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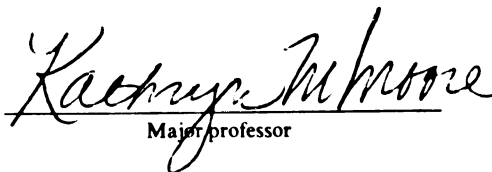
THE JOURNEY INTO COMMUNITY: THE PROFESSIONAL
LEARNING COMMUNITY IN ONE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

presented by

David Anthony Sam

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph. D. degree in Higher, Adult, & Lifelong Ed


Major professor

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THE JOURNEY INTO COMMUNITY:
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY IN ONE COMMUNITY
COLLEGE

VOLUME I

By

David Anthony Sam

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Educational Administration

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ABSTRACT

THE JOURNEY INTO COMMUNITY: THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY IN ONE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By

David Anthony Sam

Within the conceptual framework of the Learning Organization, this qualitative case study explored how faculty members at one Midwestern community college described their experiences as participants in several Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The objective of the study was to assist in understanding how various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics may foster or obstruct the development of PLCs in community colleges. A Professional Learning Community refers to a specific kind of knowledge community or community of practice which has learning or knowledge creation as a goal intimately connected to the organization's purpose of teaching and learning. There follows a categorization of those strategies, actions, and characteristics of individual faculty members, departments, groups/teams, leaders, and the overall organization that may foster or serve as barriers to the development of PLCs at that college. The study concludes with some general conclusions regarding the PLC and organizational change, recommendations for practitioners who seek to foster PLCs, and recommendations for further research into PLCs.

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2002

DEDICATION

To Linda,

my love, my wife, my friend
who believed in me, helped me in countless ways, and refused to let me quit when I was
discouraged.

You now will have a husband on weekends.

For my

IN MEMORIAM

For my father, Tony Sam, whose love and belief in me was always important, no matter what I said.

And for Carolyn Desjardins, the sister to us all.

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I owe many people my deepest gratitude for their part in making this dissertation possible. Daniel Jaksen, Richard Saunders, Barbara Einhardt, and George Keith encouraged me in my career and in seeking a PhD. Lee Howser, now retired as President of Jackson Community College, supported me not only with his words and experiences, but by providing me professional leave days so that I might have more time to write. Also thanks to many other people at JCC, too numerous to mention, who supported me in many ways. My doctoral committee—Kay Moore, Ann Austin, Marilyn Amey, and Ellen Kossek—provided that mixture of support and challenge to encourage me toward my best effort. I want to especially thank my committee chair, Kay Moore. She coached me to be a better researcher, one willing to risk my thinking among the community of scholars.

Thanks also go to the kind and generous people at the real place that I have disguised as Midwest Community College. They invested their time, memories, and thoughts with a stranger who arrived bearing no gifts except a hungry ear. The executives of the college gave me full access to the institution, documents, and meetings without asking anything in return.

On a personal level, I must thank a long-time friend, Dwight Baker, for our joint pact to challenge each other onward. It is your turn now, Dwight. My children, Michelle and Ryan, saw less of me than they otherwise might have but supported me in my quest. My mother, Ann, and my now deceased father, Tony, placed within me the passion to learn and the courage to be myself. Finally, my wife, Linda, not only tolerated my long hours immersed in this doctoral journey, not only encouraged me through the many rough times, but took many hours of her own time to serve as editor and proofreader. Her unselfish support made my journey less lonely.

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PREFACE

When I began this research, conflicts between the ideals of individualism and of community in American life were a salient topic. As we shall discuss in the literature review, works such as *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam (2000) were very much in the news, decrying the loss of community and “civic engagement” in American life. To me this seems an ongoing conversation of two tendencies in our society: a conversation and conflict that has been one spine throughout American history. My study, focusing on faculty work in the community college and localized to one specific setting, was intended to add to that larger conversation.

The events of September 11, 2001 and after have changed the context for this research as well as for the ongoing interplay between individualism and community in American life. Individuals in what we supposed to be the most individualistic city—a city supposedly with no heart—rushed to help each other, and often died in the attempt. In the past, such threats have brought out the best in individuals and communities, and sometimes the worst. On and since September 11, we have seen much of the best, and only a little of the worst. As a nation, we struggle with our historic preference of individualism over community. And we wonder at the paradox of citizen soldiers surrendering their lives—the ultimate sacrifice of their individuality—to preserve both their community and its ideal of individualism. Meanwhile, the new enemy we face has a hierarchic view of the world, sees the ideal of individualism as satanic, and seeks to cover it permanently in veils or with the soil of the grave.

Although the context and our history have changed, the interplay, conflict, and conversation between individualism and community will continue in our story. This research becomes neither more nor less important as a result. But its color is hues by these larger

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events and this greater struggle. As a result, the journey of individual faculty members into community may seem smaller than before...or more poignant than ever.

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KEY TO ABBREVIATIONS

AAHE — American Association for Higher Education

LC — Learning College

LO - Learning Organization

LTC — Learning Technology Center

PLC — Professional Learning Community

Beginnings: An Introduction

The August morning was remarkably temperate as I drove into Urban City, turning off the interstate and onto a moderately busy city street. Just two blocks from the freeway, the buildings of the Midwest Community College campus stood before me, almost monolithic in the light tan-gray of formed concrete. I turned twice, then onto a street that took me towards the multi-level parking garage, where I took the ticket, drove to the third level, and found a parking spot near a sign that pointed to a walkway. I took a deep breath. This was a new kind of research, and I hoped I would not embarrass myself too much. I exited the car, took my rolling research suitcase, and began to stroll through the garage to the skywalk.

The skywalk hovered above the city street, connecting the garage with one of the campus buildings. As I strolled through the skywalk, the sun warmed me and also heated the enclosed air. Several people walking the other way, including a maintenance worker and a security guard, smiled or said hello. The skywalk led me into the Learning Technology Center (LTC) and its third of four floors. Computer screens flickered, and the chrome or painted exposed infrastructure of pipes, cables, lighting, and girders gave what I assumed was intended to be a “modern and high-tech” look to the facility. Computer workstations in the hall offered students the opportunity to surf the college web site, explore the campus by touch screen, or register for classes. I saw one student sitting at a station. In the center of the building, a stairwell rose to the fourth floor and dropped into the lower levels.

The LTC connected to two other buildings, one due east and one south. I turned south, following the signs. Doors opened from one building to another, as I navigated the campus from inside. None of the buildings had windows from the core, where students and I walked to the external world; but as I looked through open classroom doors, I could see

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that most classrooms did have windows, opening onto the central courtyard or out into the city streets. After passing through six buildings, I reached the administrative building where I was scheduled to meet with Dr. Paula Galligan, the Vice President for Instruction. The elevator took me to the ground floor, and I walked by her open office door. Being about an hour early, I passed outside into a central courtyard, a vast expanse of the same concrete, surrounded by some 14 multi-story buildings. At more or less the center of the courtyard, several steps led to a set of bubble glass skylights, around which pennants flew, one saying "Midwest Community College," one "A Learning College," and six listing the principles of the Learning College, all in the red and gray colors of the college. To the south and west, or back towards the interstate, there was a tall monolithic tower, at the top a bloc, capital "M." It all seemed impersonal, uniform, and institutional. I wondered about the climate for community within such architecture.

Students seemed not to notice the architecture. Mostly young men and women sat on steps, stood in groups, or strode quickly across the courtyard. There were the sounds and sights of a traditional college, with an occasional older student. But it was a Friday morning. Most likely, older working students would be in greater numbers on weeknights. I turned back into the administrative building. It was close to lunchtime, and the door to the Vice President's office was now closed. I sat down on a cloth couch, one of many in the center of the building, arranged as conversation pits. Several students sat on other couches, apparently waiting appointments with counseling offices or other offices around the periphery.

At noon, the Vice President's door opened, I stood and entered. The office was decorated in wood, warm and comfortable, with original paintings and sculpture tastefully arranged. The Vice President and Assistant Vice President each had an office, and there were two cubicles in the reception area. Martin Bentley, the assistant to the Vice President,

welcomed me. He stood to a medium height, shook my hand, and said, “Dr. Galligan will be right with you.” I said my thanks. He telephoned Dr. Galligan, who came out to greet me herself. “David. Welcome.” She shook my hand. Galligan, in her late fifties, had a wide smile and bright eyes behind wire-rim glasses. Her full-length patterned dress and sweater gave me the impression of an artist’s costume, not the uniform of a corporate VP. We walked into her office and sat at a round table on which she had provided salads and iced teas for lunch. As we ate, she asked me to again explain the purpose of my research. From then on, my experience with the people of Midwest was one of warm welcome and generous cooperation. And I did find community amid the concrete towers.

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CHAPTER ONE

The Research Problem

We must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our community as members of the same body.

-John Winthrop, first governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony (1630)

Introduction to the Problem

This study is about the journey into community and into learning in community. It is also about the change in relationship, the change in thinking and being that this journey requires. It is about how people who have worked in isolation may move toward working in relation, and how changes in roles and assumptions may be the most fundamental learning required for a new kind of organization. Finally, it is about how an organization changes to foster that community and that learning.

Throughout the decade of the 1990s, writers about and leaders of community colleges have been preaching the merits of the *Learning Organization* (Dixon, 1995; Marquardt, 1996; Senge, 1990a; Watkins & Marsick, 1993), much like their colleagues in business or other sectors of education. Many have focused on O'Banion's *Learning College* (1996, 1997b). Others have described their college as a *Professional Learning Community* (PLC). Presidents have written about their efforts to drive this change throughout their college campuses. All call for a new kind of organization—a more democratic one that has the characteristics of a community, one in which innovation about core technologies and fundamental and continuous learning of individuals and groups is shared systematically across the normal boundaries and barriers of the organization. They believe that this

organization as learning community has the best chance to survive, let alone compete effectively, in the rapidly changing future.

After presidents have spoken, vision statements been written, consultants hired and heard, planned change efforts designed and implemented, people at the local levels in organizations have to respond. They may respond with indifference, fear, resistance, cooperation, excitement, and retirement. They may wait skeptically for this “fad of the year” to fade away, or they may find hope for a better organizational life and a chance to be better at reaching and teaching students as a result. However, they respond. Presidents are often frustrated by how their visions of a new organizational community are made real or even thwarted. Or they may be pleased and surprised by what the vision for change has become.

Every organizational change is accomplished one person at a time but in relationship with others. The way faculty and staff attempt to change their ways of working together are both the method and the goal of the Professional Learning Community. Administrators who may have depended on their position in the hierarchy and faculty who have depended on their autonomy and isolation in the classroom are challenged by these visions of a new kind of organization, challenged to transform the very foundations of what they believe about organizational life in a college, what they believe about working relationships and organizational power. The success or failure of a Professional Learning Community depends in large part on this transformation.

Observing and understanding how these visions get implemented by real people in real organizations is vital to seeing if they are more than prescriptive concepts, more than the wishful thinking of presidents and pundits. This case study will focus on one set of faculty and administrators in one Midwestern community college attempting to make the concepts

real during one academic year, using techniques from organizational ethnography including document research, long interviews, and observations.

Rationale for the Study

The Research Problem

Despite a great deal of prescriptive literature on the creation of learning organizations and of communities of practice/learners, there is remarkably little empirical research that has been conducted describing actual attempts in any kind of organization to produce these kinds of communities. Furthermore, there is much literature on management behavior, but little empirical work describing how managers and subordinates work together to produce a learning organization/community. Finally, many examples exist of prescriptions for creating the learning organization in a college or university or for creating the “learning college” in community colleges, but there is very little empirical research on the actual creation. More of the empirical research on schools as communities is available in the K-12 education sector, but most is directed at how students and faculty can become a Professional Learning Community. Very few studies in any sector have focused on the local application of a planned change effort to create a Professional Learning Community involving interactions among faculty and with administrators.

