditional path of an academic, it would need to be an institution that was open to – to the path that my career has followed.

My own approach was very people oriented. I’m a collegial, collaborative leader. I think that fits well with this institution. I think Midwestern, as an institution with roots in its religious founding, was not seeking someone with that background but I think it’s a value added that I bring and I’m able to relate with a certain set of constituents here because of that background.

Summary

Understanding the culture and developing a vision for a campus community began with presidential selection process where an explicit articulation of characteristics supported identifying an individual who fit the culture of the campus. The fit resulted from both the match of the individual’s personality and values with the needs of the institution. In this case, the members of the campus community developed a feeling of the fit of the president and with the community.

The perception of the presidential fit is important, as the campus community is involved in the development and communication of a vision. The evidence of fit exists
because of the congruence with the culture dimensions such as community, participatory
decision-making and support for strong university governance and the presidential
candidate’s style and characteristics. This fit was articulated both by the new president
and the faculty and administrators. The fit was reinforced because of the presidential
actions.

Presidential Actions

The president also took actions that demonstrated institutional fit and his
commitment to the institution. The fit was reinforced by the actions that the president
took to understand the culture and to demonstrate a level of understanding about the
institution. Many of these actions started long before the president officially took office
and began when the president first became a candidate for the position. Through the
search process, the president worked formally and informally to better understand
Midwestern College and to be sure that the values and culture of the institution matched
his values and skill set as a leader. The president noted:

The process for developing priorities began with the day I was contacted about
the position and I began to – to do everything I could to gain an understanding of
Midwestern College. I received a position description. I wrote my letter to the
search committee in response to the profile that had been developed, and I think if
we go back and look at that letter some of the priorities that I state today are
reflected in that letter. The search process allowed me to begin to do that too. The
search consultant was very helpful in providing all of the information that I
requested. Sometimes she had it at the tip of her tongue. Sometimes she would
have to make a phone call and get back to me. But I can remember sitting in a
hotel lobby talking to her a couple of weeks before my first interview, with two
pages of questions, and gathering a significant amount of information. I talked to
one of the former presidents prior to that first set of interviews, and I talked to a
couple of other former presidents who had knowledge of the institution from a
distance. And so I entered the interview process with all of that information, and
by the time I came to the campus interviews I had that information plus follow up
to the initial hotel interviews and subsequent conversations with the search consultant between the two sets of interviews.

The actions of the president were known and understood by the participants. Several noted the actions that the president took as part of the interview and selection process that helped to set the stage for his arrival. As a result, before he officially began, the president had engaged with the community of Midwestern College to begin forming relationships and demonstrating a level of commitment to the institution. Participants shared:

Before he officially started, he was here a lot and as he was making trips with his former college. I think he was doing us both proud. He was doing his work there and doing his work for us. He was meeting with alums, he was meeting with trustees, he was meeting with potential donors even before he started, and burning the candle at both ends obviously doing it so that he was making sure that he fulfilled his responsibilities at his former institution. He came in, he did his homework, he learned more about this place than most people who have been here for a long time though – and that’s impressive to people who are here. He was here almost every week for 3 or 4 months before he even showed up, which most presidents do, but he was very visible in terms of what he did. He didn’t sneak in and sneak out. He made sure that people knew he was here. (administrator)

He did all sorts of things that weren’t for outside consumption but if you knew about them, just showed that he was sincere. So for example, he was the only candidate who when he came even for the airport interview, he brought his spouse and they spent an extra day. They didn’t say anything to the search committee, and they just walked around campus and they walked around – and this was before he was a finalist. I mean you know when he was at the airport interview – to see whether this was the kind of place he could build a life. (faculty)

This pattern of engagement continued as the president arrived and began his presidency. These actions created a sense of trust, demonstrated a level of commitment early in arrival, and reinforced the idea that the president was a good fit for the institution. These early actions and the engagement with the campus community opened
the door for communication with the campus and created a level of receptivity of ideas. These were symbolic actions that demonstrated to the campus community that the president understands the institution and the institutional values. The actions described by the participants illustrate someone who is visible, a community builder, egalitarian, communicative – all institutional values and elements central to the culture of Midwestern College. One administrator described the president’s actions as, “He gets around. He has hosted many, many, many groups in his house. That was off limits in the past.” Other actions of the president were noted by two faculty members:

The first thing you would do is you would roll up your sleeves and help new students move in, and not for 30 seconds for a photo-op and then stop, that you are egalitarian and you walk around and you talk to everybody, not just the powers that be and you don’t just say you’re going to – you actually do. That you don’t seem to have a class consciousness. You’re not presenting yourself as above and distant from, and untouchable and in buried in your office. You’re sensitive to costs so you’re not spending inappropriate amounts of money. I think that the president certainly seems to be showing that he’s trying to be clearer about what’s going on by sending out emails. We’re only in the second week of the semester and I think we’ve gotten two already saying you know updates on what’s going on. I think that’s a very effective way to do it. Part of what he’s done right is he’s constantly having dinners and lunches at his home – I mean for various groups of people, whether it be staff or students or teams or – I mean the number of I don’t – I mean I can’t tell you the number of dinners but its just seems like every night I keep hearing about there was another dinner at his house. He’s also genuinely excited when you talk to him. I mean you know and I’m fortunate enough to have had private meetings with him where we’ve just talked one on one and you know he’s excited about stuff. He’s obviously happy. He obviously likes it. You can’t fake that you know? “Oh this is so cool.” You know I mean as opposed to everything’s one big drag. It’s infectious too. It really is infectious. I mean he believes we can do it. I mean a leader who believes you can do it as opposed to as basically giving you the message that this is a lost cause. It’s just wonderful. But I just really can’t emphasize enough how positive everything is and how effective he has been, and I really can’t think of a single thing he should have done differently. (faculty)

A concern was that he had not been in the classroom enough. And how can you understand what’s going on at an institution if you haven’t been in the classroom.
He does know how to speak to people. He does know how to listen. He does know how to lead a meeting. We were so impressed with every single interview process that he went through. That he never set at the head of the table. He always sat at the side of the table. He always knew your name. By the time he left the meeting he knew all about you. He looks in your eyes. He remembers. His communication skills are phenomenal. (faculty)

In addition to these actions, the president communicated with the community about his excitement and pleasure of being part of the Midwestern College community.

After he was appointed as president, he sent the following email to the campus community:

We were thrilled with every aspect of our visit to the campus last week, but nothing was more inspiring or energizing than our interactions with the people who make up the Midwestern College family. I look forward to becoming acquainted with each of you and to learning much more about the College over the next few months. We commit to you our very best efforts on behalf of Midwestern College, and we look forward to a long and fruitful relationship together.

The president reflected on the actions he has taken to demonstrate a level of engagement with the community:

I have been very intentional about how I’ve structured my time. I have been intentional about my time with students. I’ve had dinners in three of the fraternity houses and attended an all-Greek reception, so that’s four different evenings. I’ve eaten in student dining one or two evenings a week with my family, and have eaten in the student place most commonly frequented by students at noon two or three times. I’m told the students have been heard to say that I eat there every day, which says something about the ability – the symbolic importance of even periodic presence.

There have been a couple of emails that I have sent to the entire community that articulates the – that articulate some of the issues that we’re dealing with but also, in the most recent, campus wide email I actually did spell out these four issues in the context of that email. Lots of individual conversations. Lots of group meetings. Presentation to the faculty meeting this week. I said exactly these four issues in the presentation to the faculty.
I am also in the process of a series of late afternoon gatherings of ten to twelve faculty members, intentionally not ever including two people from the same department in the same session. Those will be listening sessions. I have a set of four or five questions that I will pose and I will ask them for their consideration. The questions essentially – and some of these were outlined in my presentation at the interviews last year – but I’ll ask them to reflect on what they value most about Midwestern College, to reflect on their highest aspirations, what they most would like to see. To think about with me about what are we doing now that prevents us from achieving those aspirations, and what are we not doing that could allow us to achieve those aspirations? That gets to that fourth point of aligning the way we do our work.

We have hosted events at our home for the admissions and financial aid staff, to thank them for the great class they brought in. We had the University Relations staff last night. They had a record fundraising year last year so a thank you to them. We had the Residential Life staff, along with the RAs, to thank them for their work. We had the orientation leaders, which includes student life group for an evening event.

I will conduct alumni events around the country where I will ask alumni to think intentionally about, and to share with me in a fairly structured way – we’ll follow the same structure in each event, – what they value about the institution, their aspirations for the institution, their fond memories of their experiences here and their understandings of how their experiences here have shaped the lives they’ve lived since they were here. And so all of that is a way for me to access the collective memory and the collective story of the institution. I think the future has to grow out of that collective understanding of the past, and be grounded in it in some way.

Similarly, the president shared in the commencement speech to students, stating that,

“Many of you have told me the value of the relationships formed with members of this faculty, and of the impact of caring administrators and staff on your time here.”

Finally, the president’s actions at times of important decision-making reinforce his understanding of the culture. The actions of the president become part of the institutional values and beliefs when administrators and faculty begin telling stories about the president that reinforce what the institution values. In this inquiry, several participants mentioned an instance when the president addressed the faculty regarding a problem he
uncovered. The outcome was not a popular one but the president’s choice on how to handle the situation reinforced the importance of honesty, university governance and strong community. Several participants shared the story around this incident. One description is as follows:

He has a level of personal integrity. A good example would be the faculty meeting where he talked about the discovery of unreported SAT scores. You know that was a risky thing to do but risky in terms of those people who had some allegiances to the previous administration as well as just getting the ire of the faculty. It was extremely well done and I think received by the faculty in a way that “You know we didn’t like what we heard but we’re glad we heard it. We’re glad that the administration and the president were open about that and weren’t trying to hide it from us and wasn’t sugar coating it. It was here’s what it is. We are where we are and so now we need to move on from here.” I think that sort of approach that the president has in dealing with even some difficult issues. I can’t get the specific conversations but there have been times where I think it would be easier, more convenient to say “Well let’s just not say anything about that and let it roll.” That certainly is an option but his response has always been “Well that may be easier to do but let’s do the right thing. Let’s get this on the table and talk about it and move on.” Overall I think he’s built a high level of trust with him. But he’s not unafraid to take on the tough questions but does so in a way that – I think sometimes if you come on too strong with individuals they may get a perception that you’re trying to pull something over on them or intimidate them into a particular position or whatever, and the president doesn’t do that. (administrator)

He seems to very much understand how anything to be successful here must be really bought into by everyone. He obviously has to be comfortable with it, but nothing is going to work if we just import something from some place else because it seemed like it worked some place else? He knows that it won’t necessarily work here so he really is trying to learn about us. And he’s done a few other things where he learned, sort of by accident that we were sort of digging through some old data and they learned that we had been reporting some admission scores in strange ways. But somehow he was uncomfortable with the way it was being reported. He came right out and he said, “I’m just not comfortable with us not doing that. Who knows when it happened? I’m not pointing the blame at anybody. But lets not do that anymore.” Someone asked, “Is that going to hurt us in the rankings?” and he said, “Possibly but I think we just need to have it all out there on the table.” People were really pleased that he was that open with us and didn’t just – he could have one, not changed it. He could have two, changed it but not admitted it, and three – he came right out and said
“Yeah. It’s not great for us but we are going to be working to get more and more good students and we need to know who’s here. (faculty)

As soon as the president found out about it, he was upset. His immediate response was, “I don’t care whether this hurts us or not. We can’t have wrong information. You know I can not be president of a school that has incomplete information about its numbers.” And so the accurate numbers were reported. It wasn’t open for question. It wasn’t open for discussion. The only question was when do I tell the community? How do I tell people so that we keep the reaction to a minimum? It wasn’t an issue of are we going tell people? Or are we going to start doing it the right, clean way this minute? We don’t need to find out who started it. We don’t need to know who made the call. It was a long time ago. Let’s just forget it and move on. I think that bought him a lot of trust and a belief in his honesty. A belief that he would give you the straight story whether or not it was good news. (faculty)

These stories are told about the president that reinforces the institutional culture. Not only is he telling stories to demonstrate his understanding of the culture, but also others are telling stories about him to further illustrate the cultural connection.

Summary

The president’s actions before his arrival and during his early in his tenure symbolically reinforced the cultural dimensions that describe Midwestern College. Hosting a significant number of gatherings at his home, reaching out to alumni across the country, sending emails communicating the state of the College, along with the way he worked hard to relate to people and build relationships reinforced the idea of community, participatory decision-making and the acknowledgement of an egalitarian culture. These actions felt congruent with Midwestern College’s culture to the campus community.