Philosophical Orientation

The philosophical orientation I hold and that is reflected in this research is a constructivist one. At least as it applies to social systems, knowledge is socially constructed. Reality is plastic, shaped through the interaction of knower and known. What is more, reality is negotiated and created in and through social relationship. This stance affects both the

choice of method and the research product. An ethnographic method seeks to comprehend the reality that a social grouping has constructed. The research product itself is constructed in a social conversation between the researcher and the members of the group being observed and interviewed, as well as in a conversation of the research within the community of scholars. While I do not take the extreme view that language is the only reality, language does shape reality. The language of the researched social group is a key data element. And the language of the research product is the primary tool of data analysis.

Research Questions

This study explored how a number of faculty members described their experiences as participants in Professional Learning Communities within one Midwestern community college. The objective of the study was to assist in understanding how various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics may foster or obstruct the development of PLCs in community colleges. A Professional Learning Community refers to a specific kind of knowledge community or community of practice that has learning or knowledge creation as a goal intimately connected to the organization's purpose of teaching and learning (see page 13 for a fuller definition). The research questions were written to explore the development of PLCs at one community college using the experiences, memories, and meaning-making of participants in PLCs through interviews, observations, and document analysis.

I began by assuming that PLCs, as I have defined them, did exist within some colleges in some form(s). From a review of the literature, I developed a comprehensive list of likely characteristics of a PLC (see Appendix B, page 393). Based on this preliminary research and scanning, I selected a site that I believed was likely to manifest PLCs among at

least some faculty groups, that is among those who have become teams of learners themselves, dedicated to the purpose of improving student learning and thus focused on teaching practice. I chose a community college that has publicly espoused a vision of becoming a Learning College and/or Learning Organization in order more effectively to help students learn. Fundamental to this espousal was a set of strategies involving the promotion and use of faculty teams, which may or may not have been described by participants as Professional Learning Communities, but which have as their purpose the facilitation of student learning. If PLCs pervaded the college, I believed that I would see a thriving culture of experimentation and sharing of practice, an invigorated and self-renewing culture, a body of faculty energized and challenged by each other, and a richer learning environment for everyone including and especially the students.

Using tools from organizational ethnography and the learning history, this study sought to explore how several faculty members at Midwest described their individual and collective journeys to develop Professional Learning Communities. Three primary questions guided my research, and the findings for each are presented in a full chapter, as noted below:

1. How are the elements of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) as described in the literature exhibited in the following:
 - a. individual faculty member actions and behaviors?
 - b. faculty group and team actions and behaviors?
 - c. administrator and formal leader actions and behaviors?
 - d. academic departments actions and characteristics?
 - e. structures and systems of the larger organization?
 - f. organizational culture?
 - g. organizational community? (Chapter Four)

2. How may various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics be fostering the development of PLCs at Midwest? (Chapter Five)
3. How may various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics be serving as barriers to the development of PLCs at Midwest? (Chapter Six)

Significance of the Research Problem

For at least a decade, the scholarship on organizations has demonstrated interest in workplace learning and workplace community. Meanwhile, this interest has grown significantly in the literature on higher education in the last five years or so. This study will contribute to our understanding of the workplace as a site for personal and group learning and help to illuminate how organizations may change in some basic ways the relationships and assumptions of employees as they change their visions and operating methods. This study will contribute to our understanding of the workplace as a site for fulfilling the needs of community when those needs perhaps are not met elsewhere, and may help explain how community is created among professionals who have been used to working in relative isolation. In these ways, the study may contribute to the scholarship on organizational learning and community.

Leaders of higher education are facing increasing pressure to work within budget constraints and effectively face increased competition. Presidents launch organizational planned change efforts with very mixed results. A study of how concepts of the learning organization and Professional Learning Community are made real by employees may help practitioners plan better change efforts, ones that are not only more effective from the organizational point of view, but also more realistic and humane for the employees affected.

Leaders of colleges may discover ways to cooperatively lead change with less manipulation and exertion of power, the latter perhaps resulting in resistance and backlash.

After years of educational leaders imposing quality and process changes on the administrative side of the organization, faculty in colleges increasingly find themselves the subjects of planned change efforts. As a result of this study, faculty may learn how they can contribute to their own mutual learning and to a more satisfactory work life through the building of communities of learners. Faculty and administrators may discover ways that can improve the sharing of best practices, innovation, and new learning. They may also discover new ways of learning together within their practice. And administrators and faculty may learn of new possibilities for role definitions that can liberate them both from the more destructive aspects of their traditional roles and relationships with each other.

Methodological Approach

Given the nature of this study, I used a qualitative research design emphasizing in-depth interviews, review of organizational documentation, and observation as the primary data collection methods. As devices for additional data collection as well as for member checking, I made use of individual interviews to follow up on my observations of one working team, and I used one focus group from another working team after initial data analysis to clarify and support emerging themes. In addition, I emailed transcripts of every interview to the participant(s) and asked for any corrections, additions, or further thoughts. Criteria for the selection of the research site included: 1) a community college that has 2) expressed a vision or announced a planned change effort to make itself a Learning College, learning organization or Professional Learning Community and that 3) is within reasonable

distance of my home or work. Chapter Three will provide further details on my methodological approach.

Definitions of Key Terms

Several concepts and terms will be used throughout this study, and it will help to understand the meanings I have adopted for them, especially given the great deal of prescriptive literature by scholars and management “gurus” who have used many of the same terms:

Academic Administrator: A college officer who, or position that supervises and coordinates academic programs, faculty, and student learning as a central job function. These may include provosts, academic vice presidents, deans (including associate and assistant deans), division heads or chairs, and department heads or chairs.

Community: A group of people who live and/or work together over a period of time and form complex relationships among themselves, thus developing a shared history and a mutual dependence. Community members define themselves to some extent by their membership in the community, and recognize others as members or non-members of the community. In a *healthy community*, there is recognition of the incompleteness of the individual, and thus the community is both an expression of that incompleteness and an attempt to become more complete through the act of reaching beyond the self to other selves (Peck, 1987). Conflict is not suppressed or denied but used in a creative and generative way (Kofman & Senge, 1993). Trust exists among community members to the extent that people can confess weakness and ignorance without retribution or stigma. People form a community accidentally or intentionally by sharing some important parts of their lives together over a period of time.

Community of practice: Self-forming groups of three to thirty people who learn together, drawn together for both social and professional reasons. They learn from each other, teach each other, share learning, and test learning on and with each other over time, thus having a shared history (see Stewart, 1996). Communities of practice are not formed formally by an organization, and may be subversive of organizational structures and rules. They are not responsible to the organization but only to themselves, have no boss, are strictly voluntary, and are more like professional societies than committees, departments, or teams.

Communities of practice typically have longer lives than those more formal groups. They have a purpose that is connected to their work or practice and that gives some value to members and clients, but they do not have a specific agenda. Their purpose involves learning. They are not gathered merely for fellowship. The work they do belongs communally to all members. Having a purpose and a shared history of interrelations and learning, these communities develop a culture based on shared assumptions about the world and how to interact with the world. While perhaps necessary for organizational learning, they do not respond to traditional management techniques and may either ignore them or be destroyed by them (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998b).

Knowledge Community: A knowledge community in business is a group of people aligned by a common vision and mission of creating and sharing new knowledge in order to use that knowledge expressly for business purposes. As in a community of practice, the members of a knowledge community come to trust each other and to share practice even as they challenge each other's assumptions in an effort to build and use new knowledge about practice. Unlike a community of practice, a knowledge community is an intentionally created community with a formal place in the organization.

Professional learning community (PLC): A Professional Learning Community refers to a specific kind of knowledge community or community of practice which has learning or knowledge creation as a goal intimately connected to the organization's purpose of teaching and learning. Members share individual learning on a regular basis, and create shared learning through their interactions, conversations, and common practice. Learning may be expressed as one primary goal of the community. Whether announced or not, there is a clear focus on learning as a process and a product intended for community members individually and as a group, for the organization as a whole, and for clients of the organization. The new knowledge created here is about teaching and learning in a K-12 school, a college or university, or a training department. Like a knowledge community, the Professional Learning Community has a formal place in the school or college organization. As with any community, the members develop a shared history and mutual dependence. In theory, an entire organization could be a PLC; but even in an organization that in its entirety is not one, PLCs may still exist in some variety within.

Not a Community of scholars: A community of scholars refers to the notion that all researchers and scholars form an intellectual community of scholarship. In this community, there is a dialectic of debate and discussion that collectively builds knowledge. Every member of the community contributes to that collective conversation and body of knowledge by the research being done, through the placing of prior research (literature review) into a new context, and through the call for new research (implications for further research) that are standard practice in research articles.

Learning: As a process, learning refers to cognitive and affective changes which occur as a result of experience, observation, contemplation, or formal or informal efforts to learn. Learning assumes a before and an after state which are different from each other. As a

product, learning is that set of affective and cognitive changes which demonstrate the difference between the before and after states. *Fundamental learning* or *transformative learning* refers to that subset of learning which alters *mental models and/or paradigms*, that is, those basic assumptions or underpinnings that serve as a foundation of belief in a culture or an individual, resulting in changes in meaning structures (Mezirow, 1991). *Metalearning* is what Argyris (1992c) referred to as *double-loop learning*, or learning about learning. Here the fundamental assumptions, mental-models or paradigms are questioned, potentially resulting in fundamental learning. With any form of fundamental learning, it is assumed that some behaviors must change.

Organizational learning: The concept that individuals in an organization share the learning that they have created individually as well as catalyze learning through their interactions with each other. Organizations obviously are not capable of learning separate from the individuals who form them. However, organizations can concretize learning in data banks and manuals or formalize learning through changes in procedure and policy.

The Learning Organization (LO): While organizational learning is a descriptive term, the Learning Organization is a prescriptive term. It refers to the concept put forth by any number of organization development practitioners and theorists that the healthy and competitive organization of the future will be an intentional learning community, designing systems and processes and seeking to alter culture and behaviors so that organizational learning is more likely to occur. There is often a belief that the Learning Organization regularly seeks fundamental learning in order to meet the changing external environment.

The Learning College (LC): The prescriptive term created by O'Banion (1996, 1997b) to refer to an idealized model of the community college in which the needs of learners are at the core of the organization's design, structure, practices, and efforts. The Learning College

is itself a Learning Organization (although not all learning organizations are or have to be Learning Colleges). Included in O'Banion's Learning College is a focus on fundamental learning for students, a concept that learners are partners in learning and not passive vessels, that learning should be fostered by multiple methods and multiple pathways, that faculty roles are defined by the needs of learners, and that learning is assessed and documented.

Planned Change Effort: Any intentional initiative to bring about systemwide change in an organization or a community. This includes organization development through structural, political, or any other set of alterations normally initiated by executives or formal leadership, with an expressed goal of making the organization or community somehow qualitatively better, more productive, or more likely to survive.

Delimitations and Limitations

Given my focus on process and my desire to describe in depth, this study has been narrowed to the learning of a small group of faculty and administrators in one community college. While this may contribute to filling the gap in the literature on organizational learning and communities of learners, this study does not seek to answer questions of the effectiveness of the learning organization or Learning College interventions in general or in particular. However, understanding the processes and perceptions of this one group of individuals in the larger college community has an inherent fundamental value.

The study has the potential weakness of giving a distorted picture because only a few small groups identified as exemplary by organizational leaders were studied. But as Maslow (1971) points out, "If we want to know how fast a human being can run, then it is no use to average out the speed of a 'good sample' of the population; it is far better to collect Olympic gold medal winners and see how well they can do" (p. 7). We do not learn what we might

become by looking at the average of how we are. As is the nature of this kind of research, participants may have distorted their recollections and experience because of the presence of the researcher, in reaction to the official organizational views and vision, or for political or personal reasons. No generalizability is sought and applicability is left to the reader in a particular local setting.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

Chapter Introduction

Organizations like the American community college are under tremendous pressure to alter structures, work processes, and employee relationships to meet the rapidly changing external environment and marketplace. As a result, CEOs and other organization leaders have instituted **organization development** activities in an attempt to create a **learning organization (LO)**, one that adapts and learns continuously and generatively. A key expectation is that individuals will learn new patterns of thought and behavior, altering fundamental assumptions and mental models, and further that this learning will be shared with others, thus becoming **organizational learning**. Theorists and managers alike conclude that some form of **workplace community** or a **Professional Learning Community**—a healthy set of relationships among a group of people who work together regularly—is a necessary (although not sufficient) condition for organizational learning to regularly occur, and hence for there to be a learning organization. What is largely missing in the literature is empirical research describing how this kind of organizational learning community comes to be, and what relationship it has to the executive vision that was intended as its impetus.

The Community College as “Learning College”

In most of the literature, the community college is seen as a threatened open system, in need of fundamental change to make it resilient and adaptable to the changing environment and marketplace (e.g., Baker III, Dudziak, & Tyler, 1994; Brint & Karabel, 1989; Cohen & Brawer, 1989; Dougherty, 1994). According to critics and defenders alike, community colleges must change their paradigm of teaching and learning, become more

learner-centered institutions, reorganize to meet changing economic realities, and face increased competition from alternative and for-profit ventures. The classroom paradigm must be changed. These writers seem to agree that all of this requires systemic—not incremental—change.

These demands on comprehensive community colleges to change in order to meet the ever increasing challenges of their missions as well as environmental and market forces, combined with the proclivities of CEOs toward systemic restructuring, have led to a variety of planned change efforts imposed on these organizations. Many community colleges tried management by objectives in the 1970s, strategic planning and TQM in the 1980s, and reengineering in the 1990s. In most cases, the effort failed to live up to the promises made. Change may have occurred because of the planned change effort, but, as in all social systems, the actual changes produced have varied significantly from those expected. Increasingly in such industry publications as *Community College Week* and *Community College Journal*, there are calls for the creation of the community college as learning organization and Learning College.

Many leaders in the community college movement now believe that applying organizational development strategies to create the **learning organization** in the community college will save the institution from irrelevancy, loss of purpose, or even death—thus making them more vital organizations for the next century (Gratton, 1993; Lorenzo & LeCroy, 1994; O'Banion, 1995; O'Banion, 1997a; O'Banion, 1997b). Leaders of community colleges and writers about them often present the learning organization and the **Learning College** as key goals and sets of strategies for this kind of fundamental change. More and more community colleges are expressing the “learning college” and “learning organization” in their vision and mission statements and many are trying to implement them.

Some colleges—including the Dallas Community College District in Texas, Lane Community College in Eugene, Oregon, and Maricopa Community College in Arizona—have written vision statements expressing a desire to become a Learning College (O'Banion, 1995, 1996, 1997b).

The Learning Organization

O'Banion (1997b) describes the Learning College as, among other things, a learning organization in the spirit of Peter Senge.¹ Senge's work (Kofman & Senge, 1993; Senge et al., 1999; Senge, 1990a, 1990b; Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner, 1994) has popularized the notion of the learning organization, but there is a wealth of varied descriptions of what a learning organization is or should be. Nonetheless, because it is Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline* (1990a) that is nearly universally referred to in the literature on community colleges, we will focus on some key characteristics as described therein, particularly the notion of workplace community.²

Reg Revans has been credited by some writers with the first mention of the need for organizations to learn and adapt to their environment in order to survive (Fulmer, Gibbs, & Keys, 1998; Revans, 1982). One of the earliest proponents of “action learning,” Revans used his background in physics to try to better organize coalfields in England during the Second World War. More recently in the 1970s, Argyris and Schön (1996) began to view learning as an organizational strategy to be promoted. Much of the work of Argyris (1985, 1986a,

¹O'Banion reminds us that the learning college must be a learning organization, but not every college that is an LO is a learning college. The learning college shifts from a teacher-centered to a learner- or learning-centered approach to its core business of facilitating student learning.

²Appendix B beginning on page 393 summarizes organizational characteristics as well as group and individual behaviors both of these idealized organizations and of “traditional” organizations, as described in the literature here reviewed.

1986b, 1990, 1991, 1992a) has been in organizational learning dysfunctions and methods for self-analyzing the dysfunctioning through “double-loop” or self-reflective learning.

That organizations somehow learn has been a notion discussed at some length at least since the 1960s. However, the concept of the “learning organization” or “learning company” (Pedler, Boydell, & Burgoyne, 1989; Pedler, Burgoyne, & Boydell, 1991) has grown popular in the business press as well as in journals on higher education and other types of organizations mainly since the late 1980s, with Senge’s work gaining the most prominence, especially after publication of *The Fifth Discipline* in 1990. Combined with more recent research and theorization about “knowledge work,” the general trend has been toward a recognition that learning has to be shared from person to person, organizational department to department, and system to system, else innovation and adaptation will not move usefully beyond their initiators.

Another common thread in much of the literature on the LO has been the conclusion that traditional hierarchies and power structures, many organizational control systems, and the divisions between work units and systems are all dysfunctional, especially in terms of organizational learning. In turn, theorists recommend not just a flatter organization, but a radical reformation of organizations toward a more democratic community of members, simply because the kind of resiliency and adaptability that is the desired outcome of learning organizations cannot be mandated or controlled, only encouraged, facilitated and rewarded.

Senge, in a number of his writings, speaks of “enrollment” of organizational members (1990a), of “communities of commitment” in the workplace (Kofman & Senge, 1993), of “shared vision” co-created by the organizational community (Senge, 1990a, 1992; Senge et al., 1994; Senge et al., 1999), and of “learning communities” in the organization

(Senge, 1995, 1997). In sum, he describes a workplace wherein leaders are catalysts and preachers of a commonly-created purpose that drives the organization forward even while its systems and people operate increasingly as free agents. In fact, Senge (1997) says there really is “no such thing” (p. 17) as a learning organization, that the LO is really an ideal to be aspired for and a vision to work toward:

A learning organization must be grounded in a culture based on transcendent human values of love, wonder, humility, and compassion; a set of practices for generative conversation and coordinated action; and a capacity to see and work with the flow of life as a system. (p.17)

Referring to the kind of transformative learning that Mezirow (1991) describes, Senge acknowledges its difficulty for us. “Learning is dangerous,” he says (1997, p. 18). That is why spiritual disciplines that seek personal transformative learning do so in communities of mutual challenge and support. “Only with the support, insight, and fellowship of a community can we face the dangers of learning meaningful things” (Senge, 1997, p. 18). Thus, the only real leadership in these learning communities is shared leadership through “communities of leaders” (Senge et al., 1999, p. 565) who have adopted the role of servant leaders (Greenleaf, 1977; Senge, 1997). Presumably then, if we were to see an organization that was becoming an LO, we would see an organization which is made up of communities of learners sharing practice and leadership. Daly (1998) describes such communities of learners in an LO as places of mutual influence rather than control, places of mutual commitment to “sustainable results and change” which “support creativity, collective learning, and generative growth” (p. 64).

Schein (1993a, 1994, 1996a, 1996b), working with Senge and others at MIT’s Center for Organizational Learning, has written in depth about those barriers that prevent

organizational learning because of differing internal organizational cultures. Specifically, he describes the vastly different organizational subcultures and the underlying assumptions held by CEOs and what he calls “operators” (those who make do to get things done) and “engineers” (the designers and protectors of technology who believe that systems can be designed to prevent human errors). Particularly interesting has been his work on brainwashing and the use of coercion to bring about organizational learning and change (Schein, 1996a). Schein questions whether the “generative learning” that Senge and others advocate as an outcome of the LO can come about without coercive management intervention:

These are not easy questions to answer, but it is time we looked at organizational learning realistically and accepted the fact that for most members of the organization the choice between holding onto their prior beliefs and learning new beliefs, values, concepts, and behaviors is often not a choice at all. Not to learn means loss of job or career advancement. Learning therefore is a coercive persuasion process whether we admit it or not. (Schein, 1996a)

Hence, the paradox that Gorbachev faced in the last years of the Soviet Union: How do you, in effect, order people to be free to change (see Bolman & Deal, 1991)? For our purposes here, how do managers foster a generative Professional Learning Community in an organization when that is not the cultural norm? Or is this simply another device of management control?

Watkins and Marsick (1993) see organizational learning as a “metaphor for understanding how systems change” (p. 262). Organizations may learn only through individuals but that learning is socially constructed (see Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and

collaboratively created and shared. For them, the learning organization is a strategy for organizational change, or better yet, organizational learning is organizational change in that people learn how to reconceive the organization, how individuals and subsystems should relate to each other, and how work may be done within it. Democracy is therefore practical as well as moral. Ideas and knowledge, learning and creating are not the domain of any one group of employees. An adaptive organization recognizes learning as belonging to all employees and all systems or departments. Learning must span these departments and systems and not be contained within any portion of the organization if the organization is to make use of new learning in a timely way. Teams, then, are the vehicle for this transformation as well as a goal or outcome of it. But not just any kind of team. Team members may work together in isolation of the rest of the organization. Teams may also do their work without generative learning. The kind of “synergistic” and “integrated” learning that Watkins and Marsick describe questions fundamental assumptions and mental models. Further, the learning the team does is integrated and synergistic beyond the team and its members with other teams and parts of the organization as well. Indeed, this learning and these teams are connected beyond the organization to the external communities of which the organization and its members are a part.

For Watkins and Marsick (1996a), the learning organization implies systemwide organizational change:

An organization of people who learn is not a learning organization per se. A learning organization must capture, share, and use knowledge so its members can work together to change the way the organization responds to challenges. People must question the old, socially constructed and maintained ways of thinking. Learning must take place and be supported in teams and

larger groups, where individuals can mutually create new knowledge.

Moreover, the process must be continuous because becoming a learning organization is a never-ending journey. (p.4)

Learning must be transformative, at the individual, the small group or team, and the organizational level, else we do not truly have a learning organization. This learning is incorporated into systems, processes, procedures, and the culture of the organization (Watkins & Marsick, 1996a).

Dixon (1995) concludes that “learning in community” is a trait necessary for organizational survival and a benefit gained by the learning organization. Using literature on collaborative learning and social constructionist theory, Dixon argues that individuals need to have the safety of a trusting community in order to be able to have ideas and beliefs challenged in such a way that defensiveness is given up in favor of critical analysis and reflection. Colleagues in community can assist each other either in validating their ideas or in producing a cognitive dissonance, which can lead to fundamental learning. Managers who make the transition to being a leader of learners in community must give up a traditional role that they have found comfort in, and thus experience a loss that must be mourned. Managers also experience new hope and a vision of what their role could become and what the organization might look like. Having a community of learners or a Professional Learning Community can ease this transition. Furthermore, in equivocal situations where there are no clear data and a long time between action and results, the only way to test conclusions and make new learning is in a collaborative and trusting relation where those conclusions and that new learning are challenged by colleagues. Without this cooperative confrontation, the fallacies of individual reasoning go unchecked and development is slowed or prevented. And during the transition time when developmental learning—“the reorganization of the self in

relation to the world” (Dixon, 1995, p. 110)—is possible only because one’s fundamental assumptions are under doubt, the collaborative support of colleagues encourages the individual to pass through the discomfort to a new frame of understanding. In other words, for Dixon (1995), learning in complexity is of necessity learning in community.

Community Building and Organizational Community

Recently there has been a growth in literature calling for greater community in the highly individualistic culture of the United States (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985; Etzioni, 1993; Etzioni, 1995; Magaziner, 1995). Bellah et al have empirically described a society wherein individualism has been celebrated and lived to such an extent that it is harmful to joint efforts, to community life, and to individual health. They take their book title, *Habits of the Heart*, from a phrase by De Tocqueville, who wondered at the American spirit of individualism and the willingness to cooperate for the common good. Putnam (1995, 2000) has joined with others in lamenting the loss of “civic engagement” and “social capital” as the emphasis on individualism has grown. Fewer people joined voluntarily together, even bowling alone rather than in organized leagues, resulting in a loss of “social capital.” Social capital includes “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit” (Putnam, 1995, p. 66). In an interview, Putnam speculated on the implications of this development for higher education:

Americans are in the midst of a transformation that is privileging nonplace-based connections over place-based connections. This is playing out within the academic community as well, and it means that the average faculty member’s ties to colleagues around the country and around the world are

getting closer, while ties to colleagues in the next building or across the hall are weakening. It's harder and harder to fill faculty clubs.