Listening and Developing Trust

The president of Midwestern College was very deliberate in his actions of understanding the institution, building community, and building relationships to help
bring about an understanding of the culture. The president spent a significant part of his
time early in his presidency listening as a way to glean information about the institution
and the culture. These actions, along with an approach of openness and receptivity in
order to grasp the culture, lead to a level of trust that the members of the campus
community developed. This trust created a platform for developing a vision that fit the
institution while taking the institution in a new direction.

Listening

One of the most noted themes about the president’s actions was the act of
listening, a quality noted not only by the president himself but also by the participants.
The importance of listening was introduced as early as the presidential search process.
The presidential prospectus noted that is was important to have someone who made
decisions after listening. The profile stated, “The campus is united in its desire for a
president who will engage the campus community in discussions about matters of
importance to the institution and who, after careful listening, will make informed
decisions.” This quality was deliberately mentioned as something that the institution was
looking for in a president.

The president discussed the importance of listening and seeking input as he
arrived at Midwestern College. From the first day, the president set the tone that input,
collective thinking and collaboration was important. In a presidential communication in
his first week on campus, he shared:

I write to thank you for the role you have played in making this the great
institution that it is and to solicit your counsel and assistance as together we open
the next chapter in the history of Midwestern College.
Over the next six months, I hope to engage all who care about Midwestern College in a conversation about a bold vision for the future. I want to know what about the College you value most, and I want to know your highest aspirations for this institution. I ask for your counsel, and as the vision is articulated and our plan for the future develops, I ask for your support in whatever way you can offer it.

This invitation set the stage to indicate that the president is ready to listen, to seek input, and to understand the institution. It is clear that the president is opening the door to listen to campus community, by being deliberate in “seeking counsel.” These actions continued within the early months of the presidency, as the president was very deliberate to create opportunities for listening and gleaning information about the institution and the culture.

The president described gatherings he conducted to create opportunities for listening:

Lots of individual conversations. Lots of group meetings. Presentation to the faculty meeting this week. I said exactly these four issues in the presentation to the faculty. I am in the process of meeting with each department and program as a group on the campus. That will take several months. I am also in the process of a series of late afternoon gatherings of ten to twelve faculty members, intentionally not ever including two people from the same department in the same session. Those will be listening sessions. I have a set of four or five questions that I will pose and I will ask them for their consideration. The questions essentially – and some of these were outlined in my presentation at the interviews – but I’ll ask them to reflect on what they value most about Midwestern College, to reflect on their highest aspirations, what they most would like to see. To think about with me about what are we doing now that prevents us from achieving those aspirations, and what are we not doing that could allow us to achieve those aspirations? That gets to that fourth point of aligning the way we do our work.

The president also noted the importance of asking questions and listening for the answers, even when the answers may be in conflict with each other. This action is an important part of listening, in not drawing conclusions too quickly. He described:

I think being willing to ask any question. It’s very important to be able to ask questions and then to listen and to expect the answers to come. It’s important not to rush to judgment. I think that I have been able to learn by being open-minded. I can ask different people the same question and get different answers and sometimes the answers are in conflict with one another and you have to – you
need to give yourself some time, not rush to judgment, not think that the first answer is the only answer.

The theme of listening and the value of listening were shared by virtually all participants, a theme that was unsolicited in the inquiry process. Both faculty and administrators made statements simply reflecting his action, such as, “I think he’s so far been listening a lot, which I think you have to do initially.” Another noted, “He does know how to listen. He really listens.” Further, a faculty member and an administrator described the impact of that listening and how that approach has helped to enhance trust and communication.

He listens very well to people. He’s made a point of coming around to each department and asking questions. “What are your strengths? If you had more resources what might you do? What are some things that you think – you know what would you like to do better?” He’s made a really big effort to make sure he understands each group.

If we tell him something he doesn’t always take our advice, but he really listens, and if he doesn’t take our advice he’ll tell us why. He’s really big about creating community. He himself walks the walk and talks the talk. His inauguration was an example of community building. It was so successful that we’re talking about doing something like that campus wide again for the whole institution. Closing down all the food halls. The only place you can eat is in the street with the whole community. We talked a lot about creating community. So he’s good like that. And he’s very good at turning negatives into positives. If someone complains, he listens and then he turns it into a positive. He asks for input. He asks for feedback. And you know how someone will ask your opinion but then they don’t take it just so they get annoyed? He asks for your opinion, and he may or may not take it, but you don’t get annoyed if he doesn’t take it because he tells you why. But it was enough that you felt he heard you and you made that connection and that contact.

Listening results in two outcomes. It helps the president understand the culture by hearing from the community their interpretation of the institution, how it runs, its history and its hopes for the future. Listening also has an outcome of building trust.
Developing trust

The theme of trust also was revealed in discussion with participants about the president and his actions. It was mentioned frequently in conjunction with how the president was becoming acclimated to the institution. I asked more directly about the theme in later discussions to try to better understand the role of developing trust.

Both the president and the participants spoke about the importance of trust. With trust, participants appeared to be more willing to accept new ideas from the president because they could believe that he had their best interest in mind and that he understood them. They also were more willing to listen in return, because they had first been listened to and their ideas were considered. In regard to trust, the president first noted its importance:

Listening, building trust, earning trust, using skills of diplomacy, finding opportunities where change creates winners on all sides, finding opportunities where various groups of people are all asked to give something as well as to receive a benefit makes a difference.

Relationships are very important and putting the time and energy into nurturing and sustaining trust, nurturing and sustaining relationships I think will be important.

I’ve poured myself into this and have engaged with as many different constituencies as much of the time as possible, and am on the road a lot but I’m told that I’m seen everywhere on campus. It’s a pretty demanding pace that I’ve set for myself but I think that its paying off in terms of the response and the feedback and the energy and the enthusiasm and the trust.

The president also discussed the lack of trust that he sensed when he first arrived and how to address that lack of trust:

Trust is not as high as it should be. There is always a suspicion, more so it seems, and I think the first step toward addressing that issue is the senior leadership team that we’re putting in place to make sure that we have the trust among ourselves,
and then that we create among the various divisions we lead. Trust within the divisions and then trust among the divisions.

I think that when it was pretty clear to me even before I arrived that certainly in the early weeks here that there were issues on campus related to trust and they were not related to any particular individual. It was almost systemic and I think some of this could relate to those experiences – the difficult times in the past – and so I’ve talked a lot about trust and the importance of trust. And I feel like that we’re slowly creating a climate that is more trustworthy, that is more trusting, that – and I think frankly you can’t achieve the kinds of objectives that we have without trust.

Presidential actions as well as personal characteristics have lead to the trust that has developed in the president by the campus community. Participants described the qualities possessed by the president as ones that lead to trust, qualities such as ethical style, honesty, approachable. His actions backed up those qualities, leading to the creation of a culture where trust can exist. These actions confirmed that the president was with the campus community and that they were heading toward the same objectives.

The president has captured the confidence and trust of the faculty of staff from the very beginning. It’s just something about him. I think his style, his ability to listen. I think he’s very credible. (administrator)

And because he came in, he did his homework, he learned more about this place than most people who have been here for a long time though – and that’s impressive to people who are Midwestern College. And he came in just embracing the community tremendously. So trust was built from day one. He actually built it before he came. He was here almost every week for 3 or 4 months before he even showed up, which most presidents do, but he was very visible in terms of what he did. He didn’t sneak in and sneak out. He made sure that people knew he was here. The trust came when people understood he was real, he was committed, his family was committed to this place, and he was also very smart, and had probably more experience than most people realized he could have at his previous institution. He really has very broad experience and he brings that to bear. He’s a good guy in general. He’s very truthful. I think there’s a strong sense of ethics. (administrator)

But there has to be something that obviously the president has done as well as the institution has to have a readiness for that trust as well. He came in and did some
things that I think were positive. Add two faculty, and had the trustees endorse that at the faculty meeting, at the inauguration. Wow! I mean that’s really significant. I think trust comes from honesty. So maybe his credentials a little bit lead you to want to trust him. So far this looks like a good match – and that creates trust – the match. (administrator)

I think the president automatically engenders that in people. He’s very honest. He’s very approachable. He’s very charismatic and because he is at the top of the entire project I think that he has given people a lot of trust in the process. So I do think that there is, and continues to be a feeling that this really is a collaborative effort and it does represent the majority of people on campus, kind of what they feel is in the best interest of the university. (administrator)

They trust the president. They trust him. We can do it and he’s pretty bold and he doesn’t seem to get flustered, and he’s respectful of whoever he’s talking to. He really is. He listens and he’s respectful and he’s even tempered and he thanks people, and his favorite – like he wrote this email and he starts out with “I’m asking for your good counsel.” I think faculty trust him. That he has our interests at heart. (faculty)

Like the president, other participants commented on the lack of trust that came from past experience and institutional history. One administrator noted actions of a former president that contributed to this lack of trust in institutional leadership by describing, “The previous president came in and terminated two employees right off that he did not get on with. That doesn’t lead to a lot of trust.” This same administrator went on to described the past history with institutional trust as follows:

A lot of it comes back to the issue of trusting the people who are running it, who are – and we didn’t have that. But the president – you met him, you talked to him, you know how his mannerism, how his style is one that leads to, I think, people who come to know him to know that he’s sincere and he has the trust and the best interests of the institution at heart. I think for a long time there has been a frustration that we have not succeeded as an institution that leads to want to trust someone.

Summary

The actions by the president, combined with a deliberate effort to listen and weigh
the community’s opinions, led to a trust in the president. The president learned as much as he could about the institution and the people, held a number of listening sessions with a wide variety of constituents to learn the history and the culture, and was visible to the campus community. Personal characteristics that the president exhibits also contributed to this sense of trust within the campus community where one did not exist consistently. The trust created a sense of collaboration and openness that opened the door for the campus community to consider new ideas and a new vision for the College.

The Strategic Planning Process Matters

The strategic planning process and the development of the vision were two arenas in which the president utilized the culture to communicate the vision. At Midwestern College, the strategic planning process began during the interview and selection stage of the presidential search. As with many successful presidential searches, the president of Midwestern College began to formulate his institutional vision during the interview and selection process. The expectation for the new president was communicated as part of the presidential prospectus:

The campus also looks to the next president to turn immediately to reviewing and completing a strategic planning process. The campus is eager to cooperate with the president in identifying and recommending to the Board the University’s short-term and long-range strategic priorities and the fundraising goals that derive from those priorities.

The president used the interview process to begin to create some priorities and a plan for Midwestern College, as a way to help illustrate what he might focus on as president. He stated:

The process for developing priorities began with the day I was contacted about the position and I began to – to do everything I could to gain an understanding of
Midwestern College. I received a position description. I wrote my letter to the search committee in response to the profile that had been developed, and I think if we go back and look at that letter some of the priorities that I state today are reflected in that letter. The search process allowed me to begin to do that too….I’d laid out a bit of a plan in my presentation at the campus interviews about what I would do, or how I would go about building and planning.

Upon arrival at Midwestern College, the president continued to introduce ideas of a vision for the College. The priorities presented by the president outlined the importance of completing a strategic planning process that includes many voices. The priorities included the following two points:

Complete strategic planning process with clear, unifying, and differentiating vision, that incorporates findings from external market study and from campus master plan, and that sets the stage for clarifying objectives of the capital campaign

Visibility and Engagement – engage fully in all aspects of university life, with strategic and visible presence at the largest possible number of events and with strategic use of the president’s home as a venue to host internal and external constituents, with strategic attendance at off campus alumni gatherings that can create buzz among the alumni association; and with strategic presence in community events.

The president also began to outline a vision during his inauguration. His speech set the stage for the planning process in which the campus community would embark over the next six to nine months. The early clues of themes that he began to develop were shared as part of this address:

Today, with a legacy grounded in the liberal arts and rooted in a practical idealism that connects the lessons of the past with the experiences of the present in order to prepare leaders for the future, we at Midwestern College have much to offer the world. This is our time. In this opportune moment, let us think together about what it would mean for Midwestern College to set the liberal arts standard for educating moral leaders for a global society. We must provide greater opportunities for our domestic students to cross cultural boundaries and to travel the world, experiencing for themselves the variety of cultures, histories, and perspectives they ultimately must be prepared to engage, in order to flourish in the
professional lives that await them. We can imagine together experiences created by members of this faculty, in every discipline, to offer our students the benefit of a more global perspective and the enrichment that comes from immersion in cultures different from one’s own.