This erosion of social capital on our campuses has serious consequences for university life. Deans can't order people around; they depend on the faculty's sense of campus citizenship. When that citizenship weakens, it becomes harder and harder to get on with the important tasks of the campus. . . . Without connections, it's not just that people don't feel warm and cuddly toward one another. It's that our schools don't work as well. . . . So, while I can't give you five easy steps to rebuilding community on our campuses, I can say that recognizing the character of the problem is the place to begin. (Edgerton, 1995)

Putnam argues, "Life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital." These "networks of civic engagement foster" trust, collaboration, communication, and collective action. In this web of reciprocity, "incentives for opportunism are reduced." He sees these "dense networks" as embodying "past successes at collaboration, which can serve as a cultural template for future collaboration," "developing the 'I' into the 'we'" (Putnam, 1995 p. 67), viewing community as a collection of "Thous," much as Kofman and Senge (1993) do, as we will discuss below.

This isolation from community due to excessive individualism seems to describe much of the faculty life, wherein individual faculty members largely continue a tradition of the single "sage on the stage" in the "island" classroom. Team teaching often means two faculty members before a class but at different times, and talk about teaching and learning is relegated to complaints about students. Others call for increased community on increasingly

diverse and divergent campuses, divided by curriculum, department, politics, race and gender (Gabelnick, MacGregor, Matthews, & Smith, 1990).

Peck (1987, 1993) has echoed this call for community in a society of individualists, and has described a typology or progression of stages for the growth of community:

1. *Pseudocommunity*: The group “fakes” real community by avoiding disagreement, fostering courtesy over honesty, and denying individual differences. The hallmark of this stage is conflict-avoidance. When these differences are not just permitted but encouraged, the group “almost immediately moves” to . . .
2. *Chaos*: People try to “heal” each other and the conflicts that have arisen through “converting” each other. In the words of Bohm (Bohm, 1996; Bohm, Factor, & Garrett, 1991), debate predominates over dialogue. Because this stage feels like a descent into chaos, some individuals abandon the effort and leave the group. If enough do, the group ceases to exist as a group. Another choice is what Peck calls “organization,” which is not community but does function. The other choice is . . .
3. *Emptiness*: This crucial stage is where people empty themselves of the barriers to real community—assumptions, motives, and emotions. Similar to Bohm’s “Suspension,” this stage enables real listening to begin because people have stopped trying to convert the other, have abandoned the need to control. Individuals feel great pain here, and Peck likens it to a kind of death. As with Bohm, Peck believes that only with this kind of emptiness can we feel the need for the others. Bohm says we experience an incompleteness that cannot

be filled, a kind of existential pain. According to Peck (1987), “when its death has been completed, open and empty, the group enters. . . ” (p. 103)

4. *Community*: When people stop trying to heal and convert, suddenly healing and conversion just happen. Joined around a common vision or task, a community coalesces. However, community is not easier than the lack of it. Unlike in pseudocommunity, community members feel greater pain and greater joy because differences are made visible, and struggle is open. But the differences and struggle are directed at the community vision or purpose. Individuals have abandoned their “skilled incompetence” (Argyris, 1986b) in favor of real communication.

In real community, there is shared history (Bellah et al., 1985), mutual dependence, and commitment toward a common vision or purpose.

Writers on “dialogue” (Bohm et al., 1991; Brown, 1995; Isaacs, 1994a; Isaacs, 1994b; Isaacs, 1993; Schein, 1993b), the process developed by David Bohm and made use of regularly by LO facilitators like Isaacs (1999, 1994c), describe a similar progression through the dialogue process. (Pseudocommunity exists prior to the dialogue session.)

- Instability of the Container more or less equals Peck’s Chaos.
- Instability in the Container is Peck’s Emptiness
- Inquiry in the Container is the beginning of Community
- Creativity in the Container is the fruit of Community

Tannen (1998) describes community as “a blend of connections and authority” and believes that the United States is “losing both” in becoming an “argument culture” (p. 24). Echoing Senge, she sees this development as resulting from dualist thinking that encourages debate in all circumstances. She argues that dialogue in community is superior under any

circumstances wherein you have to live with the “opposition” after the dust clears. Tannen refers to Etzioni’s “rules of engagement” which provide a way to have disagreement through dialogue with “opponents” who are in reality part of the same community (Etzioni, 1996).

Ryan (1994, 1995a, 1995b) advocates “learning in community” as one solution to the “fragmented thinking” (p. 85) that not only reduces the effectiveness of organizations but of society itself, thus echoing writings by Senge (Kofman & Senge, 1993; Senge, 1995, 1997). Learning communities may arise when there is sufficient “curiosity, commitment, and . . . desire to act collaboratively with a spirit of experimentation” (Ryan, 1995a, p. 86). Ryan (1996a) emphasizes personal choice as a key ingredient of learning in community:

Members of a learning community are rarely paid to show up; they are there because of curiosity and a commitment to create something they care about. Learning community members are connected by matters of the heart as well as the mind; they share a desire for learning, not an obligation. (p. 86)

In a learning community, leadership is shared, and managers foster an atmosphere of trust, collaboration, and patience with not-knowing that is crucial to real learning being shared and co-created. Ryan echoes Peck in believing that “emptiness” is a critical stage in the process of developing the learning community, and maintains that managers must acknowledge it as a fact without jumping in to save the day with managerial solutions, thus aborting the development of community as well as preventing real systems thinking. Managers in a learning community are, therefore, facilitators and “guides” rather than aggressive deciders and doers. For Ryan (1995a):

The experience of giving voice to what needs to be said, and seeing what has always been there, is the experience of learning in community. . . . Learning communities are a place of truth seeking and speaking without fear of

reprisal or judgment. They are a place where curiosity reigns over knowing and a place where experimentation is welcome. Developing the capacity to live with 'not knowing' when it naturally arises, to be in relationship with oneself, and to be reflective more often than defensive provides the leverage for learning. (p. 93)

This profound vision reflects Kofman and Senge (1995) who speak rather poetically of the LO as a new kind of organizational community:

We believe a learning organization must be grounded in three foundations: (1) a culture based on transcendent human values of love, wonder, humility, and compassion; (2) a set of practices for generative conversation and coordinated action; and (3) a capacity to see and work with the flow of life as a system. . . . In learning organizations, cultural norms defy our business tradition. Acceptance of the others as a legitimate being—a Thou—(our meaning of love), replaces the traditional will to homogeneity. (p. 32)

In this deep community of “Thous,” there is “collective leadership” rather than a hierarchy. In fact, the heroic model of leadership is destructive, creating a dependency that is neither healthy nor productive, as it reinforces crisis management.

Other writers have studied community and community building in an organizational setting, mostly as an intervention or a prescription (Brown, 1991; Gozdz, 1995a; Nirenberg, 1995). Some like Brown et al (1994) see competitive advantage in forming workplace communities as part of the development of the LO. Some like Nirenberg (1995) approach it from a democratic and moral agenda, believing that in a free society it is contradictory and fundamentally unhealthy that we accept a “master-slave” relationship in our workplaces. Others, like Gozdz (1995c), combine the moral imperative with the practical in believing that

organizations must become more adaptive learning organizations and that this leads to a “paradigm of wholeness” that cannot exclude relationships among organization members. Ergo, workplace community is one shift in the consciousness from fragmentation toward wholeness.

Brown et al (1994) define six “core processes” in the development of a Professional Learning Community: *Capability* or the skills, knowledge and abilities needed to learn and be together; *Mutual commitment* to each other and to the shared goals of the learning community; *Complex contribution*, or the recognition and reward of people’s abilities to work beyond the narrow job description and volunteer more than their presence; *Continuity* through system designs that store organizational memory; *Collaboration* through mutual trust, shared information systems, and webs of relationship; *Conscience* through shared vision and values. Even here there is a moral charge toward democracy as a key value in organizational life.

Again, there is little in the way of empirical research that describes community-building efforts in organizations. And while there is much prescriptive literature for managers and leaders to read on their presumptive role in building community (e.g., Block, 1993; Gozdz, 1995a), there is little if any descriptive study on the effects of this management-led community building.

Writers on higher education have focused on the need for greater community among students, faculty, and staff on the campus (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990; Spitzberg Jr. & Thorndike, 1992). These have tended to focus on issues of diversity and political differences, and have as often as not been prescriptive and visionary rather than empirical. More relevant here have been writers who spoke to the need to end the loneliness or “pedagogical solitude” (Shulman, 1993) of solitary faculty teaching in island classrooms, divided by discipline, department, and tradition, and silent with other faculty on

the challenges and possibilities of teaching (Palmer, 1992, 1993). Shulman (1993) notes the irony that this experience of isolation does not occur while doing research where there is a long tradition of joint scholarship and of scholarly conversations in the “community of scholars,” but rather in the classroom. In order for teaching to be as valued in academe as research, teaching must become “community property” (p. 6) just as scholarship is. Shulman believes that teaching must be the responsibility of disciplines, not of individuals, and not of nondisciplinary college-wide teaching centers. The professional community of the discipline must take ownership through exercising quality control and judgment over teaching in that discipline. Just like scholarship, teaching must be documented and evaluated by peers. In this way, the discipline forms a professional community that focuses on teaching in the rigorous and public ways that it has on research (Shulman, 1993).

In fact, Palmer (1997) believes that without the safety and trust that comes from real community, teachers cannot share their truths and experiences about teaching, cannot share their deep practice. And without this sharing, teaching becomes sterile and false, disconnected from the inner experience of the teacher or the students. Palmer (1993) believes that, “unlike many other professionals, [faculty] lack the continuing conversation with colleagues that could help us grow more fully into the demands of the teacher’s craft” (p. 8). While there are writers and “experts” on learning and teaching, what is missing is the opportunity to share the “deep reservoir of insight” (p. 8) held by other faculty.

This privatization of teaching may originate in some misguided concept of academic freedom but it persists, I believe, because faculty choose it as a mode of self-protection against scrutiny and evaluation. Ironically, this choice of isolation leads to some of the deepest dissatisfactions in academic life . . . the “pain of disconnection. . . .” (Palmer, 1993, p. 8)

Without a “community of discourse” on teaching and learning, it is difficult to properly evaluate teaching, and difficult to systematically improve teaching and learning in the institution. Palmer (1993) describes three necessary ingredients in creating such a community:

. . . *leaders* who expect and invite conversation, *topics* of conversation that can take us beyond technique, and *ground rules* that keep us from defeating ourselves before our conversation begins. (Emphasis in original, p. 8)

Palmer argues that academic leaders (presidents, provosts, deans, department chairs) must not try to coerce conversation—which will fail. However, these leaders can and must lead by expectation and by invitation to use their academic and personal freedom to choose to join these professional conversations about practice. “The most powerful kind of leadership is to offer people pathways and permissions to do things they want to do but feel unable to do for themselves” (Palmer, 1993, p. 9). Moreover, Palmer (1993) believes that for these conversations to be productive, they cannot be debates. If faculty members are free to attack each other’s experiences and positions, no one will want to step forward and honestly converse. Palmer describes one and a half hour meetings in which the ground rules ban advocacy and promote inquiry, in the terms Bohm (1996; Bohm et al, 1991) has defined in his work on dialogue. No one is allowed to speak to another faculty member except “to ask an honest, open question” (Palmer, 1993, p. 13). This process encourages deep sharing that results in not just mutual learning about teaching practice, Palmer says, but also “a rare sense of community with colleagues” (p. 13).

From several writings of Palmer (1993, 1997, 1998), I extract several characteristics of this kind of community of conversation about teaching practice, if we were to observe it:

- honest talk not just about technique but about the human experience of teaching and the human experience of students
- expressions of faculty fears of failure, of rejection by our students, of criticism by colleagues
- stories about and discussions of “critical moments” when whether students will learn or not hangs in the balance and strategies used at those moments including successes and failures
- anecdotes about great teachers faculty have known themselves
- public examinations of the self in relation to the role and challenges of teaching

In these ways we will know that “good talk about good teaching” is occurring (Palmer, 1993, p. 13).

Argyris (1992b) supplies similar observations when he describes the defensive routines that prevent learning in consultants. Consultants, after all, are teachers too. They are given to blaming their clients and managers when clients do not learn and make effective use of the consultants’ work. Argyris imagines a productive conversation among consultants with their manager and about clients. I quote it here, substituting titles to show how what Argyris describes echoes Palmer above:

[ADMINISTRATOR]: “What troubled me about your original responses was that you assumed you were right in calling [students] stupid. One thing I’ve noticed about [faculty]—in this [college] and others—is that we tend to defend ourselves by bad-mouthing the [student].”

[FACULTY] A: “Right. After all, if they are genuinely stupid, then it’s obviously not our fault that they aren’t getting it!”

[FACULTY] B: “Of course that stance is anti-learning and overprotective. By assuming that they can’t learn, we absolve ourselves from having to.”

[FACULTY] C: “And the more we all go along with the bad-mouthing, the more we reinforce each other’s defensiveness.” (p. 99)

As Palmer and Shulman suggest, the isolation of faculty from each other in terms of questioning and learning about their practice is the result of fear of failure. Argyris believes that “smart people” who have been ever so successful in years of college are ill-prepared for failure when they begin their professional work and have no effective coping skills by which to learn from failure. The result is a set of defensive routines which preclude double-loop learning, whether by oneself or in the group. Faculty and administrators seem to fit this description. Rather than admitting failures, challenging each other’s assumptions, gathering data from practice, and learning there from, professionals feel threatened and attack others, ignore or deny the data, and are skilled at not learning from their practice (i.e., learned incompetence). Argyris believes that managers must begin to model undefensive reflection of their own practice, and encourage professionals to explore the difference between defensive and productive behaviors (see Table 2.1, p. 36)

Difference between Defensive and Productive Behaviors

Defensive	Productive
- soft data	- hard data
- tacit, private inferences	- explicit inferences
- conclusions not publicly testable	- premises explicit, conclusions publicly testable
- tacit theory of dealing with threat	- (explicit or tacit) theory of strategy formulation
- set of tacitly interrelated concepts	- set of directly interrelated concepts
-set of tacit rules for using concepts to make permissible inferences, reach private conclusions, and private criteria to judge the validity of the test	- set of public rules for using concepts to make permissible inferences, reach testable conclusions, and criteria to judge the validity of the test

Table 2.1 (Argyris, 1992b, p. 94-95)

The privatization of practice that Palmer describes is therefore—at least in large part—a defensive routine to contain the fear of failure that Argyris also describes. On the other hand, a learning community is able to allow and encourage its members to publicly reflect on practice, challenge each other’s assumptions, and learn together.

In answer to Shulman’s concerns about “pedagogical solitude,” the American Association for Higher Education’s (AAHE) Teaching Initiative has established a project to encourage peer collaboration. Some of the strategies employed have been described by

Hutchings (1996). These include “teaching circles,”³ reciprocal classroom visits, interdisciplinary classroom learning communities, collaborative inquiry into practice and pedagogy, and intercampus or on-line collaboratives. Since these strategies support faculty in working together in order to learn together, they may well support the building of a community of learners among faculty.

Cox (2001) labels a particular planned faculty development program at Miami University of Ohio “faculty learning communities.” Unlike my more broad definition of the PLC, Cox defines faculty learning communities as specific, time-limited (one-year) joint professional development activities for eight to fourteen faculty members. Simply stated, the faculty learning community is a student learning community where a cross-disciplinary group of teaching faculty are themselves the students. Cox uses the literature on student learning communities to design and analyze faculty learning communities, arguing that faculty are students, too. They gather around a topic or around their being at a similar stage in the faculty career (e.g., probationary, mid-career). Among the planned activities they participate in over the course of the one year are regular seminars on teaching and learning, conferences, retreats, and research into teaching and learning (the Scholarship of Teaching). Individuals also work alone on a teaching project and find a mentor or partner with a faculty member not on the team. Cox, as faculty developer, works closely with the faculty learning communities managing their operations. Participating faculty each receive release time or a cash stipend, and a travel allowance for conferences and retreats. Cox estimates that each faculty learning community costs the university \$20,000 to \$30,000 per year.

³ Teaching circles were created by Daniel Bernstein at the University of Nebraska on the model of Japanese Quality Circles. Hutchings says that today “the term is used to describe a variety of arrangements through which (1) a small group of faculty members (typically four to ten. . .) (2) makes a commitment to work together over a period of at least a semester (3) to address questions and concerns about the particulars of their teaching and their students’ learning.” (Hutchings, 1996)

Cox makes several claims about the effectiveness of the program on individual faculty and on the university as a whole. To buttress his claims regarding changes to individual participants, he refers to a survey of participants' estimates of the program's impact on them and their practice. Among the more significant effects, Cox (2001) notes that they say they

are very interested in the teaching process and get a perspective of teaching, learning, and higher education beyond their disciplines. They become comfortable in the university community.... At Miami, [junior faculty] participants are tenured at a significantly higher rate than junior faculty who do not participate in this community. (p. 73)

His claims for the impact of the program on the university as a whole derive from his own observation as a practitioner:

In my 20 years of faculty development, I have found faculty learning communities to be the most effective programs for achieving faculty learning and development. In addition, these communities build communication across disciplines, increase faculty interest in teaching and learning, initiate excursions into the scholarship of teaching, and foster civic responsibility. They provide a multifaceted, flexible, and holistic approach to faculty development. They change individuals, and, over time, they change institutional culture. Faculty learning communities and their "graduates" are change agents who can enable an institution to become a learning organization. (Cox, 2001, p. 69)

Cox's faculty learning communities may help to promote the PLC as I have defined it here, but they are very expensive in time and budget. Some of the activities suggested parallel other work in the K-12 sector.

Much work has been done in K-12 schools on how principals may facilitate the development of a Professional Learning Community among teachers and students (Atkin, 1994; Brandt, 1992; Garmston & Wellman, 1999, 2000; Lieberman, 1996; Oxley, 1997; van der Bogert, 1998). Watkins and Marsick (1999) apply concepts from their work on the LO, advocating the creation of learning communities in schools which will include students, teachers, administrators, parents, and external community members, all in the service of designing and running schools as continuous learning organizations. They note that seldom do schools live up to being true learning communities. Barth (1990) was one of the first to advocate that schools become communities of learners involving teachers, principals, and parents. Bielaczyc and Collins (1999) believe that a learning community seeks to “advance the collective knowledge” and has as a defining characteristic a “culture of learning” (p. 604).

Four traits make it clear there is truly a learning culture: (1) diversity of members expertise and contribution, (2) the goal of advancing collective knowledge mentioned above, (3) a focus on learning how to learn, and (4) “mechanisms” to share learning. Bielaczyc concentrates on learning communities in the classroom but argues that this approach to learning can be extended to the organization as a whole and beyond to its local external community.

In his latest work, Senge (Senge et al., 2000) has sought specifically to apply the theory and practice of the LO and community building to K-12 schools. In a fashion similar to his earlier texts (see Senge et al., 1999; Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner, 1994) applying the theory in practice, *Schools that Learn* offers strategies for planned change

interventions which may foster the LO in our public schools as a way of improving them as communities and in their effectiveness for students. Senge does not offer much new, but is more context specific in his hints on building an LO in education using his five disciplines. For the individual faculty member, he offers mainly individual efforts to “find a partner” because “teaching is one of most [sic] isolated professions around” (Senge et al., 2000, p. 302). Kerka (1995) found that schools which claimed to be LOs generally failed when evaluated along criteria derived from Senge’s five disciplines due to several barriers: lack of effective leadership, learned helplessness, “tunnel vision,” incomplete or “truncated” learning, destructive forms of individualism which prevented effective community or collaboration, and “a culture of disrespect and fear.” Kerka found that while it was popular for schools to call themselves learning communities, in reality few actually were. Zederayko and Ward (1999) conclude that schools fail to become learning organizations or communities due to a lack of time for teachers to reflect together and learn from their own practice and a failure to take a “systems approach” to teacher learning, work, and professional development.

DuFour (1999) describes the kind of instructional leader needed to foster the development of a “Professional Learning Community” as someone who balances seeming contradictions: urgent about the need for change but patient for the long run, focused on the future but clear on the present reality, able to see the big picture as well as the details, fostering autonomy everywhere except when it violates the shared vision/values, celebrating successes but fostering abhorrence for the status quo, and finally acting as a strong leader who empowers others by giving power away. While these writers concentrated on the K-12 school system, their ideas and research seem applicable to colleges as well. Generally,

however, they are not empirical studies but rather prescriptive writings or descriptive only about their personal experiences as a principal or consultant.

Beck (1999), in her metanalysis of community as described in studies by scholars and practitioners, listed several metaphors for “community” as commonly used:

1. community as family offering networks of relationship
2. community as musical group (jazz, orchestra)
3. community as subjective experience of the individual as “belonging”
to an organism of social connection
4. community as objective and observable regular interaction of a group
of identifiable “members”
5. community as a collective of shared purpose and culture
6. community as a creation of political power wherein there is a struggle
for control
7. community as oppressive force
8. community as a place of honesty, shared communication, and
dedication to justice

From this Beck concludes that to identify a professional school community as inherently a positive thing—connected somehow with positive outcomes for student learning—is to mistake one view of community as held by members for some kind of objective definition, or in other words, to mistake the prescriptive for the descriptive. She believes that the contradictory variety of the metaphors used expresses the complexity of the concept and the actual experience of community. She concludes:

Research that seeks to isolate community as either a dependent or an independent variable may be taking a rich, complicated, and invariably

dynamic phenomenon and reducing it in a way that runs counter to our common conceptual systems. Researchers interested in the idea of community might do well to focus less on evaluating or measuring its impact and more on understanding it from a range of perspectives. (Beck, 1999, p.38)

Communities of Practice and the Knowledge Community

A particular kind of workplace community has been labeled a “**community of practice**,” communities that form around common work, whether as a profession (e.g., communities of practice among doctors from many hospitals), a work team, an organizational department, or a group of employees with similar job descriptions (e.g., electricians in a factory). Lave and Wenger (1991) first described this concept in their work on the learning process of apprentices and others new to a given craft or job set. They defined it as follows:

A community of practice is a set of relations among persons, activity, and world, over time and in relation with other tangential and overlapping communities of practice. A community of practice is an intrinsic condition for the existence of knowledge, not least because it provides the interpretive support necessary for making sense of its heritage. Thus, participation in the cultural practice in which any knowledge exists is an epistemological principle of learning. The social structure of this practice, its power relations, and its conditions for legitimacy define possibilities for learning (i.e., for legitimate peripheral participation). (p. 98)

Wenger (1996, 1998b) wrote more extensively on communities of practice in his later work, making the point clearly that these communities could not be created by organizational leaders as some kind of organization development and/or top-down driven intervention. Despite his concerns, more recently some consultants and management gurus have begun to advocate that managers or leaders “facilitate” the creation or at least the productivity of communities of practice (Boyett & Boyett, 1998; Senge et al., 1999; Stamps, 1999). Wenger (1998a) is more modest in arguing that

many elements in an organizational environment can foster or inhibit communities of practice, including management interest, reward systems, work processes, corporate culture, and company policies. These factors rarely determine whether people form communities of practice, but they can facilitate or hinder participation... because communities of practice must be self-organizing to learn effectively and because participation must be intrinsically self-sustaining.... (Wenger, 1998a, web page)

Wenger then describes a progression of relationships between the community of practice and the official organization ranging from “unrecognized” by the organization, informally noticed or “bootlegged,” officially recognized or “legitimized,” “strategic,” to “transformative” or helping to change the larger organization (Wenger, 1998a). He concludes by suggesting to management that while communities of practice are “mostly self-sufficient,” managers can support them by the following:

- provide resources, outside experts, travel, meeting facilities, electronic communication
- help connect their goals to the larger organizational goals
- encourage them to focus on the new and experimental

- help them include “all the right people”
- help them connect with other communities of practice (Wenger, 1998a)

A related concept is the “knowledge community,” which Botkin (1999) describes as an intentionally created community with a formal role in the organization. Knowledge communities operate in similar ways to communities of practice, and both create a social identity of membership and connection among participants. However, while communities of practice are defined as informal and specifically not created by the organizational leadership, Botkin argues that knowledge communities may even have membership lists and are highly visible in the day-to-day operation of the organization. As a definition, Botkin (1990) offers:

Knowledge communities in business are groups of people with a common passion to create, share, and use new knowledge for tangible business purposes. Successful knowledge communities bond with a sense of belonging that comes with shared values or a common commitment. Members tend to trust one another and to open themselves up to creative brainstorming without fear of being ridiculed for ideas without immediate implementation.