Using a process built on culturally symbolic actions

A strategic planning process, designed to develop a vision and a plan for the College, worked well because it was built with an understanding of the institutional culture. As a result, the outcome of the vision was born out of a process that used the culture to arrive at the end result. The president chose to use a planning process to generate the vision and the priorities that fit Midwestern College. The process was described by the president as follows:

I’ve completed 19 of the 30 alumni events around the country and in some ways the structure of those events is changing and that reflects the evolution of the planning process. The initial half dozen events were held in the late fall, and in all of those cases the primary purpose of the evening was listening, and I posed a series of questions. I invited alumni to participate in focus groups and then to share responses more fully. These were the same questions that I’ve been asking faculty in meetings with faculty here, at my home in late afternoons over the course of the fall and finishing up in the winter. But in the alumni events now I’m beginning to articulate a possible vision and then ask for feedback on the vision that I’m articulating. I did, in the fall, reconvene the strategic planning group that had been organized a couple of years ago and in particular the chairpersons of the eight work groups that had been identified. And I asked those groups to go back and to review their work and to think about where they might want to make some revisions or some changes or some enhancements, and then to submit that to me. I took that and with the information from the eight workgroups and with the information from the results of the art and science group’s research, which were presented in December, I drafted a first draft of the strategic vision and shared it in January with the faculty governance committee and the board of trustees. And in fact the board spent a fair bit of time in conversation, understanding that this was a very preliminary draft. I’m now in the process of sharing the draft more broadly. It has gone now to all of the work groups. It was shared also in that first round of sharing with the chairs of the eight workgroups. I’ve now asked – with each sharing I’ve incorporated the revisions and the current draft is being reviewed by the full membership of the eight workgroups. We’ll come back after
spring break and distribute it to the faculty. I’ll meet with the administrative staff and share it with them, and solicit their feedback. I’ll meet with two or three other staff groups. The alumni board will be on campus and we’ll review the document. And so there are a number of groups – I’ll have a student group that reviews it. And in each of these cases I take the input and the document continues to evolve, and by mid-April I hope to have a document I can take back to a group that the trustees have appointed to provide counsel and preparation for submission to the full board at its May meeting. So the fall was all about listening and I continue to be in a listening mode, but I’m listening now to responses to an initial draft of the vision and the objective of course is that the vision ultimately will represent the full institution. And it may be that nobody buys in completely to everything in the vision, but I hope everybody finds a substantial amount of the vision that is familiar and meaningful and has power for each person.

The description of this process was confirmed by many of the participants. The participatory nature of the process was recounted as one that allowed for input from a broad constituency on campus. The process was affirming for the campus because it mirrored the culture in a number of ways. The president understood the culture and chose to design the process to work within the culture of Midwestern College. First, the process was built on work done previously at the College that remained incomplete. Instead of leading the campus community through a process that started from scratch, the president understood the work previously done, work that members of the community had a stake in, as the basis of the vision formulated out of the planning process. Secondly, the process was participatory. The ideas that contributed to the draft of the plan began with the work previously done before the arrival of the new president. The draft, written after the contribution of the campus community, was vetted with a wide variety of campus groups. One faculty member described that process, in relation to prior planning processes and receiving direction from the president:

He called the eight workgroup chairs together and said, “I want you to look over the reports that you did because they’re now two years old, and revise them as
needed. Some of you will need to do more work than others depending upon how things have changed or not changed, and give me a new report, and I will take those reports and write my plan starting with those reports.” So half of the reason it’s a good strategic plan is because it is grounded in those reports. I was at a meeting with the other seven chairs and the president, where we sat around and the basic agenda was he wanted feedback on the first draft of the strategic plan. But the question was – the main question was “am I reflecting your needs?” Not literally every little dot obviously because I have to you know now bring these all together in a cohesive way but you know the essence, the most important parts, like are you satisfied?” So that’s half of why it’s successful. Then he took all that feedback and he revised it. Our first effort was more of a top down effort. The effort that we previously undertook was much more top down and I think he was – he felt that we had to get something done and we had to get something done quickly and we do now too. But it’s a whole different attitude. So I think it’s much more collaborative. So I don’t think anybody could say their individual imprint is on this. I mean it’s really a consolidation of all the thoughts that they put together and distilled down to only two or three. Now remember that’s all tied together with a process that we already undertook where we did a physical master plan of the campus. That’s already been completed. So you put the two together. It’s getting broader distribution on campus. It has been communicated to various different off campus.

The president also commented on the importance of involving a participatory process:

We have to have all the constituencies fully engaged in ways that access their best thoughts and build their most significant investment in the process and its outcome. So we have to do this in a way that creates – it gives us the benefit of the best thinking but also creates the benefit of the most significant investment from all the stakeholders.

The process also relied on faculty input and faculty governance leadership.

Members of the faculty and the faculty governance committees were included in the development of information sent to the president for the initial draft and also involved in providing feedback after the draft was written. Seeking faculty governance and faculty input more broadly is representative of Midwestern College’s culture. This vision and strategic plan were more readily accepted because the process fit with what the culture
valued, as the president understood through his listening and his actions. Two administrators described the process:

The document as a whole will go back to the work committees in the next week or so and they’ll be asked to take a look at it. It’s been reviewed by the faculty governance committee. So certain people have had a look-see at it and it’s still is in a draft format but its coming together and is getting a little bit more specific as we get on the road – more detail. (administrator)

The vision statement for the strategic plan was introduced by the president and handed out as another iteration of the draft. And then after the trustees it was rolled out to the governance committee and the faculty. And then it was rolled out most recently – I don’t know – a week or so ago – to the strategic planning committee. And then the next step, I believe, it is going to be rolled out to the entire community and then there will be some open forums, I guess, to discuss that and talk about it. (administrator)

The president also acknowledged the importance of a vision that had significant faculty input. By understanding this aspect of the culture, by sharing it with faculty and seeking faculty input, the vision had stronger buy-in.

It certainly is the culture at Midwestern College to engage a wide range of constituencies and processes concerning virtually all aspects of the governance and leadership of the university. I think that that is important in any institution of higher education, particularly in a small liberal arts college. That a strategic vision has to be a shared vision, and that a strategic vision has to be matched by a strategic implementation and the implementation will be accomplished not by a president but by the entire family of the university, and the power of the implementation, I think, is directly related to the extent to which the full family was involved and shared in the creation of the vision. I happen to value that kind of process personally. It certainly is a value of this institution and I think it is a wise way to go in an institution of this sort. I knew well from the search process, and from conversations with people around the country, who knew Midwestern College at a distance, as well as conversations with people here during the search, that this is a campus that has a high premium on shared governance and on decision making that is transparent and that involves the community. And I also had a clear self-understanding of the power of shared vision.
A process that deviated from this kind of pattern would not be accepted, as reflected by one participant in describing the process used by the former president, “You know the problem of the last plan is that we did these reports and then the strategic plan came out from the former president and like there was no correspondence whatsoever.”

An administrator described the process that was not accepted by the campus community:

It happened that committees were working individually without sort of an umbrella over it. We were kind of keeping everybody herded – you know it was herding cats and just you know they just all went out in their own direction without a lot of cross communication doing the committees. So there wasn’t a nice umbrella put over the whole thing so we could keep that process within some bounds. The former president convened us off site, which is another mistake, in a city away from campus, which was another mistake, and with a facilitator. And we tried to put together to take this strategic planking process of the committees and put it together into one document. That was brought back to campus, and within a couple months and ultimately floated as the answer to a strategic plan, because I’m ready to take it to the board.

The process used in this planning process for Midwestern College used functions, activities and approaches that were symbolic of the institutional culture. Members of the campus community expressed the fit of that process.

*Fit of the planning process*

The president acknowledged that the planning process must fit the culture of the institution. A process imposed on the institution that did not resonate with the institution’s way of doing business would not be widely accepted. The process of planning also is organic in nature, developing and emerging, rather than being implemented and followed very prescriptively. The president noted, “I think that the strategic planning process has to grow organically out of what the institution is, how the
institution understands itself – the organic identity of the institution. The planning involves a significant amount of listening and fact-finding.”

Members of the Midwestern College community commented on the strategic planning process that lead to the development of a vision.

His way of thinking matches ours because when something needs to be done his first instinct is one, to gather data, and two, to get a committee. And a broad based committee with staff, and faculty, and students and trustees – that’s how he does things. It isn’t closeting himself with the two most senior officers and making a decision. (faculty)

It’s clearly speculation but I think it’s almost impossible to separate the person from the process when it comes to building buy in at a university. I mean really the importance of the president cannot be underestimated when it comes to a campus wide effort to set the vision for the next ten years for the university. I think it absolutely requires a level of personal charisma and trust that there’s no substitute for. Having said that, somebody who comes in and is trustworthy and has a great personality could certainly blow it because the process is also important and a place like Midwestern College, where we highly value every individual and have a history of faculty governance and very egalitarian approach to decision making and a very participatory approach to deliberation, there would have – no matter how much trust people would have had in the president, had he not gone through a process that now has spanned six months or so – to start at the bottom level and let this grow organically involving all of these people, it would not have been widely accepted. There’s no substitute for either of those two ingredients in my mind. It takes somebody who has the personality, the strength of character and the kind of engender the whole cult of personality a little bit, and it takes the process. And if either of those is absent, I don’t think it’s enough to have a document that will energize people that actually will make people change what they have done, in some cases for 25 years. (administrator)

Summary

In order to use the culture, one must understand the culture. It is evidently clear that the president of Midwestern College spent the time. As a result of the trust and fit, the president could garner the attention and people listened to his description of the vision. One participant summed it up best in describing the outcome of the president
using a planning process and developing a vision that fits the institution when it was
shared that, “Anything that the new one does is going to be viewed with rose glasses.”

Using the Culture to Communicate the Vision

Research on college presidential visioning has revealed that successful presidents
are the ones that understand their institutions (including the culture), where the institution
is headed, and what the institution will become (Peck, 1983). In order to work within an
institution’s culture to develop and communicate a vision, the shared norms and values
that define culture must be affirmed and communicated in some tangible way (Beyer &
Trice, 1987).

The success of communicating the vision comes from two sides – one from the
president understanding the culture and the kind of process that would fit for the planning
process as well as the president formulating a vision that fits the culture of the institution.
At Midwestern College, the president spent a great deal of time and energy focused on
understanding the culture of the College. Through the time spent understanding the
history and culture of Midwestern College, the president was able to respond and interact
with the campus community in a way that acknowledged and honored the culture. The
contrast of how the former president interacted with the institution in ways that were
contrary to the culture of the institution presented a contrast for the members of
Midwestern College, affirming that they were not only looking for a president that “fit”
but also acknowledging that having a vision and a process that worked within the culture
was important.
The vision for Midwestern College

The institutional vision and strategic plan is organized into five sections that speak to the institution’s vision for the campus. The first section speaks to the academic priorities, and the importance of blending the theory and grounding in the liberal arts with application in the real world. Within these academic priorities will be a focus on the institution’s global connection. The second statement focuses on the student beyond the classroom and how to ensure that the students have the success and satisfaction that the College wants them to experience. The third area describes priorities for student enrollment, with the priority to increase the academic profile of the student body and to provide financial assistance to more students. The fourth focus is facilities as the facilities are in need of renovation, with preference given to preserving the historic buildings rather than new construction when possible. The fifth priority area is resources with the goal of better aligning human, financial and technology resources. The president noted that the College will need to, “set very concrete objectives for the resource base we need to build in order to fulfill the vision to become – to set a standard for a liberal education that connects theory and practice.”

The summary of the vision that was shared by the president describes these priorities:

Midwestern College affirms that a liberal arts education provides the singular best path to thoughtful, engaged, moral leadership in the increasingly complex global society of the 21st century. This education, grounded in the classical disciplines and complemented by multiple and varied opportunities for engagement with the world, equips students with the skills needed for lifelong learning and prepares them to be adaptable and innovative leaders in a future we cannot fully imagine today. We believe that an education that blends theory and practice, thought and action, inquiry and engagement, and the campus and the world has the power to
transform the lives of our students. We further believe that these students, equipped with this education, will have a powerful impact on the world in which they will live and work. We believe that Midwestern College has the opportunity, through the bold initiative and audacious aspirations reflected in this document, to set a new standard for a life-changing, liberal arts education and, in the process, to transform the College itself. It is to this high purpose that we devote ourselves and this vision for the future of Midwestern College.