(p. 30)

Using the analogy of a bee community, Botkin describes the knowledge community as a place where information and knowledge is shared among the community in order to produce a community product.

Learning Networks and Professional Learning Communities

Related to the learning community is the **learning network** (Johnson, 1999; Lieberman, 1996; Van der Krogt, 1998), a more flexible and integrated organizational form that is part of the learning organization. In the learning network, participants freely share

experiences, trust is high, and learning occurs in a just-in-time and synchronistic manner.

The leader's role in a learning network is facilitative and integrative rather than as an agent of control. Leaders try to encourage the creation of an organizational culture that supports this kind of deep sharing about practice, in part by creating learning spaces that lead to a warm and accepting community (Lieberman, 1996).

Lieberman (1996) notes several "recurring tensions" in learning networks: (1) tension between work purposes and learning network purposes; (2) tensions over whose knowledge will shape work practices as members learn and share (network insiders or outsiders); (3) tension between centralization of the process (top-down development) and local or decentralized development of learning networks (natural development); (4) tension between the natural development of the learning network as it is formed and its increasing bureaucratization as it grows and involves more people, departments and locations; (5) tensions between keeping the learning network smaller, enclosed and also expanding membership to involve more people. Van der Krogt (1998) observes that there will always be some tension between the organization of work and the learning network because the latter is in many senses uncontrolled and uncontrollable. Furthermore, the learning network should be clearly differentiated in our thinking, planning, and research from organizationally sponsored or mandated training. Because most organizations do not offer many chances for employees to integrate their learning with their work, work processes need to be altered to encourage more team learning. As with Wenger's notion of communities of practice, while there is an overlap of learning and work systems, learning networks nonetheless "develop according to their own laws and dynamics, independently of the work system in the organization but in accordance with the specific capacities of the learners" (Van der Krogt, 1998) p. 167). Johnson sees a stressor between the need for organizational productivity and

the necessity of taking time away from work to learn (Johnson, 1999). Despite these tensions, Lieberman believes these learning networks or learning communities are one vital and effective means of fundamentally changing educational systems (Lieberman, 1996).

Van der Krogt (1998) notes that research is needed into learning networks, particularly into how the actors involved operate within organizational structures and systems, and also into their theories in action and mental models. While managers, trainers, and the systems they manage can and do “steer” learning systems, Van der Krogt believes it is unlikely that anyone can control learning systems or use them instrumentally. He therefore argues for research into the interplay of these actors. Lieberman (1996) also describes these learning networks or communities as something that cannot be willed by management, or perhaps even by members and participants:

Structurally and philosophically, they are more like a movement than an organization. In addition, agendas are more often challenging than prescriptive; work formats more collaborative than individualistic; attempts at change more integrated than fragmented; and approaches to leadership more facilitative than directive. (p. 55)

Resnick and Hall (1998) make the case that, in public education, for students to learn, teachers must move from the expert role to seeing themselves as continuous learners as well. They cannot do so in isolation because the social construction of knowledge about teaching and learning and the natural conservatism of organizational systems would drag them back to traditional and failing methods of teaching/learning. Therefore, it is necessary for schools to operate as learning organizations. They argue that this is best facilitated by the creation of “nested learning communities,” or learning communities that are within learning communities: Thus the students/teacher learning community in a class is nested within

larger interclass learning communities, themselves nested within a learning community made up of teachers dialoguing about their profession and about teaching and learning, nested within the school as learning community, led by the principal who is himself in a district-wide learning community with other principals and schools led by the superintendent and other executives. Therefore, “the purpose of nested learning communities is to enhance the knowledge base and instructional expertise of all education professionals—teachers, principals, and administrators alike—by making student learning the dominant focus of daily activities at every level” (Resnick & Hall, 1998 p. 113).

DuFour (DuFour and Eaker, 1998; DuFour, 1999) argues for schools to become **professional learning communities** (PLC), which he defines as a grouping of professionals with a given expertise who form a “community of commitment” and continuously learn together as a community—that is, “an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone” (DuFour & Eaker, 1998, xii). The Professional Learning Community is related to but distinct from the learning organization primarily because the latter is focused on profit-making business and industry. There are still similarities and DuFour does not agree that education cannot learn from the private sector. Like the LO, the PLC is presented as an antidote to the fragmentation of thought and work elicited by the factory model of the early 20th century.

Six characteristics describe the PLC: (1) shared vision, mission and values; (2) “collective inquiry” into practice and method; (3) a team structure and collaborative learning and action; (4) an “action orientation” and a focus on experimentation and research into practice; (5) a “persistent discomfort with the status quo” resulting in continuous improvement; and (6) a commitment to go beyond mere intention to achieving real results.

The Professional Learning Community is very similar to Botkin's knowledge community, mentioned above. The primary difference is that the knowledge community is focused on using the product of the community—shared knowledge—while the Professional Learning Community is focused more on process—learning. That distinction is a relatively minor one as Botkin and DuFour develop their concepts so that process and product are interlinked.

Louis et al (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996) list five characteristics of a teachers' professional community, which from their description is similar if not identical to a Professional Learning Community:

1. Shared norms and values having to do with students and student learning
2. A focus on student learning as the primary goal for the professional community
3. Reflective dialogue, or conversations and sharing with colleagues about practice
4. Deprivatization of teaching practice, or continuous improvement of practice through interaction with and feedback from colleagues
5. Collaboration, sharing teaching expertise, necessary for and implicit in the above

Louis et al believe that this kind of professional community can be fostered in schools by actively seeking to create the kind of organizational culture that encourages risk-taking and requires the reconception of leadership as facilitative. The intent and result, they claim, is an end to teaching as an isolated and solitary activity by permeating organizational barriers and creating a new mental model that sees teaching as a collaborative activity involving principals and administration as well as other teachers. Scribner et al (Scribner, Cockrell, Cockrell, & Valentine, 1999) take the definition of a professional community created by Louis above and add to it Argyris and Schön's notion of double-loop learning (see Argyris & Schön, 1974; Argyris & Schön, 1996) to define the Professional Learning Community. The use of double-loop learning can serve as a "guide" for developing the Professional Learning Community,

they claim. Scribner et al conclude that there were several issues that affected to what extent a Professional Learning Community would be successfully implemented in a given school: (1) the leadership and organizational change style of the principal; (2) organizational history as remembered by its members; (3) the politics involved in dispensing scarce resources; and (4) the extent of the bureaucratization of the school. Of these, the role of leadership style of the principal was most critical.

Gozdz (1998) defines a learning community as:

. . . groups of people and social systems of all shapes and sizes that learn as a whole. They act as a singular entity to accomplish their tasks, goals and vision. They also govern themselves in a civil manner and in accordance with guiding ideas, purpose and values that enable everyone to learn and grow over the long term. (p. 31)

Everyone is a leader in a learning community, but roles vary. Executive leaders must move from thinking of the organization as just an “economic entity” to seeing it as a “living community” in which the individual human being is valued and treated accordingly. The executive leader focuses on values, governance, and assuring that organizational systems promote community, not pseudocommunity or destructive internal competition. Front-line leaders facilitate groups and teams, seeking to promote real community in and between operating units. A third group, what Gozdz calls “internal networkers,” may not be within the management hierarchy and may have little formal power. Nonetheless, they lead community building activities, help to create a spirit of real community, share learning, and form and maintain informal and formal networks across organizational systems. Gozdz sees all three types of leaders as vital to an organization becoming and continuing to be a learning community:

The executive leader contributes governance; the local line leader builds infrastructure that supports learning; the internal networker infuses the organization with the felt experience of community. . . . In this model, large-scale change does not occur as a result of being pushed down or cascaded through an organization. Change is enabled through relationship and community. (Gozdz, 1995b, p. 34)

The organization as PLC then is a particular kind of learning organization, one that certain educational leaders (both formal and informal) seek to create in schools and colleges, and whose purpose is to foster and promote action learning about student learning. To develop either an organizational or more local variety of PLC requires a particular kind of leadership described in much of the literature on the LO and reviewed, in part, herein. I have described also some of the obstacles to creating such a new organization. However, it may be useful to briefly review some literature on academic culture and the professional bureaucracy for more light on how a PLC might be produced, but also on some further barriers to its creation.

Academic Culture, Faculty Life, and the Professional Bureaucracy

Bringing this kind of organizational change to a college, and this kind of change in work life to a group of faculty, will require an understanding of faculty assumptions about the “way we do things around here.” As Austin (1990) describes, faculty live within at least four cultures in their normal worklife.⁴ Institutional leaders who seek to bring about Professional Learning Communities or similar initiatives will have to recognize these

⁴Tierney and Rhoads (1993) mention national, professional, disciplinary and institutional cultures. Toma (1997) suggest we should also add research paradigm, especially given the presence of critical and other postpositivist approaches.

differing cultures, some of which may support and some of which may interfere with the organization development strategy.

Senior faculty largely formed **“The Culture of the Academic Profession”** during the boom period of the 1960s and 1970s. Among the values and assumptions Austin describes here, there are three that are likely to impact the learning community initiative: Autonomy and academic freedom may be interpreted in such a way that faculty isolation is viewed as not only a norm but a right, and institution-driven initiatives perceived as a threat to these norms. As Shulman (1993) noted above, the value of collegiality and community of scholars has tended to apply only to research and not teaching. Still, this value has been regularly applied to collegiate governance in the past and may support movement toward a Professional Learning Community as a complementary value. Finally, the hierarchical valuing of the research university has placed teaching institutions on a lower rung, and encouraged a belief in the academic discipline as the best way to structure the organization. As Shulman mentioned above, this may mean it makes better sense not to fight these assumptions but to work within the discipline as the place to build community responsibility for learning.

“The Cultures of the Disciplines” provide strong values even in teaching institutions, as noted above. The ways of thinking like a scientist taught by some disciplines and the ways of thinking like a humanities scholar are so different that faculty in one institution may have more in common with colleagues in their discipline at a radically different institution than colleagues in other disciplines at their home institution. This results in great challenges to building professional community across disciplines and to building common understandings of institutional beliefs and espousals. Rewards within the discipline may be more powerful than institutional rewards.

“The Culture of the Academy as an Organization” results in two primary values of the social organization: That teaching and research are *prima facie* “good work,” and that concepts of autonomy and collegiality should govern faculty work. Austin describes external environmental factors that are weakening the commitment to the good work by disturbing the balance between the culture of management and the culture of faculty described elsewhere by Newton (1992). Such factors as federal regulations and requirements have encouraged greater centralization, bureaucratization, and administrative control. It is ironic that the kind of decentralized knowledge work described by many writers about the private sector has been the norm in higher education for a long while, and that higher education has moved to model the highly centralized industrial plant even as the latter may be moving to a more decentralized structure. Clearly, however, the organization as Professional Learning Community is neither a centralized bureaucracy like traditional industries, nor one decentralized but dependent on a central office staff like the Alfred Sloan (General Motors) model of organization, nor decentralized to isolated individuals as the academy has been. Rather, if the organization is itself a PLC, it is a team-based organization that is centralized in its mission, vision, and values, and localized to the team.

“The Cultures of Institutional Types” are different because similar types (research universities, state colleges, liberal arts colleges, community colleges) have similar cultures. Austin (1990) believes that the heavy teaching loads, need for remedial assistance, and scarcity of upper-division students in community colleges means faculty in these institutions gain similar cultural values focused on student learning and the intrinsic value of serving that learning. This shared commitment may make it easier to create professional learning communities focused on student learning in community colleges than in other institutional types.

Another consideration in the likelihood of creating a PLC is Mintzberg's (1991) notion of the "professional bureaucracy." Because the professional bureaucracy "hires duly trained and indoctrinated specialists—professionals—for the operating core, and then gives them considerable control over their own work. . . [,] control over his own work means that the professional works relatively independently of his colleagues, but closely with the clients he serves" (p. 53). This aptly describes the situation of the community college faculty member and echoes Shulman's "pedagogical solitude." Mintzberg's professional here is a "knowledge worker" who carries his tools within, has great autonomy in a job too complex to be supervised in a narrow sense, and who must customize work to the client. Here again, as in Austin above, the professional is likely to identify more with the profession than the institution. The professional in this type of organization requires a great deal of discretion to perform the work, but this individual discretion also makes teamwork, commitment to institutional goals, and consistent quality of work harder to achieve. The community college—when viewed as a professional bureaucracy—is a conservative organization, adapted to a stable environment, and slow to change even in the face of dramatic external forces. Mintzberg believes that change occurs in these organizations only through a changeover in membership through attrition, a change in the socialization of new members, or the slow upgrading of current members' skills. This all seems to argue against dramatic change such as the development of PLCs.

Both Austin's notion of a mix of somewhat contradictory faculty cultures and Mintzberg's concept of the professional bureaucracy seem to lead us to conclude that we are looking at fragmented cultures. As Martin (1992) describes it, a fragmented

. . . organizational culture is a web of individuals, sporadically and loosely connected by their changing positions on a variety of issues. Their

involvement, their subcultural identities, and their individual self-definitions fluctuate, depending on which issues are activated at a given moment. (p. 153)

At its extreme, this perspective of a fragmented culture suggests that even a common vision cannot bring the fragments together in any regular or “permanent” way. The challenge to the development of PLCs may be that an organization’s culture attacks any organizational change effort much as the immune system of the body attacks an external infection. Alternatively, it may be that there are so many fragmented, competing, and isolating cultures in an organization that no real community can exist.

Bergquist (1992) reinforces the notion of a fragmented culture by describing four separate cultures in higher education. The *collegial culture* values autonomy for faculty, loyalty to one’s academic discipline, and a focus on inputs as defining educational quality, that is, that we should focus on good instruction and leave the responsibility for outputs—learning—to the students. The *managerial culture* values the prerogative of administration, loyalty to the college or university above loyalty to a discipline or profession, and focuses on outputs, including student learning, as a measure of educational quality. These first two echo Newton’s (1992) two cultures, the scholarly and the corporate. For Bergquist, next there is the *developmental culture*, which values personal development, whether of students maturation and intellectual development, or faculty professional development, and measures quality in terms of value-added. The fourth culture, the *negotiating culture*, seeks to counter the formal power of management with the power of union organizing and collective bargaining. This culture does not define the terms of educational quality, but rather focuses on the process whereby all stakeholders will have a say in defining quality through an open dialogue.

Originally, in his book *The Four Cultures of the Academy*, Bergquist stopped here. More recently, as he wrote in a "Program Summary" for a conference in Phoenix in October 2001, Bergquist (2001) has added two more cultures to his list. Whereas the first four cultures commonly assumed that education occurred in a single place at a single time, the growth of electronic mail and Internet-based learning has produced a *virtual culture*, which sees a future of asynchronous education, with learners choosing when and where they will participate. The virtual culture values innovation and both individual and individualized learning. Quality is determined by outcomes, regardless of the amount of time on task. In reaction, a counterculture, the *tangible culture*, has arisen. The tangible culture values tradition over innovation and instructional processes over individualized learning. Quality correlates with the amount of time students spend in the classroom or other learning situations, and cannot be delimited by predefined learning outcomes.

The work of Bergquist suggests that we cannot assume homogeneity among members of a college community in terms of cultural assumptions, values, or worldviews. We would expect that each would see the same leadership action differently and would respond very differently to external mandates, threats and opportunities. Furthermore, and perhaps more germane to this study, we would expect different views of the need to work in collaboration with colleagues and different responses to opportunities to do so. Using this frame, we might see Palmer as working within both the developmental and tangible culture, O'Banion within the managerial and virtual cultures. One college, manifesting variants of these six cultures, would certainly be fragmented rather than uniform in both culture and response to internal or external challenges.

Along a similar line, Cohen and March's (1974) description of the college as "organized anarchy" offers further concern that the fundamental nature of the community

college may preclude it becoming a PLC. In their seminal work—still vital and very relevant after a quarter of a century—they note the following characteristics of the organized anarchy that each president must face: *Problematic goals*- the college operates “on a variety of inconsistent and ill-defined preferences,” with no “coherent structure” but rather held together as a “loose collection of changing ideas,” only becoming aware of its direction after it has been on the journey; *Unclear technology*- unaware of its own processes, the college operates through trial and error, learning (if at all) from these “accidents”; *Fluid participation*- a highly individualistic culture, and a “boundary-less” organization, the college cannot count on consistent commitment or consistent levels of participation from individual members nor across all members of the organization. In sum,

the American college or university is a prototypic organized anarchy. It does not know what it is doing. Its goals are either vague or in dispute. Its technology is familiar but not understood. Its major participants wander in and out of the organization. (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 3)

Given all of this, it seems the college is the least likely place to create a Professional Learning Community, committed together to a clear mission and vision, operating as a community of learners seeking the continuous improvement of fundamental processes.

However, Rice and Austin’s (1991) work on exemplary colleges offers some hope. Faculty morale was high in colleges that, among other things, had a strong sense of community, practiced participatory leadership, had a strong commitment to students and also a strong commitment to faculty development. All of these are part of the PLC as it has been described in the literature. Austin (1990) recommends, among other things, that institutional leaders “analyze and understand” (p. 69) the unique mix of faculty cultures at their own institutions as part of any organization development initiative; that they “clearly

and frequently articulate” and celebrate the core mission, vision and values (p. 70); and that they assure confluence among those values and the informal and formal rewards systems at their institutions. An awareness of the mix of faculty cultures may help faculty understand their colleagues better, and may help administrators predict faculty reactions to decisions or initiatives. A PLC may then evolve from the cultures of the department, discipline, academy, and/or an individual community college—but can it evolve fast enough to meet the challenges these institutions face?

Dearth of empirical studies of organizational learning and the learning organization

By and large, most of the writings on both organizational learning and the learning organization are prescriptive rather than descriptive. Bedeian (1986) listed organizational learning as one of the four challenges facing researchers into organizations, and Tsang (1997) renewed that challenge more than ten years later. Nevertheless, there remains little empirical descriptive research into organizational learning, and even less into the implementation of the LO.

Within the descriptive literature, most of what is available is the work of practitioners and consultants describing their own efforts to facilitate the development of organizational learning or an LO in a few (or one) organizations (Cox, 2001; Fries & Kruse Jr., 1995; Watkins & Marsick, 1996b). There are a few Ph.D. dissertations which look at organizational learning (Amponsem, 1991; de Monchaux, 1993; Kim, 1993; Shrivastva, 1981; Zayed, 1989), organizational memory (Stein, 1989), or the LO (Kim, 1993). For example, Kim’s work attempts to study the growth of individual learning into organizational learning, but his seems to be the only research that does that. Nothing seems available which empirically studies the development of a Professional Learning Community in an organization. No

empirical research on the role that managers play in that development seems to be available as well. And those studies that have been performed have tended to approach their work from the viewpoint of the CEO or management implementer of the strategy. What is missing is a ground-level view of the strategy in action, its effects on individual and group behavior, experience, and learning.

Finally, with the increasing pressure by national leaders, critics and promoters of the community college to make fundamental changes, especially to become Learning Colleges and learning organizations, it seems very timely to study one community college in the process of such a change effort. Given the pressures for change mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, and the increasing reliance on some of the models of organizations mentioned in this review of the literature, such a study may prove useful and important to both scholars and practitioners.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

Chapter Introduction

Most of the literature on the learning organization, Learning College, and Professional Learning Community is prescriptive rather than descriptive. The small amount of literature that describes how such organizational development has occurred is mostly produced by organizational participants and/or organization development consultants. While a few articles and doctoral dissertations describe some empirical studies in this arena, there is a gap in the literature. Therefore, this research study will explore how some faculty in one community college may have practiced what the prescriptive theory describes.

My research was done within one Midwestern community college that is attempting a set of organizational development activities intended to foster its advancement as a Learning College. I have disguised this organization as much as is practicable, and given it the name of Midwest Community College. Organization members were asked during long interviews to remember the activities they participated in, to describe current activities, and to reflect on both. In addition, I made observations of two meetings where access was possible and appropriate, and general observations in public settings such as hallways, the cafeteria, and the external campus. I studied or scanned over forty original documents (see Appendix C), reviewed the college web site regularly before and during the course of the research, and reviewed articles about Midwest in national higher education media.

Since I focused on a “specific, unique, bounded system,” a case study approach seemed warranted (Stake, 1994). Because my interest is in providing insight into learning in one particular organization, on the continuum of intrinsic to instrumental, this case study fell nearer the former. And since learning, both individual and organizational, is the subject, I adapted a composite methodology under the umbrella of organizational ethnography known

as the “learning history” (Roth & Kleiner, 1995b) which includes the use of the long interview (McCracken, 1988), follow-up interviews and/or focus groups, observations by an “outsider” and the reading of documents (see Appendix F).

Purpose and Research Questions

The purpose of this case study was to assist in understanding how various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics may foster or obstruct the development of PLCs in community colleges. I chose a community college that has publicly espoused a vision of becoming a Learning College and/or Learning Organization in order more effectively to help students learn. Fundamental to this espousal was a set of strategies involving the promotion and use of faculty teams, which may or may not have been described by participants as Professional Learning Communities, but which have as their purpose the facilitation of student learning. If PLCs pervaded the college, I believed that I would see a thriving culture of experimentation and sharing of practice, an invigorated and self-renewing culture, a body of faculty energized and challenged by each other, and a richer learning environment for everyone including and especially the students.

Therefore, this study explored how a number of faculty members at one community college described their individual and collective journeys to become teams of learners themselves, dedicated to the purpose of improving student learning and thus focused on teaching practice (i.e., working in PLCs). Three primary questions guided my research:

1. How are the elements of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) as described in the literature exhibited in the following:
 - a. individual faculty member actions and behaviors?
 - b. faculty group and team actions and behaviors?

- c. administrator and formal leader actions and behaviors?
 - d. academic departments actions and characteristics?
 - e. structures and systems of the larger organization?
 - f. organizational culture?
 - g. organizational community?
2. How may various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics be fostering the development of PLCs at Midwest?
 3. How may various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics be serving as barriers to the development of PLCs at Midwest?

Hypotheses or Schema

While it is antithetical to qualitative research to generate and test hypotheses, Kurt Lewin did say that there was nothing more useful than a good theory. It is probably disingenuous of any adult human to claim to see any phenomenon from a theory-less state. I had planned on neither testing hypotheses nor developing grounded theory, but rather intended to use existing theory to shape my study and to speed analysis of the data. It seemed useful, therefore, to have a schema to describe group and individual characteristics and behaviors that were or were not consistent with the literature. Because the gathering and the analysis of data are synchronous and iterative processes, such a schema served as a shortcut for me, assisting me in reaching conclusions about whether observations and data supported the existence of a learning organization/Learning College/Professional Learning Community in a particular case. I have summarized below those behavioral characteristics and actions that reflect one end or the other of the continuum implied between the stylized “traditional organization” and the ideal “learning community” (see Appendix B).

Individual Behaviors

Through interviews and observation, I looked for examples of individual behaviors that were or were not consistent with what the literature described as characteristic of the Professional Learning Community. Do faculty exhibit systems thinking? Do they collaborate in the design of individual courses, in the teaching of those courses, and in evaluating those courses? Or do faculty operate in “island classrooms,” and generally avoid talking about their teaching practice, about their successes and failures? Is there public exploration and reflection among the faculty? Do organization members mutually challenge each other’s assumptions and conclusions through dialogue rather than debate, especially when differences over technique and teaching philosophy arise? Or do faculty generally avoid talking about learning, sidestepping differences and disagreements except perhaps to accuse each other of bad technique? Are faculty members regularly using learning community practices such as reciprocal classroom visits, collaborative teaching, classroom learning communities, and teaching circles? Or is their teaching practice privatized, with improvements made in solitary contemplation? Does the suggestion that “my class” could be improved result generally in a noncommittal response, perhaps even anger?