**Culturally symbolic actions**

From the beginning of the presidential search, the president sought to understand Midwestern College’s culture through reading university publications and the history of the institution along with talking at length with former presidents and alumni. Actions described previously highlight the fact that the president was interested in understanding the history, the customs, and the way of doing business at Midwestern College. This understanding came from talking with people who knew the institution, from making many visits to campus even before starting the job, to devoting a significant amount of time listening to campus members in the early months of his presidency. With that understanding, the president could then use the symbols of the culture to communicate the vision. The president deliberately used symbols of the culture, such as stories and listening sessions, to illustrate the vision.

My public comments and even my article in the alumni magazine do not say “this is the vision. Here’s what we’re doing?” But I’m telling stories that are grounded in the story of the vision that we will be articulating. So I’m planting seeds in that way. In my continuing sessions with groups of faculty, ten or twelve faculty members coming to my house in the late afternoon always from different departments and I’ve just about finished those. But when I’m finished every member of the faculty will have been to one.
Similarly, in his inaugural address, the president painted the picture of that vision, providing hints of the priorities yet to be formalized, but that used language and made statements that fit the culture of Midwestern College. This statement is:

Today, all of us with responsibility for this institution – trustees, faculty, officers, staff, and alumni, students, and friends – stand where those who have gone before us have previously stood. We stand as stewards, entrusted for a time, with responsibility for a treasure. This treasure, made tangible in the buildings on this campus and in the lives of those who live and study here, reflects an even greater and even less tangible idea – the idea that an education makes a difference in the life of an individual, that educated citizens make a difference in the life of the world, and that a liberal education grounded in our practical idealism has a singular opportunity in this age to raise up a new generation of moral leaders for a global society. With humility, let us embrace this high calling and let us dedicate ourselves to these noble aspirations.

The president took action and made decisions that supported ideals in the vision. These actions are symbolic ways of demonstrating that the president has stated priorities for the institution. One example was the decision to elevate the chief student affairs officer position to a vice president. The strategic plan has specific initiatives to enhance the residential experience for students, to support transitions for students, such as First Year Experience, and to create enhanced community and tradition within the student body. The appointment of a vice president for student affairs supports that direction and priority for the institution. The president reflected about this decision:

Well one small – well maybe not small – the elevation of the Chief Student Affairs position to an officer level is a change. It’s an important symbolic statement about the importance of co-curricular life and about the importance of the representation of co-curricular life.

The president also hired a new enrollment vice president, a director of marketing and a director of human resources in the first year, representative of the priorities of the strategic plan.
Another example of a symbolic action that supports the institutional vision is the announcement at the inauguration of the president and the Board approving two new faculty positions. These positions will be in faculty areas that fit with the strategic plan, not necessarily where there are vacancies in departments. In the convocation address, the president shared:

We must work to increase the size of our faculty, building on our core strengths and diversifying the range of expertise represented here. I am thrilled to announce that this morning; our Board of Trustees approved two new tenure-track faculty lines, affirming the important work of our faculty both now and in the future.

The president further clarified the specifics of the new faculty in a conversation about six months after the inauguration.

We’ll be looking at ways to increase global studies in the curriculum on campus, and in fact we’re adding a position in International Political Economy, and a position in Islamic Studies in the faculty next year. Both new tenure track positions that relate to global issues.

A final way to examine how the president used the used cultural symbols to communicate the vision is to examine the five characteristics about the institutional culture and examine ways in which the president used cultural symbols to communicate the vision. The following table summarizes these five dimensions and ways in which the president used these aspects of the culture to communicate the vision.
Table 1. Dimensions of Culture and Cultural Symbols

With the understanding of the culture, the president has the opportunity to create and use new cultural symbols to enhance the communication of the vision. In this particular case, the president did very little changing and creating new culture and spent more effort using the existing culture to present new ideas. Because of the past experience with the former president, the new president focused on how to honor who Midwestern College is rather than trying to change it. However, one example of when the president did create a new cultural symbol related to the appointment of new faculty early in his presidency. The president has the goal of working with the faculty to make more strategic decisions, moving away from the egalitarian approach of decision making where everyone and every department is treated equally in areas like resource allocations. It has
been the culture of Midwestern College to replace faculty in departments as faculty leave or retire, keeping the number and mix of faculty in departments the same. The president’s approach recognizes faculty distribution must reflect enrollment demand in the marketplace. Departments that are more “marquee” programs or that have higher demand should have more faculty allocation, even if it means moving a faculty line from a department that has an opening. The president commented on the importance of this:

Resources are limited everywhere. Resources are finite. But they are not as limited often as people think they are. They are limited in part by the way we choose to utilize the resources we have, and one of our challenges here is to take stock of how we are currently using our resources, and I am finding a number of ways in which I think we can achieve some rather substantial savings by doing our work in different ways. Some of those changes will require some careful diplomacy because there are people who have things at stake in the status quo. But a part of what leads people to think that resources here are limited – a part of that is a result of the way we use resources. We’ve had a budget process for a very long time that is incremental, not strategic. If there are increases in departments, every department gets the same increase. The President’s Office has a discretionary fund. That fund has very little discretion because it funds the same things every year. These are things that should be rolled into departments but they aren’t rolled into departments because you can’t give one department a higher percentage increase than another. That cannot – that practice can not remain if we’re going to become strategic. That’s a small example. The idea of equity is deeply embedded in the culture, there’s no doubt about that. I think small liberal arts colleges tend to be more egalitarian. They tend to value equal treatment of all people, in ways such as no differential in compensation for faculty based on discipline, even when the market is leading it another way. Midwestern College is an extreme version of that general tendency. I think here – and that’s a part of why the processes are as they are – it’s important to take time to hear from everyone. There’s been a reluctance to allow a set of programs to become the marquee programs that lead the institution. I think it’s difficult when you try to be all things to all people all of the time. You get lost in the crowd. But that’s a risk we run in our current style of operation and I think that strategically long term we have to have a marquee presence.

Participants reflected on this change, acknowledging that it was a change in the culture. This move was described as “landmark” as it was so different than past practices
but the faculty were behind the decision as it made in conjunction with the university governance process. One administrator reflected:

There were six replacement positions, meaning faculty who were retiring and in normal years if we had six replacements and no new positions, there’d be no new positions. Those six departments would get their replacements. Not maybe automatic but certainly the hoop that you had to go through to bump one of those out was much more difficult. And in fact the replacement position request would have to had done something wrong. You’d have to show that an addition is necessary whereas you just have to maintain status quo for your replacement. On the first go round, and this happened in two stages largely because when we announced the two new positions, the first go round the committee decided it wanted to hold back on two replacement positions so it only granted four. And then it opened the review up all over again to all departments to compete for the last two, plus two for four – so that’s four positions. All of those four positions went to new departments. So the two that would have been the kind of incumbents lost. And that’s landmark here. And the four positions, I would say, follow very nicely the plan – the concepts. Two of them had to do with global position in religion, Islamic and Politics and Government. And two were reduced class sizes. Zoology had high class sizes. We want to get our class sizes lower, which is also part of what we’re talking about. More of a one to one. And English. So I would say the two new positions were split on the two things that we were trying to do – a new strategic plan for the institution and to the number of courses under nineteen at Midwestern College is much lower than that of our peer institutions and we made that known to the committee.

By taking this action of announcing new faculty positions and by working within the existing governance system at the College, the president made the direction that he was leading the institution tangible. This example, as well as the others presented, demonstrates that dichotomy that appears to develop, in taking action that supports the vision, even when it appears challenging, while taking that action in the context of the existing institutional culture.

*Fit and acceptance of the vision*

One measure of the cultural appropriateness of the vision is how well the vision appears to fit with members of the campus community. In this case, clues existed that
provided an indication of fit. Responses from the campus community indicated that not only did the process used to arrive at the vision fit the culture as previously described, but the content of the vision appeared to fit as well. One administrator described that the vision connects with the culture and that it does not require the institution to reinvent itself.

It’s bold in many respects, in the details. The ideas that I described don’t sound all that bold but when you look at what they translate down into, these are big changes. I think it fits because it is a validation of who we have always been in many respects. So we’re not reinventing ourselves. We’re just kind of clarifying who we are. And I think it fits because it addresses future possibilities for us. You know building on that historic base of who we are. How does that translate into the 21st century? You know this is an institution now – this is our third century of existence. You know how does that initial charter and that – all of that history and identity translate into the modern age, and how does it continue to be relevant to young people from all around the world that you know they might want to come here and be a part of it? I think it does both of those things and so I feel pretty good about it.

The responses from various constituents are also important. At an institution that has a strong faculty presence, the responses of the faculty are important. Participants reported that the faculty are responsive and those speaking against the plan are few or non-existent in some cases. The support was articulated by one administrator when the participant described, “The faculty have come together and have a very vibrant and energetic approach to really a full revisitation of the curriculum and issues that are looked at once every several decades.” A faculty member commented that, “I now don’t shake my head as much at some of the things that I saw before because I really see campus wide excitement at the possibility.” Others shared that:

The plan seems to fit and the faculty has responded very positively. They’re working on what I think might ultimately be some fairly significant changes in the
curriculum. The plan makes so much sense to everybody that there’s no reason not to move forward (administrator)

The plan would not work if it didn’t match who we felt we are and who we wanted to be. I don’t think any president, no matter how popular, could have come in and written a plan that told us we were going become an engineering college. That’s what we’re trying to do is something that really fits us, and it works in the international. We’ll be inventing interdisciplinary classes because that’s another way of crossing boundaries so we’ll encourage faculty too. More classes with more international content. And again, you can incentivize faculty to incorporate more international content into their class. It takes what is so foundationally the personality of Midwestern College and operationalizes it into the kinds of experiences that have been kind of proven as developmentally positive for students. So it’s the idea of community, it’s the idea of that challenge and support. (faculty)

The most important thing was for people to realize that bold action is required, and I think we’ve done a very good job of that. We’ve done our homework. We have a lot of quantitative data that backs up kind of us heading in this direction. We have a lot of comparative data that suggests that in the competitive arena that we exist in, if we fail to innovate and move forward we fall behind, and so I think for the most part people understand that and they’ve embraced that I think it’s largely the fact that we did have the actual kind of research to show people some quantitative data about our relative position. We had surveyed students and had lots of very solid information about that and have lots of information about how we rank across all kinds of factors. I would also say that I think we were helped by the fact that some of these ideas are not new to the campus. That the previous strategic plan, either there was a desire or a hint that that many of these things were on the horizon, but for whatever reason they were not tackled really in the previous strategic plan. It was, from what I understand – I wasn’t here – it was a very contentious point and there were people on both sides of it and really it drew some real passions out from different people. So but a new cast of characters is involved, and for whatever reason the detractors kind of went away and in fact some of the detractors are now avid supporters. Midwestern College is, you know, a place that embodies the highest ideals of what a liberal arts faculty governed institution should be about and so there may have been other solutions but I think that they would have created more problems and taken more time than they would have been worth. This kind of was the path that fit Midwestern College. (administrator)

The campus community members demonstrated the acceptance of the vision by voicing their support and participating in ways that were new to Midwestern College.
One faculty member noted a change in the engagement of new faculty as, “Younger faculty are voicing opinions more strongly than in the past and we need to do that. So I think everyone’s on the same page.” An administrator commented:

I think that the impact of cross departmental efforts could – and by the way I think it’s remarkable that the faculty has gotten behind this concept and they believe in it and I think the president was really smart in putting this all together.

A faculty member reflected specifically on the view of the faculty where they acknowledge that the vision and the direction have been accepted and it is now simply a matter of execution:

It’s definitely in keeping with what we do. We’re not changing curriculum. We’re just packing it differently. We’re not changing student experiences. We’re just packaging it differently. And I think that we’re still very parsimonious and that we’re not favoring one department over another. We’re not changing that either. But I think the faculty are ready to say “we need to get out there and we need the message.” I think the university is unified on a vision now. Whether or not he prioritizes based on where the money is, or whether or not he prioritizes based upon what the university really thinks should be high priority, I don’t know how to answer that. If I were him I would prioritize based on where the money is because you have really some quick successes pretty easily. I think the majority of faculty are waiting for him to do whatever he needs to do to get us going. I think the majority of faculty are going to say “Go ahead. If you think – go ahead.” I mean they’ll grumble and complain and all that other kind of stuff, but they’re going to say, “go ahead.”

“If People Aren’t Bitching, Then Something’s Wrong”

The participants in this study communicated much confidence and support for the president and the strategic planning process. The congruence between the institutional culture and the way in which the president understood the culture and worked within it was quite high. No process, however, is perfect and participants, as well as the president, reflected on ways that the campus community may not support the vision or that doubt exists about realizing the vision.
This most significant theme that emerged in examining disagreement reflected doubt that there would be funds to support the new vision. While people support the ideas, there is concern about how it will be achieved and should they get behind something that they do not see how it will become reality. While the president took action to develop the trust that the community believes him, the community is still looking for the evidence that the plan can be supported fiscally. One faculty member expressed the concern directly by stating, “No one’s going to believe that we’re fiscally going to be able to do it.” One administrator described the doubt as:

The easy one is resources. It’s now all of these things we are trying to do. Most of these things in the plan have a price tag and sometimes it’s a price tag that doesn’t have dollars on it, it has hours of work on it or it has a number of people required. You know that might be the price tag. But that so resourcing the plan in order to make it a success is the biggest and most obvious hurdle.

Another faculty member described the concern as follows:

The reality of the situation is you can have 20,000 great ideas but we’re not going to have the money to do all of them, so maybe some of this is wasted effort and we should be one, working on contingency plans in case the bottom drops out, and two, focusing on, really focusing on just a few things rather than lets get all these wonderful thoughts going. I’m not saying people are discontent or unhappy. I’m saying if there are any rumblings, that’s the rumblings and its not cause of the President. It is because of the economy. If the economy wasn’t as bad as it is. But when the Dow goes below 7 (sic 7,000) – you’d have to be an idiot to at least once in a while not to say “Oh my God. What if we’re 200 people short in our enrollment?”

Related to finding resources is the potential conflict of competing resources. This dilemma ties to the cultural dimension of a strong community, the siloed community and the egalitarian nature of Midwestern College. The nature of the College is to have a decentralized approach to the oversight of departments, allowing them to create their own agendas. In addition, it is the culture to treat departments equally. A faculty member
commented on this potential conflict with the vision and this siloed approach by stating,

“One is our needs are so great, we’re just not – we won’t be able to make it. And the
other is more along the lines of we have sort of what we call our way here. Our way is
that we pride ourselves on how individualized we’re allowed to be, how autonomous
each person can be within a department.”

One administrator described the impact of competing resources as follows:

There’re the naysayers of “how are we going to get the money to do this?” Or
“But our faculty salaries are low. We need to be putting our money into raising
the faculty salaries versus all these new initiatives.” And even if we could – if we
had the money – you know clearly the priority should be taking care of the faculty
first, and then doing this other stuff. So that’s one thing that is out there floating
around. And then just the general question of, Where are we going to get the
money? Where is it going to come from? How are we going to make this work,
especially in this economy? And then I think there’s the cynicism of we’ve been
through strategic planning processes before, and so forth. We’ve been there and
done that and oh its just another process and oh we know its really – in the big
picture its really not going to make any difference because you know at the end of
the day we’re going to have to find the money to do it and in this climate how are
we going to do that so we’ll go along with it but its not really going to make a
difference in what I do in terms of my day to day functioning in the classroom or
outside the classroom.

Another administrator described the reaction of some alumni that illustrates that change is
difficult as vision could potentially go against their understanding and the culture of the
institution:

I think that among older alums for instance there’s a bit of a concern that we’re
going to go too far towards the whole international thing, and that comes from a
very conservative bunch of people who may not really even understand what that
means. So I think some of the concepts that are being thrown out there are just
going whoosh over their heads. We’ve had a couple of people who have stood up
in some of these meetings who said, “Just get back to the basics.” which goes
back to where we were in sort of this insular silo – the basics mean – go to the
humanities department and study all day long. Don’t think about what the impact
of your studies has on the world or internationally or whatever. So we’ve got that
and that’s, from a curricular standpoint I think, has been a criticism among some of the people who just don’t understand.

Similarly another administrator pointed out that change is slow to happen and anything that could go against the culture of the institution may not be a good idea. This same administrator discussed the potential conflict with the vision and the idea of community and the fact that there is question about changing the way they call out the sense of community.

We have a long history and it’s not a place that changes over night. And so you know some of the things that are being called for are really all of our research to date suggests that the level of change required, the level of distinctiveness, which we have characterized in a broad sense using the word “bold”, it’s just not a way that the university has acted in the past. So that is a challenge, in and of it self. People could say, “You know what? This place is great. We don’t need to prove ourselves by trying to reinvent ourselves.” The international thing especially, I think, has drawn cynicism.

The close knit community thing is interesting because it in some respects cannot be seen or heard without it being a little bit of an accusation. You know “What do you mean we need to focus on that? We are a close knit community.” You know the notion of the Midwestern College family. How dare you suggest that we’re not.” That’s not really an argument against what we’re saying. It’s just an argument against the need to say it.

Another component of the symbolism of the vision that potentially can go against the institutional culture is the fact that the strategic plan could go against the egalitarian nature of the culture. The vision opens the door for some areas or departments may receive more funding than others as a way to built premiere programs. While there is support for this approach by those faculty and leaders involved in the strategic planning process, the participants noted that there could be faculty who disagree with that approach. One faculty member described this reality:
No one wants to give up a penny. And part of the strategic plan requires some reshuffling of resources and so that is going to be an issue, for the good of the order kind of thing. I think there will be some pockets on this campus that won’t be happy with it.

The president reflected on where he potentially sees disagreement within the campus community around the vision. He described it as:

There will be some people who, when we talk about theory into practice in a global perspective, will say well that doesn’t fit with what I do. And it may or may not fit with what they do I suspect – I actually think that it could fit with what everybody on this campus does. There will be tension among competing interests on campus. There are the academic programs. There’s co-curricular life. There are huge needs in the student affairs division and we have facilities needs on both the academic and residential sides of campus. We have under resourced programs and departments and there will be some competing needs and I think that ultimately the rising tide lifts all boats and we can structure the vision in a way that advances the entire university.

Summary

The findings in this study revealed ways in which the president used symbols of the culture to communicate a vision to the Midwestern College community. This insight was learned primarily through the perspective of the participants as well as from the reflection of the president. Through additional observation of events and review of documents, the understanding of the vision and of the culture of Midwestern College became more evident.

The findings can be summarized in six themes that were presented in this chapter. The first theme is that the communication of a vision using the culture begins in the presidential search. The actions of the College in setting priorities and a clear direction during this time make a difference in helping the presidential candidate understand the institutional culture. The second theme of presidential fit revealed that fit is an important
prerequisite to a president being accepted by the community and acknowledges that the president has demonstrated some understanding of the culture. Fit is less about actually communicating the vision and more about the president’s cultural understanding. The third theme in these findings was that the actions of the president early in the presidency and throughout the first year that are consistent with the culture and help reinforce the culture help to support the communication of the vision. The fourth theme in the findings was the importance of listening and developing trust as a means to communicate the vision. In this case, listening and developing trust allowed the president to act in a way that was culturally competent and develop relationships with the campus community, which helped in the development and communication of the vision. The fifth theme revealed was that the strategic planning process matters and a process that is congruent with the institutional culture contributes to a level of acceptance of the vision. The process employed and the way the process uses elements of the culture can create greater engagement by the campus community and a vision that makes sense to the members of the community. The final theme revealed through this inquiry was that the president’s actions that symbolize the institutional culture aid in painting a picture that make sense to the campus community. These symbolic actions that are culturally congruent represent that vision, even when the vision may be different than what has typically been the priorities of the institution.

An additional way to summarize the findings is to present each theme of the findings through the lens of the dimensions of the culture learned in this inquiry. The table below describes ways that the president used symbols of the culture to communicate
the vision for Midwestern College. In some cases, the president used cultural symbols that supported the culture while other symbolic actions were different than the institutional culture. Table 2 presents summary of several examples where the culture was used to create symbolic actions that promote the president’s priorities.
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<th><strong>Strong community and care for students</strong></th>
<th><strong>Strong university governance</strong></th>
<th><strong>Participatory decision making</strong></th>
<th><strong>Egalitarian</strong></th>
<th><strong>Siloed</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>Presidential search</td>
<td>Spent time on campus outside interview while a candidate</td>
<td>Priorities of governance shared with consultant</td>
<td>Presidential prospectus highlighted</td>
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<td>Presidential fit</td>
<td>Visibility on campus</td>
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<td>Broad communication to campus</td>
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<td>Moving students into residence halls</td>
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<td>Presidential actions</td>
<td>Inauguration – close dining halls for campuswide meal</td>
<td>Seeking counsel</td>
<td>30+ alumni meetings across the country</td>
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<td>Opening home</td>
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<td>Listening and trust</td>
<td>Frequent meals in the dining halls</td>
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<tr>
<td>Strategic planning process</td>
<td>Sign off on plan by governance before trustees</td>
<td>Campus wide committees for planning</td>
<td>Presentation of plan to campus for feedback</td>
<td>Development of cross disciplinary programs in plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Symbolic actions</td>
<td>Inauguration and role of students</td>
<td>Use of governance to appoint new faculty</td>
<td>Campuswide input into strategic plan</td>
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<td>Elevation of dean to students to Vice President</td>
<td>Choice of inauguration speakers</td>
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<td>Stories about institutional heros</td>
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Table 2. Synthesis of Cultural Dimensions and Presidential Actions

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In this inquiry, the president clearly understood the culture and used it in communication about the vision; both of ideas that he knew would be the same as what Midwestern College was currently doing but also in the ideas that may be new. The president, however, did not create new cultural symbols to communicate the vision in this inquiry; instead he used his understanding of the existing culture to generate new ideas to implement.
CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION

The discussion of this inquiry begins with the findings related to the research questions. First, the discussion centers on understanding the culture, which includes analysis of how the president performed the culture, and how listening and trust impacted this understanding. The discussion of findings continues with a description of how symbolic actions extended the understanding of the culture. This chapter also will touch on how the finding relate to the literature. I will revisit the model of presidential cultural competency followed by a review of implications for future research and limitations of the study.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore the use of cultural symbols (Beyer & Trice, 1987; Geertz, 1973; Tierney, 1988, 1989) at a four-year private college as a vision is presented by a new president. This study sought to investigate how a new president used existing cultural symbols and how new symbols are offered in order to communicate a vision. In addition, comprehending the perceptions and the interpretations of these cultural symbols by the institutional leadership group were important. Specifically, the study asks the following research questions:
1. How does a new university president use existing cultural symbols to communicate an institutional vision?

2. How does a new university president create and employ new cultural symbols in order to communicate an institutional vision?

3. How are these cultural symbols perceived and interpreted by the institutional leadership group (vice presidents, the president’s executive management team, faculty leadership)?

Understanding the Culture

In order for the president of Midwestern College to use cultural symbols to communicate an institutional vision, understanding the culture was critical for success. This cultural understanding began in the presidential search process and extended throughout the first year of his presidency. Clarity about the institutional culture was a shared responsibility between the president and the institution. While it is a typical expectation for the president to do the necessary work to gain an understanding of the institutional culture, this inquiry demonstrated the importance and the value of the officers of an institution presenting the dimensions of their culture. It does not mean that the culture cannot eventually change, but without that acknowledgement of the culture existing and having definable characteristics, then the chance of success in having the president understand the culture and use the culture is minimized.

In this inquiry, the institution set itself up for success by providing realistic information about the culture during the presidential search process. The presidential prospectus included specific descriptions about the university governance at Midwestern
College and described the history of the institution to paint a picture about the dimensions important to the College. This document painted a realistic picture of how the institution was positioned and described in the landscape of higher education, what the search committee sought in a president in terms of characteristics that fit with the institutional culture, and what are the institutional hopes for the future. The accuracy of this presidential prospectus was important because it described the institution realistically in terms of the culture, using words that resonated with the campus community. The prospectus also addressed a direction for the institution, and it allowed presidential candidates to understand this direction in the context of the existing culture. The qualities and the characteristics sought in the president fit with the culture of Midwestern College. This description did not limit future directions for the institution, but it did differentiate between these components. The tension that exists with presidential prospectus documents is the balance between what the institution is and what the institution wants to become. When the institutional community cannot agree on presidential characteristics or when the description does not accurately match the institution, then the prospectus may not serve its intended role. In the case of Midwestern College, the accuracy of the prospectus appeared to benefit the process.

In addition to a carefully crafted and realistic institutional description, the search consultant was able to represent Midwestern College to candidates and was able to eliminate candidates who did not appear to fit with the institutional priorities. The ability for the consultant to communicate the culture allowed the president to begin to understand the institutional culture and formulate thoughts about a vision during the
presidential selection process that reflected this culture. The consultant supplied information to the presidential candidates and provided the insight helpful to the president in forming that understanding of the institutional culture. The president shared that he did all he could to understand the College as soon as the position description was shared. It was from this initial position description that the institutional priorities began to take shape. This information was supplied through the consultant who represented the college well to the presidential candidates. The connection of the culture and the vision began before the first interview based on information written in the prospectus and from the search consultant that was truly representative about the institutional culture.

An unanswered question that arose in this study was the uncertainty about whether the clarity of understanding and shared agreement about what was important in a new president was a result of the campus leadership and trustees being able to agree or if the experience with the former president helped bring that clarity. Was this the result of an exceptional level of work by the consultant, teasing out these characteristics and building consensus or was it a result of common thinking in response to the experience with the former president? It is a crucial question because this level of agreement does not appear to be typical in searching for a new president. There was unanimous agreement among the faculty and administrative leadership, which seemed to be congruent with the views of the trustees. This question was not explored in this inquiry and therefore remains unanswered. However, it is evident that the role of the consultant in bringing a campus to consensus and crystallizing a level of clarity can result in a positive outcome, regardless of the source of the unity. While it may be either uncommon
or unrealistic to believe that all presidential searches can be conducted with such clarity, its importance is illustrated in this inquiry.

The president’s cultural understanding continued after the search process was complete. The president spent a great deal of time developing the cultural understanding in his first year by listening, meeting with people, and receiving and acting on feedback from the campus community. The president acknowledged the occasional misstep in his actions that perhaps were not congruent with the culture but the learning came from the feedback that was given from members of the campus community.

*Performing the culture*

The president demonstrated a comprehension of the culture through his actions. By being visible several times on campus prior to his arrival as president, creating community gatherings, sending campus wide communications about the state of the institution, opening his home to the campus community, engaging with the faculty governance committees, and using the existing structure to solve campus problems and carry forward the strategic planning process, the president showed consistently that he understood the institutional culture and had an appreciation for it. He felt congruence between his own style and way of doing business with the historic culture of the institution.

Demonstrating a cultural understanding provided the president with the opportunity to develop a vision that made sense within the current culture while also developing tenets of the vision that were different than the existing culture. This situation was less about the president developing new cultural symbols than it involved being able...
to explain and present his actions in the context of the existing culture. The development of the vision was done using a process that matched the culture by providing a strong level of participation from university governance, ideas were shared campus wide allowing for strong participatory decision making, and by using the community gatherings to generate input into the vision.

The vision itself contained elements that came from the president’s understanding of the institution as well as elements that came from the planning process. The strategic plan, which contained the vision for the College, was not a top down document, rather one that was organically developed with significant input from the campus community. The president chose to use elements of the institution that were seen as its hallmarks and developed a direction around those existing strengths, while using the data that was supplied through market research to inform the competiveness of the vision. Ideas of internationalization, theory and practice, and support for students in their transition to Midwestern College fit with the culture of the institution, thus they were symbols of the institutional culture.

Ideas presented in the vision also departed from the practice that has been typical for Midwestern College. For example, the idea of strategic investment in some academic programs to create hallmark majors or centers goes against the culture of egalitarianism that is accepted at Midwestern College. While we cannot project how these ideas will be implemented in the future, it appears that the president was able to build the case to show value in this idea because he worked with university governance to vet the idea, sought input, and developed the value of this idea in terms of how it fits within a liberal arts
institution. These were fundamental dimensions of the institutional culture. Therefore, in communicating a vision to a campus, actions do not necessarily need to agree with the culture provided there is a connection that the campus community can see, some congruence with how the institution defines itself.

*Listening and trust*

Perhaps one of the most clearly articulated themes about the President’s ability to understand the culture of the institution and use the culture to communicate the vision was the president’s ability to listen and develop a sense of trust with the campus community. The president’s ability to listen in order to demonstrate an understanding of the institution was critical. While the president described this as part of his nature, listening served him well in being able to assimilate multiple viewpoints into a description and an understanding of Midwestern College that allowed him to use the culture as a vehicle for communication. By listening, he heard multiple perspectives, some of which were in conflict with each other that led the president to a rich understanding of the institutional culture. The conversations he invited also served as a way for members of the campus community to frame the institutional values and beliefs in their own words, thus reaffirming the institutional values. The act of listening allowed him to use words later that were those of the institutional members, rather than the president.

The act of listening, along with actions that were congruent with the culture, led to a sense of trust in the president. One faculty member described this as “He’s been exactly who he said he was.” In this case, the institutional members appeared to value
trust more than other personal qualities often associated with strong leaders such as charisma. Trust was earned after consistent actions by the president and through words that fit with the institution. In other words, he appeared to “walk the talk.”

This trust was also developed through actions that were transparent. When the president saw something that did not make sense or he did not support, he dealt with it directly. Opening his house to the community and communicating the rationale of his decisions, were two examples of transparency that helped to build trust. This trust set the stage for being able to communicate the vision to the campus and have a strong level of agreement and buy in by community members.

The president engendered trust through his actions as a result of feedback he received from campus leaders. Through listening, the president was able to hear feedback that guided his future decisions and actions. This feedback helped him to shift his actions, demonstrating that he heard the feedback. This cycle of feedback, listening, and action congruent with the culture contributed to the trust the leadership developed in the president.

Participants discussed listening and trust frequently because these elements appeared to be missing in the former president. The reaction and relationship with the campus community and the former president was not built on a foundation of trust between the former president and the faculty. Therefore, in this inquiry, participants were able to reflect on the difference between the two presidents and offer a perspective of difference. With the current president, the importance of listening, which was a conscious act by the president, impacted the president’s ability to communicate the vision because
he understood the culture. The development of trust, on the other hand, was more of a by-
product of his actions as opposed to a deliberate goal. However, the same outcome was
realized because the level of trust allowed the new direction for the College to be heard
and understood by the campus community.

Symbolic Actions

How does a president use cultural symbols to present a vision? In this inquiry, the
president achieved this by developing a thorough understanding of the culture, by
listening and developing trust, by developing a vision that was related to the existing
institutional culture, and by presenting it in ways that were congruent with the culture.
Understanding the culture thoroughly allowed the president to know the types of cultural
symbols to use. Examples of these symbolic actions included the appointment of new
faculty that matched the priorities of the vision, the elevation of the dean of students to a
vice presidential position, supporting the importance of student life, the addition of new
campus wide celebrations to enhance the community, and implementing changes in the
budgeting and human resources approach. These decisions that were implemented
represented important tenets of the vision. These symbolic actions were well received
because the vision made sense to the campus and was developed with a clear
understanding of the culture in mind.

When actions were incongruent with the culture, the campus community told the
president. In fact, the president and the campus leadership admit that there were times
when the president make decisions that were less than perfect. The campus leadership
sent that feedback to him directly. Their feedback further clarified the cultural norms.
The president sought counsel from faculty and staff. The campus leaders also shared thoughts with the president at times when the president was heading in a direction that did not make sense. This feedback helped the president shape his actions as he continued to communicate his message.

The distinction between understanding the culture and performing the culture through symbolic actions is critical element of this inquiry’s results. The difference illustrates a level of nuance that dissects the complexity of this research question. The president uses tools to understand the culture through listening, conversation, observation, hearing the stories, and through the feedback received from campus community members. The campus members view the presidential actions and decisions as either being culturally congruent or not. Trust develops, as actions are increasingly culturally congruent. As trust develops, the president can make further decisions that may change the institution. As the president’s actions demonstrate an appreciation for the institutional values, beliefs and underlying assumptions, then the president can bring about change in the context of the culture that he understands. Therefore, it appears that success is less about using the culture as it is about understanding the culture in order to develop a vision that makes sense for the campus community.

How does a new president create and use new cultural symbols to present a vision? In this inquiry, the president did take actions that could be interpreted as new cultural symbols. For example, the decision to elevate the dean of students position to a vice president or the decision to support the approval of new faculty positions that were not simply filling of vacancies but added staff in areas that supported the institutional
direction could be described as new cultural symbols. In the process of communicating tenets of the vision, the president used the vehicles of communication that were appropriate according to his understanding of the culture. Actions he took were consistent with the culture and reinforced the values of the culture and reinforced points that were important for him to communicate.

Since this inquiry was done during the first year of the presidency and since the formal vision was presented at the end of the academic year and the conclusion of this study, few opportunities existed for the president to create new symbols of the culture to aid in this communication. If this inquiry were extended, the president may develop new cultural symbols as the vision is enacted.

The conclusion that can be taken away in this case is that understanding the culture and relating the vision to the institutional culture is critical. The understanding of the culture allows the president to use symbolic actions that align with the culture, even when the ideas are new ones. Presenting new ideas that use symbols that represent the familiarity of the culture allow the new ideas to take hold on campus.

How are these cultural symbols perceived and interpreted by the institutional leadership group? The description of the results is filled with the perspective of the campus leadership. These symbols were well received because they fit with their own cultural understanding. The campus leadership clearly stated that if the president wanted to change that the institution was, or attempt to create a vision that did not fit with the way they did business, then he would be unable to obtain it. A clear example was drawn from the experience with the previous president who attempted to develop a vision and a
strategic plan than did not advance because the process and the tenets did not match the institutional culture.

Discussion of Findings in Relation to Literature

Prior research about presidential succession has indicated that a president creates a vision and communicates that vision to the institutional members in order to help people visualize for themselves the institutional plan that the president envisions (Collins & Porras, 1998; Fisher et al., 1988). The discussion of the literature in this inquiry will touch on the presidential transition, presidential effectiveness, symbolic frames and making the vision real.

Presidential transition

The literature on presidential transition and succession described the impact that a presidential change has on an institution. The change is stressful not only for the president but also for the institution as the new leader and new priorities are introduced at the institution (McLaughlin, 1996). In this inquiry, the institutional members spent time, before the president arrived, getting to know and understand their priorities. This transition was aided by the fact that the institution was clear about its priorities in a president, and the faculty and board leadership were in agreement about those priorities. This inquiry supported the value of reflective time about the institution (Martin & Samels, 2004). Because the institution was able to accurately portray itself and its values to presidential candidates, a good fit could be found. In addition to the level of institutional self-reflection, the new president spent significant time getting to know the institution, with numerous visits to the campus prior to his official arrival. In addition, he
worked to fit into the culture of the institution rather than attempting to change the institution to fit him.

The transitional flow chart developed by Martin and Samels (2004) that described the conceptual approach to a presidential transition outlined seven phases in a presidential transition, from the steps needed when a presidential vacancy is realized to the arrival of the president. At Midwestern College, the phases and major steps outlined were similar to the process that occurred at the College. The transition flow chart also notes the importance of meeting with the prior president and the development of briefing books. The inquiry demonstrates the essential importance of building in opportunities for the new president to learn the institutional culture, in the transition prior to the arrival and during the early months of the presidency. A successful transition is more than the action steps but also the steps to ensure a cultural introduction. The conceptual phases of presidential transition did not speak clearly to the importance of the steps to clarify institutional priorities. While Martin and Samels’ model included a step to ensure the involvement of students, faculty and staff, it did not articulate the role that these groups would have early in the transition process. The inquiry at Midwestern College demonstrated how valuable this step was in a successful transition of the new president.

This particular institution found the transition to be smoother and less stressful than the typical presidential transition for several reasons. The institution was ready and welcoming of new leadership. After a former presidency that was disappointing for a segment of the campus, and because the support for the selection of this president was unanimous, the president came with a sense of fit or match at the outset. In addition, the
actions of the president demonstrated he understood and appreciated the history and the culture of the institution. He quickly learned the institutional stories so that he could relate them in discussion about the institution.

*Presidential effectiveness*

The literature highlighting presidential effectiveness (Fisher et al., 1988; Collins & Porras, 1998) described the successful president as one who develops an effective vision and helps campus community members visualize the institutional plan. This is done in the context of the president understanding the institutional culture (Peck, 1983). In this inquiry, the president demonstrated significant effectiveness by first understanding the institution, its history and who makes up fabric of the college. The president did not make assumptions about the culture based on his past experience but instead asked many people about the institutional history and how work gets carried out. He asked for the counsel of others to check out how actions might be perceived. This distinction is important as the president took significant time to listen, ask advice, and learn the stories of the institution to truly internalize the culture. The president was able to make the distinction between the college’s values, beliefs and understood assumptions from what he sees for its future. By understanding the institution’s history and embracing its expressed values, the president was able to set the new direction and focus while placing the new direction in the context of the institutional history and culture.

*Symbolic frames and symbolic actions*

Symbolic frames are explained in the literature (Bolman & Deal, 2003) as a way to describe an organization through stories, rituals and ceremonies. These mental pictures
created about the institution help members understand the culture and the features of the institution. These symbolic frames become the outward demonstration of the culture. These frames use themes from the existing culture to provide examples of bring the culture of the institution to life. The institutional culture is illustrated through actions in ceremonies, through the repetition of actions that become a regular part of the institutional activity, and through the stories that are told about the institution to continue to illustrate those themes for the community members.

The symbolic frames in this inquiry were evident in two ways. First, the president became more culturally competent through the symbolic frames that he learned about the institution. Through talking with former presidents, faculty, students and alumni, the president reported hearing the stories of the institution to gain a better sense of the culture of the institution. These symbolic frames are further enriched as they are interpreted through the eyes of the new president who brings his own referent culture through which these frames are processed. A great deal of discussion exists about how these cultural frames serve as a way to perpetuate the culture. With each new leader comes an opportunity to interpret the culture and add to the description of these symbolic frames.

As the president’s cultural competency increased, the institutional members began to recount stories of how the president’s behaviors supported their cultural understanding. Stories about how he opened his home to the campus community and how he interacted with faculty over difficult institutional issues were two examples shared consistently by participants that illustrated ways the president expressed cultural values. These stories
about the president further reinforced the president’s cultural competency and understanding.

Second, in addition to the president learning about the culture through these symbolic frames, the president, as his competence became greater, was able to share his own understanding of the institution’s personality through his own interpretation of the stories. During the presidential inauguration, the president recounted several important alumni and institutional historic events and tied them to points that were to become the themes of the vision and strategic plan. In addition, during the alumni meetings he held throughout the country, he told the stories of the institutional history and how these stories influenced the development of the institutional vision. The institutional vision was told through these historic stories. Thus, cultural frames demonstrated to be a successful way to communicate Midwestern College’s vision. The vision was built on the cultural strengths of the institution, on the history of its institutional strengths and from the research of what is important to students interested in colleges like Midwestern. The illustration of the vision through these cultural frames made sense.

Central to the cultural understanding of this study is the literature of Schein (1985) who presented the layers of culture that drive the understanding of presidential cultural competency. The president first understood the artifacts of the culture as he did his investigation of Midwestern College in the search process and as he listened to institutional stories early in his presidency. The president also took the time to pick up on and embrace the most fundamental elements of the institutional values and beliefs: strong university governance and the importance of community. The president’s actions
continually reinforced these foundational elements of the culture. Trust developed because of culturally congruent actions, transparent decision processes, listening, and actions that demonstrated that the president incorporated feedback on a routine basis and during considerations of important changes. Literature about trust in higher education is limited, although Nielsen and Newton (1997) discussed actions between presidents and boards of trustees that can develop trust, such as team building, and planning and organization. The discussion of trust appears more frequently in organizational behavior literature (Bennis & Nanus, 1997, Dovey, 2009).

Making the vision real

Research on college presidential visioning has revealed that successful presidents are the ones that understand their institutions (including the culture), where the institution is headed, and what the institution will become (Peck, 1983). In order to work within an institution’s culture to develop and communicate a vision, the shared norms and values that define culture must be affirmed and communicated in some tangible way (Beyer & Trice, 1987). These concrete ways bring the culture to the surface so that institutional members can understand the message the president is communicating and how it relates to the institution’s shared belief system. As the leader of the institution, the role of the president is to help shape and interpret the direction of the institution for the campus community within the context set by the culture of the institution. In order for a president to use and work within the institutional culture while presenting a vision for change, the president employs cultural forms to affirm and communicate the values and norms of the institution. While a number of cultural forms exist that aid in understanding of the
institutional culture, this study focuses on the use of symbols and symbolism by a
president communicating a vision.

Model of Presidential Cultural Competency

The model of presidential cultural competency appeared to be supported by this
inquiry. The idea that the president could create a vision for change through the culture
worked because the president framed the ideas through the culture which he spent time
getting to know and understand. The symbolic actions and the symbolic frames
demonstrated to the campus community that he appreciated and understood who they
were, and used cultural communication to describe that vision.

However, based on this inquiry, several new dimensions can be added to and
changed in the model. First, the notions of cultural change and cultural stability have
been refined to reflect cultural understanding and cultural foundation. The role of the
president in listening, talking, performing the culture and developing a vision resulted in
a cultural understanding rather than a cultural change. Change may ultimately result but
competency comes in the form of understanding. Similarly, cultural foundation is a more
accurate descriptor of the reality in the campus community. While culture serves as a
stabilizer for an institution, the role of trust, cultural frames and reaffirming assumptions
and conversation serve as reinforcements to the cultural foundation as opposed to serving
as stabilizers. The institutional culture is a foundation to the understanding for a
president, thus not necessarily a force that stabilizes, implying that change is unlikely.
The word foundation implies something that has been in place for a long time, by contrast
with the term stabilizer that suggests a force that may be apparent only during times of change.

Second, the importance of listening by the president has been added to the model. Listening demonstrated that it served as an additional component of cultural understanding. This act of listening plays a similar role as conversation and as symbolic actions that help to interpret the vision through a cultural lens.

Third, in addition to listening, the concept of trust was added to the model as well. Trust was shown by members of the campus community because of the president’s actions that demonstrated a cultural understanding and actions that culturally congruent. The community gave feedback to the president that allowed him to continue to use the cultural lens to develop and communicate the vision. The trust came from the president’s understanding of the culture and demonstrating that in ways that make sense in the institutional culture. Trust fails to develop and is undermined when the campus community believes that the president does not hear or understand the institution and when actions are incongruent with the institution underlying assumptions, values and beliefs. Conversely, when trust develops, and the president continues to reinforce his cultural understanding and commitment through his actions, the community demonstrated more tolerance and support of the president, allowing the president to further his vision and his agenda.

This study also revealed a different perspective on referent culture. The referent culture played a role as the president described and created direction for its business operation, and reinforced the notion of the value of a liberal arts college. However, with
respect to the human side of the institution, the president made little reference to the referent culture. The president acknowledged that Midwestern College was a different place than his former institution and at no time did he attempt to make comparisons between Midwestern College and his former institution. He acknowledged the strengths and challenges of Midwestern College.

The revised model of institutional cultural competency is shown in Figure 5.1.

![Figure 5.1: Presidential Culture Competency Revised](image)

Presidential Cultural Competency
Adapted from the work of Schein (1985), Ford (1990), Bumaen & Deel (2003)

Figure 5.1: Presidential Culture Competency Revised
Implications for Practice

This inquiry has revealed several implications that can inform our future practice in the transition of a new president and in the communication of a vision. Examining this impact of practice is important because of the high stakes for an institution in welcoming a new president. The success of the transition and the success of getting the institution on track with a new vision or strategic plan are essential for success.

This inquiry can help inform presidential search firms and Board of Trustees in several ways. First, it illustrates the importance of clarity around the qualities desired in a candidate. When the priorities are shared between the faculty, the Board and the campus leadership, then the ability for the search firm to articulate those priorities with candidates can be enhanced. In this case, the consensus built around the desired characteristics in a new president along with the clarity in which the priorities were communicated helped Midwestern College find a candidate that matched both the needs and the culture of the institution. This consensus can allow better identification of candidates whose personal qualities fit the culture of the institution.

Second, along with the actions of the institution, the actions of the president are equally important. Before the president can effectively communicate a vision, the president must first understand the culture of the institution. While much is written about effective presidents, little emphasis is put on the presidential cultural competency that a president must demonstrate in order to build an effective vision and communicate it within the context of the culture. Siegel (2001) discussed the learning that needs to take place in a president’s first year. In this study, he noted the importance of the president
intentionally understands the institutional culture. This understanding helps to interpret the culture to be able to turn that into contents of the vision.

Third, often a president is called upon to bring change to an institution, as directed by the Board, but also as communicated by the faculty or the campus leadership. Effective presidents will understand and use elements of the culture to lead that change, rather than ignoring the past behavior in making change. Because the culture can act as an institutional foundation, it cannot be ignored during times of change. Furthermore, the campus community can connect when the president demonstrates an understanding of the culture and uses it to help illustrate the direction for change. The mistake that a new president can make is to underestimate the lack of connection when a president creates a vision or takes actions that do not have a context grounded in the institutional culture. The lesson for practice is that a new president must not only understand the institutional culture, but also frame the new institutional direction in its context. Leadership characteristics, such as charisma, organization and creativity, are important and are only part of the picture when developing and communicating a vision. The president’s cultural competency is critical to success. This competency is gained through listening, conversation, and symbolic actions, and is demonstrated through symbolic frames, sharing the vision and through reaffirming the assumptions offered by the president.

Finally, the implication for practice for the campus community is to ensure the education of the president in making sense of the culture. The feedback offered to the president is essential. The work in developing a vision, along with the president, that allows for change but incorporates the connections with the culture is critical. Often the
requirement to understand the culture and to interpret the culture becomes the responsibility of the president. This responsibility should be shared through feedback to the president from the campus community.

Limitations of Inquiry

This inquiry provided excellent insight into how a president can present a vision to a campus using cultural forms. The inquiry provided insight into one institution’s experience. There is value in using an in depth approach to one institution as it allows for careful and thorough analysis of a phenomenon. Yet the limitation is that it is only one institution’s experience. The information and the experiences of these individuals are helpful in our understanding of something that is challenging to analyze. Yet the ability make broader statements about this experience is limited. Replication of similar studies and examination of the cultural competency model can help contribute to the understanding of the role of culture in communicating a vision.

A second limitation of this study is the degree to which the campus community was united around the choice of the president and the analysis of his effectiveness. Rarely is there such unanimous support and lack of criticism from the campus community when a new president arrives. While this agreement was atypical, valuable information can be taken away from this inquiry in the importance of sharpening the cultural understanding of the institution. The president, even with similar actions, may not have been able to communicate the vision so easily and clearly had the campus community been less united about the need for different leadership. The president’s actions appeared to be culturally competent because of his ability to understand the culture and take action that reinforced
this understanding in building the vision. Change was possible because the president was able to understand the culture and craft change within that context, rather than choosing a direction that did not fit the institution and what makes it have its identity.

Another potential limitation relates to the extraordinary support of the campus leadership around the president’s actions and directions. It is reasonable to question whether the unity the leadership expressed about the president’s actions may be so positive that supporters may become reluctant to speak up because of the level of group support. This dynamic is difficult to quantify and I have no evidence to believe this phenomenon was occurring. This same leadership group was not reluctant to express dissatisfaction with the previous president, for example.

A final limitation of this study is the degree to which the culture can actually be defined and understood. There are components of the culture that remain hidden and that can be ambiguous (Siegel, 2001). An assumption exists that the culture can be clearly recognized and defined at an institution. At Midwestern College, it was clearly articulated. At another institution, it may not be. This reality may result in a different understanding or outcome as this particular concept is further investigated.

Implications for Further Study

While this inquiry resulted in further understanding of a complex concept such as presidential cultural competency, more opportunity exists for further study. The first area for further work is in the further development of the presidential search and the role of the search consultant. Institutions change presidents frequently and most now use search firms to manage the presidential selection process. Better understanding the roles of these
consultants in what institutions deem successful and failed searches could inform boards, senior leaders and faculty charged with selection of a new president of the nuances and the important questions to ask. In this inquiry, it was unclear if the consensus around the presidential selection and the clarity of characteristics could be attributed to the work on the consultant or the experience the institution had with a prior president.

An additional area of inquiry is to further examine this concept of presidential cultural competency. In this case, the cultural understanding was demonstrated through symbolic actions and decision-making that was culturally consistent, thus developing trust. This outcome may not be true in other settings, particularly when the institution may have a different situation with a former president.

Finally this inquiry should be repeated in a variety of institutional types. While these concepts fit within a private, liberal arts college, an understanding of being culturally competent and its role in promoting a vision may be different in another institutional type.

Summary

The change of institutional leadership is not an easy time for a college or university. Choosing an appropriate leader can have a lasting impact on an institution. In this process, the role of the culture and the role of the vision are critical to the success of the president and the institution achieving its goals. A president who demonstrates competency in the culture can use this competence to communicate a vision. Using culturally symbolic actions not only can develop trust within the campus community but it also can illustrate the vision in a way that connects it to what the campus community
already knows. A change in direction for an institution must be tied to the institutional culture in some way in order to be successful. This inquiry demonstrates the importance of presidential cultural competency and broadens our understanding of the way a new president integrates with an institution and communicates a vision appropriate to the challenges it faces.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

LETTER OF INVITATION FOR PRESIDENT

President
Midwestern College

Dear Dr. President:

I am writing to you to invite you and your senior administrative and faculty leadership team to participate in my dissertation research study. I am a doctoral candidate pursuing a degree in Educational Administration and Higher Education at The Ohio State University. Currently, I am in the process of completing my dissertation, under the supervision of Dr. Ada Demb, Associate Professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs.

The topic of my dissertation is to understand how a new university president presents his/her vision to colleagues and the campus. I have created a model that describes how a new president advances the communication of a vision. This study will explore ways in which a new president communicates a vision and how this communication is perceived and interpreted by the institutional leadership group.

I plan to explore these dynamics through observation, document analysis and interviews with you, your senior administrative leadership team and faculty leadership. I am using a single case study for this inquiry. The institution will be blind in the study; it will not be named, simply described generally through institutional characteristics. I will use three ways to collect data – observation (inauguration, meetings where you would preside, other institutional ceremonies, informal observation around campus), document review (vision or planning statement, presidential search prospectus, your speeches, etc.) and two rounds of interviews.

The interviews would involve individual meetings, and will include you, your administrative leadership, and faculty leadership. I will develop a preliminary list of individuals to interview and would welcome your assistance in identifying an appropriate group. I will also be asking the other administrators to help identify appropriate faculty leaders. Each person will receive an individual letter of invitation to participate in the study. If you were willing, perhaps we could include a short cover letter from you to accompany my letter of invitation to the others. I would like to schedule two rounds of interviews, the first during September and the other during the 2nd semester, e.g., February. Each round of interviews will be conducted during a one- or two-day visit to campus. Interviews would be conducted individually and will last approximately one hour. It is my plan to audio-tape the interviews to aid with accuracy. No one will be identified by name on the tape, and the tapes will be kept in a secure location away from the Ohio State campus. After each round of interviews, I will offer each person a hard copy summary to review.
The observations would take place throughout this coming school year as different events take place. The first event would be the new student convocation and the second would be your inauguration. Other events would be selected in consultation with your and other administrators. In total, I anticipate visiting the campus 4 – 6 times during the school year. I would plan to complete the data collection by the end of the school year.

All participant information will be handled to preserve anonymity and confidentiality. Each participant will have opportunity to assume a pseudonym for reporting purposes. Participation is completely voluntary and all of the data and results will be maintained in a location away from your campus in a secure, locked filing cabinet. At any time, if a participant were to feel it not in their best interest to participate, he/she may remove him or herself from the interview or study process, with no consequences. Each participant will be asked to sign a consent form that outlines the research and the inquiry process.

I would like to begin institutional visits Aug. 21. If possible, I would like to conduct the first round of interviews during the week of September 8. I plan to attend the inauguration and alumni weekend October 10 – 12. The interview portion of my research will culminate with the 2nd round of interviews in late February or early March.

I will contact your office to confirm your agreement to participate. In the meantime, if you have any questions, please contact me at 614-688-4279 or by email at wiser.11@osu.edu. My academic and dissertation advisor, Dr. Ada Demb, is available as a resource and can be reached at 614-292-1865 or by email at demb.1@osu.edu. Thank you so much for your interest and support of this study. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Beth A. Wiser
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Administration and Higher Education

Ada Demb, Ed.D.
Associate Professor
School of Educational Policy and Leadership
APPENDIX B

LETTER OF INVITATION FOR CAMPUS LEADERS

Date

Senior administrator (fill in the name)
Midwestern College

Dear Dr. XXX:

I am writing to you to invite you to participate in my dissertation research study. I am a doctoral candidate pursuing a degree in Educational Administration and Higher Education at The Ohio State University. Currently, I am in the process of completing my dissertation, under the supervision of Dr. Ada Demb, Associate Professor of Higher Education and Student Affairs.

The topic of my dissertation is to understand how a new university president presents his/her vision to colleagues and the campus. I have created a model that describes how a new president advances the communication of a vision. This study will explore ways in which a new president uses symbols in order to communicate a vision and how these symbols are perceived and interpreted by the institutional leadership group.

I plan to explore these dynamics through observation, document analysis and interviews with the president, the senior administrative leadership team and faculty leadership. I am using a single case study for this inquiry. The institution will be blind in the study; it will not be named, simply described generally through institutional characteristics. I will use three ways to collect data – observation (inauguration, meetings where the president would preside, other institutional ceremonies, informal observation around campus), document review (vision or planning statement, presidential search prospectus, presidential speeches, etc.) and two rounds of interviews.

The interviews would involve an individual meeting with you during which time I would ask a series of questions that would prompt discussion around your perceptions of the president’s communication of the institutional vision. I would like to schedule two rounds of interviews, the first during September and the other during the 2nd semester. Each round of interviews will be conducted during a one- or two-day visit to campus. Interviews would be conducted individually and will last approximately one hour. It is my plan to audio-tape the interviews to aid with accuracy. No one will be identified by
name on the tape, and the tapes will be kept in a secure location away from the Ohio State campus. After each round of interviews, I will offer you a hard copy summary to review.

The observations would take place throughout this coming school year as different events take place. The first event would be the new student convocation and the second would be the presidential inauguration. Other events would be selected in consultation with you as a senior administrator, and other interviewees. In total, I anticipate visiting the campus 4–6 times during the school year. I would plan to complete the data collection by the end of the school year.

All participant information will be handled to preserve anonymity and confidentiality. You will have opportunity to assume a pseudonym for reporting purposes. Participation is completely voluntary and all of the data and results will be maintained in a location away from your campus in a secure, locked filing cabinet. At any time, if you were to feel it not in your best interest to participate, you may remove yourself from the interview or study process, with no consequences. You will be asked to sign a consent form that outlines the research and the inquiry process.

To confirm your participation, please email or call me at wiser.11@osu.edu or 614-688-4279. My academic advisory and dissertation chair, Dr. Ada Demb, is available as a resource and can be reached at 614-292-1865 or by email at demb.1@osu.edu.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Beth A. Wiser
Doctoral Candidate
Educational Administration and Higher Education

Ada Demb, Ed.D.
Associate Professor
School of Educational Policy and Leadership
APPENDIX C

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Protocol # 2008E0541

I consent to participating in research entitled: The New University President: Communicating a Vision Through Symbolic Cultural Forms.

Ada Demb, Principal Investigator, or her authorized representative and Co-PI, Beth Wiser, has explained the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and the expected duration of my participation. I understand that the interview will be audio-taped and that I will have an opportunity to review a hard copy of the transcript. Possible benefits of the study have been described, as have procedures for assuring personal and campus anonymity.

I acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to obtain additional information regarding the study and that any questions I have raised have been answered to my full satisfaction. Furthermore, I understand that I am free to withdraw consent at any time and to discontinue participation in the study without consequences to me.

Finally, I acknowledge that I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.

Signed:

________________________________________________________________________
(Participant)

Signed:

________________________________________________________________________
(Principal Investigator or Co-PI)

________________________________________________________________________
(Date)
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – ROUND 1

CAMPUS LEADERSHIP

1.  a. What was Midwestern College looking for in a president? Why was this President the best choice for Midwestern College?  
   b. Were you on the search committee? How satisfied were you that the search committee took into account the most important dimensions of the College and its situation?

2.  What is most significant about the history and traditions that distinguishes this college?

3.  What is it about the way that the College is run that is unique?

4.  Typically how is new information communicated among its administrators? With the administration and campus leaders? And with the broader campus community?

5.  What have been some of the most effective ways of communicating new information among the leadership and the rest of the campus community? What has not worked in the past?

6.  Tell me about the vision the president has for Midwestern College? How was it developed? Who had input into the development? What are the priorities?

7.  a. As you consider the President’s vision in the context of the history and traditions of the College, how does it compare? Where is it similar? How might it enhance those traditions? How might it change them?  
   b. How appropriate do you believe it is?

8.  What plans are you aware of for sharing the vision? What will be your role in that process?

9.  What channels of communication do you believe will be used? What complications do you anticipate? How do you think these complications will be handled?

10. As we seek to understand the communication between senior administration, faculty leadership and the President, what haven’t I asked that you think would be important to mention that would help us develop a more nuanced understanding?
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – ROUND 1
PRESIDENT

1. Why did you want to become president of Midwestern College?

2. What did you know about the history and traditions of this institution before coming to the College? Were there particular stories or events that illustrated those traditions? Which do you feel are important? Ones that you plan to preserve? Ones you plan to change?

3. What did you know about the way business is done at the College before arriving? Were there stories or illustrations that were shared with you before arriving? Which of these do you feel are most important? Ways that you plan to preserve? Practices that you would like to change?

4. Tell me about the vision you have for Midwestern College? How was it developed? Who had input into the development? What are the priorities?

5. In what ways is your vision consistent with the institution’s history or tradition? In what ways does it enhance the history/tradition? In what ways does it differ?

6. What plans do you have to share the vision? What channels for communication are there?

7. What complications do you anticipate? How do you think you will expect to handle these complications?

8. As we seek to understand the communication between senior administration, faculty leadership and the President, what haven’t I asked that you think would be important to mention that would help us develop a more nuanced understanding?
APPENDIX E

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS – ROUND 2

CAMPUS LEADERSHIP

1. Tell me about the vision the president has developed for Midwestern College?

2. a. As you consider the President’s vision in the context of the history and traditions of the College, how does it compare? Where is it similar? How might it enhance those traditions? How might it change them?
   b. How appropriate do you believe it is?

3. How was the developed? Who had input into the development?

4. What opportunities did you have for input? What did you suggest? Were those suggestions accommodated?

5. What plans are you aware of for sharing the vision? What channels of communication will be used to share the vision? What will be your role in that process?

6. What complications do you anticipate? How do you think these complications will be handled?

7. Could you give me some examples of decisions that have been made recently or changes that the President has made at Midwestern College that you believe are related to the vision?

8. Are there voices that disagree with the direction of the College? If so, what are they saying?

9. As we seek to understand the communication between senior administration, faculty leadership and the President, what haven’t I asked that you think would be important to mention that would help us develop a more nuanced understanding?
INTerview QUESTIONS – ROUND 2
PRESIDENT

1. What have you done (or important decisions you have made) in the past 3 months that have demonstrated your priorities for the College?

2. What about the history and traditions of this institution are you beginning to preserve in the direction you are taking Midwestern College? Ones you plan to change?

3. Can you share a story or an illustration of something you have preserved about the way business is done? Likewise is there an illustration or story about practices you’ve begun to change?

4. Talk about the priorities for the vision that you started with for the College has changed since you arrived? Whose input was most influential as you modified the vision?

5. How did the institution’s history and tradition influence the tradition and history influence the development or articulation of the vision? How does your vision enhance or modify traditions?

6. How are the plans for communicating the vision working out? Which of the channels of communication you intended to use working out? Which are least effective? Are there new ones that you found and have utilized? If so what are they?

7. What is unique about the “personality” of the College that have influenced how you have communicated your vision?

8. Which of the complications that you anticipated presented themselves? Which did not? And what were the surprises? How did you handle them?

9. As we seek to understand the communication between senior administration, faculty leadership and the President, what haven’t I asked that you think would be important to mention that would help us develop a more nuanced understanding?
APPENDIX F: LIST OF DOCUMENTS

The following documents were reviewed in the document analysis:

Midwestern College Presidential Advertisement
Midwestern College Presidential Prospectus
President’s Application Cover Letter
Presidential Announcement from chair Board of Trustees
Letter of Welcome from President to campus community
President’s Report to Board of Trustees 1/2008
President’s Report to Board of Trustees 1/2009
Presidential Objectives
Presidential communication to Board of Trustees (2)
Recommendations for a New Curricular Plan
Speeches:
   New Student Convocation
   Inauguration
   Graduation
Midwestern College Strategic Plan
Midwestern College Strategic Plan 2009-2011

Faculty Motion to Endorse Midwestern College Strategic Plan

Strategic Plan timeline

Quarterly Communications to the campus community (4)