Group and Team Behaviors

Within the faculty team or department, do members practice systems thinking? Do faculty teams actively seek to learn together and from each other’s individual experiences? Do members share teaching practice within the team and with colleagues beyond the team? Is responsibility for student learning shared among faculty, within and across departments and disciplines? Do faculty groups seek to build mutual trust, to build community in the

group? Do faculty welcome other faculty and staff going beyond their job descriptions to collaborate? Or do faculty jealously guard their individual practice, and more narrowly define their individual roles? Do faculty members operate autonomously, rarely taking time together to explore practice or to foster significant faculty learning and development, both as individuals and as groups? Or do they set aside time to learn together, operate in collaborative ways, and research their practice, perhaps through action learning? Is the discussion of an individual faculty member's practice considered a taboo, or not seriously discussed by the group? Or does the group see its members as collectively responsible for student learning, and for each individual faculty member's growth and professional development?

Leadership Behaviors

Leaders may be administrators who supervise the faculty in the team, department chairs, or formal and informal faculty leaders within the team. Is leadership shared, or is it practiced in the heroic and individualist manner? Do leaders practice and encourage risk-taking, collective inquiry into practice, and systems thinking? Do leaders preach the vision and mission and regularly model the values of the college? Do leaders expect behaviors and plans to support the former? Is failure punished or is learning from failures rewarded and expected? Do leaders show patience with people and persistence toward the goals and vision? Do leaders try to drive decisions down from the top, or are they comfortable fostering decision-making at many levels? Do leaders tacitly or actively support the tradition of individual faculty autonomy over decisions regarding student learning? Or do they promote shared decision-making regarding student learning and other important organizational concerns?

Team or Organizational Culture

Within faculty teams or professional learning communities, is there a “culture of learning” (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999) which recognizes the diversity of members, seeks varied contribution from each member, has as a goal the advancement of collective knowledge and learning, focuses on processes of learning how to learn, and has structures which support learning? Are the espoused theory and the theory-in-use largely harmonious? Or is the culture one of learned dependency (Block, 1991), learned helplessness, a culture of fear (Kerka, 1995)? Does the team have its own mission statement or strategic plan and does the team expect individual faculty to contribute to one or the other?

Organizational Community

Do the faculty teams practice pseudocommunity as described by Peck (1987)? That is, is disagreement avoided or turned into political debate and personal attack (Bohm, 1996)? Do people try to fix each other? Do individuals abandon and/or avoid collective group action? Is there defensive individualism? Or is there a history of publicly sharing differences, a public reflection on assumptions and conclusions? Are people willing to share the pain of their individual isolation and doubts? Is there a shared history with common assumptions, heroes, and stories told by many from various employee groups and from individuals with differing roles? How have faculty arrived at the perceptions they hold? Has there been a “coming together” to review these perceptions? Or have they been reached in a more fragmented and separate way?

How the Schema were used

In the practice of interviewing, observing, and reading documentation, I looked for indicators that the characteristics, actions or behaviors of the organization and/or the small group under study fit either the left or the right column of Appendix B. I also looked for data that were inconsistent or inconclusive, since this might have indicated some third alternative, or the very likely possibility that those characteristics positioned the organization or team somewhere along a continuum, of which the two sides of the table in Appendix B represent extremes. In order to keep the observations separate from these and other tentative conclusions, I used the two-column chart method for making observations.

In addition, I designed the interview procedure in part using the schema. While each interview made use of the long interview process, I wrote broad first questions to focus discussion on experiences, events, behaviors and characteristics rather than on interviewee opinions and conclusions. Follow-up questions were especially shaped by the responses that indicated behaviors or characteristics on one side or the other of the table in Appendix B, as well as in a manner designed to explore assumptions and inferences contained in the responses. Finally, I used the schema during data analysis as described below.

Epistemological and Ethical Issues

The proposed methodology is consonant with the epistemological stance I have taken in this proposal, that objectivity in any absolute sense is illusory and not really desirable at any rate. Echoing Bohm (1980), and Maturana and Varela (1987), I believe that reality, at least social reality, is socially constructed in a partnership between knower and known in which the two are so closely implicated in each other that real separation is not possible. Indeed, to understand reality, methods which not only take this enfolded nature

into account but also make good use of it are the most desirable. Furthermore, ethics require that we recognize with Schein (1987) that any organizational research is itself an intervention, whether we desire it to be so or not. Since “every act of knowing brings forth a world,” and “all doing is knowing, and all knowing is doing” (Maturana & Varela, 1987), why not recognize this as a virtue and use methods which make the most of it?

Because learning organization theorists like Senge seem to be constructivist in their view of the world and derive many of their notions of the ideal organization from Bohm, Maturana and Varela, and Buber (1970), it seems appropriate to shine a constructivist light on the actual implementation of the LO in real organizations. Constructivists focus on theory and paradigm development as shared social creations, a key component of the LO expressed in the “disciplines” of altering mental models through team learning. My stance here is a similar one, focusing on the shared realities participants used or created in their efforts to learn from each other and to share learning as part of creating a Learning College or in some other form of organizational development intervention. My conclusions are my own, but created in the interplay of social relations between others and myself during the research process, and in the interplay of the words and thoughts of the participants and of writers from the literature with my own words and thoughts.

My ethical stance results from a worldview that describes systems and individuals as interconnected and as co-creating an intersubjective reality. In this “contextualized-consequentialist” ethical model (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), research participants are not subjects to be manipulated or coerced, but partners to be treated with mutual respect. Democracy in the workplace, in institutional life, and the values associated with democracy served to frame the research process and product. I made ethical decisions within a context-bound situation, and attempted to resolve those few dilemmas fairly and openly. Where

appropriate I included participants in that process, describing my view of research and my attempts to protect them from any negative consequences of their participation. At the same time, I was honest about how I could not control all circumstances, describing the final product and where it would be accessible to interested parties. In sum, I expressed my essential respect for the individual in the right to reasonable privacy and protection from exposure that might cause unnecessary pain or risk. Every effort has been made to disguise participant and institutional identities both for this ethical reason and for the very practical one of earning enough trust to obtain cooperation for research access and research production.

Nothing of this discussion is meant to imply either an absolute subjective view or a pure relativist approach. I have not assumed an identity between my conclusions and the views of any organizational members/participants. Nor in any essentialist way have I assumed an identity of my conclusions with an absolute reality. I do assume some conversation between the participants and myself, and between my views and the world. I take responsibility for my own voice and conclusions while at the same time I have tried to give the voices of organizational members and research partners their fair space to be heard.

The world view described above demands that the participants not be “subjects” of a research study brought down from some high objectivity as an imposition. Instead, I have viewed all participants as fundamentally and truly contributors in my creation of the research project, itself a new intersubjective reality. Further, since every research act is also an intervention, as Schein (1987) and Maturana and Varela (1987) note, I designed this study to take into account the obligation to share more than research results with participants. At minimum, I have hoped that the study should do no harm. More ideally, the research acts of participants and the researcher should be of benefit to the individuals and organization by

furthering learning in both, serving as a tool for reflection and thus facilitating that learning. The reflections of participants then became additional empirical matter for the research project. While the ultimate responsibility for the research paper and presentation are that of the researcher, the responsibility for the learning is shared, and the meanings that have been made are a co-creation.

I was thus led to a methodology where the understanding and co-creation of learning are not just phenomenon to be observed, but bi-products of the research activity.

Participatory research methods involve the researcher and researched in a conversation. This dialogue can surface new learning and understanding in the researcher and in the other participants (Bohm, 1996; Bohm et al., 1991; Schwandt, 1994). For practical applicability, organizational ethnography in the form of the learning history (Roth & Kleiner, 1995b) is essentially just such a co-discovery and co-creation of meaningful learning in actual organizational settings.

Research Design

My research design made use of the collection of methods that Roth and Kleiner (1995a) have called a “learning history,” a case study method which makes an eclectic and practical application of several approaches (see Appendix F). As Stake (1994) points out, a case study is not a methodology in itself but rather “a choice of object to be studied” (p. 236). The learning history approach studies the case through several lenses. In its pure form, the learning history is a “jointly-told tale” (Kleiner & Roth, 1997, p. 172), a form of “community storytelling” created by a team of outside researchers and inside participants to assist the individuals and their organization in making their learning known to themselves and to others (Roth, 1996). It seeks not just to record events and resulting learning, but also

to expose underlying assumptions and intellectual and experiential responses to those events and that learning, and thus to be a vehicle for learning and an act of learning itself. In Roth and Kleiner, this effort can involve up to 40 participants across the organizational spectrum. It uses techniques or elements borrowed from action research (Reason, 1994; Whyte, 1991), Schein's (1987) process consultation, McCracken's (1988) long interview, organizational ethnography (Schwartzman, 1993), organizational culture research (Schein, 1992), and document analysis (Hodder, 1994; Roth & Kleiner, 1995b; Roth, 1997).

While the full learning history methodology involves a major portion of an organization and a large team of researchers, in the case of my research project, I intend a more modest effort with one researcher and a total of nineteen organization members in hopes of achieving depth rather than breadth. Ross and Kleiner's (1996) previous use of this methodology and relative success with it suggest it will serve my purpose here. Further, the elements they have borrowed have been used and tested by others extensively. Essentially a *bricolage* (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) of observations, document analysis, interviews, personal experience, oral history, and case study, the research design was to some extent opportunistic, taking advantage of what was available at the time and of whatever methods appeared to be workable and useful. Below, I describe this design in action:

Site Selection, Access and Entry

Through my readings in the literature and the community college press, and my contacts as a member within the community college network of practitioners, I sought the names of a few colleges that met my initial criteria. Criteria for site adequacy included: (1) a community or two-year technical college; (2) within a half of day's drive of my home or work; (3) with an espoused intent to operate along some of the principles of the learning

organization and/or Learning College; (4) which has decided to make use of faculty teams specifically to improve student learning. (This could be manifested as formal and/or informal approaches such as team teaching, reciprocal classroom visits, and peer sharing conversations.) I narrowed possible sites down to three, and then explored those three in more depth using their web sites and other sources of information. By April of 2000, the school I called Midwest Community College had surfaced as an apparent best choice.

Dr. Lee Howser, the president of Jackson Community College at that time, and my ultimate supervisor as well as generous mentor, was acquainted with Dr. Aaron Moeller, the president of Midwest. Dr. Howser sent a letter of introduction to President Moeller, and then followed that with a telephone call. This resulted in the initial access I needed to telephone Dr. Moeller myself in mid-April. In that telephone conversation, I explained the general purpose of this study and sought to arrange an initial visit and interview with an executive. The first visit and interview would, I hoped, verify the adequacy of the site, and result in formal access to the campus and any willing participants. Dr. Moeller was eager to help me in my quest. Like Lee Howser, he had been assisted by others in his doctoral program and sought to pass that on to me. Dr. Moeller referred me to Dr. Paula Galligan, the Vice President for Instruction, and I talked with her further. She thought Midwest was a good site based on what I was able to tell her, and she agreed to help as well as be my first interviewee. She did ask that I speak further with Julie Shea, chair of the Trailblazers, to verify that teams were doing some of the things I was hoping to research.

Ms. Shea proved as kind and generous as so many others, with both her time and cooperation. We conversed by telephone in May of 2000 and again by email in June and July. She mailed me some documentation on teams who had received what Midwest called Learning College Grants, and we reached agreement that Midwest seemed a good research

site. I then telephoned Dr. Galligan in July, and we were able to arrange my first visit for late August of 2000. Dr. Moeller through Dr. Galligan granted me formal access to the site, pending my conversation with Galligan.

I first visited Midwest on Friday, August 4, 2000. I took photographs of the campus, and made a walking tour, gathering some documents as I walked. During the interview with me, Dr. Galligan gave me a history of key events at Midwest, answers to my questions, some official documents with more to follow in the mail, and some suggestions for teams that seemed to fit my criteria as professional learning communities, providing a list of team members names and telephone numbers. She granted me final access to the site, and also agreed to be my liaison. She offered her assistant, Martin Bentley, who over the course of the research helped me book rooms and make other logistical arrangements. Dr. Galligan then asked me to wait until she had an opportunity to talk with her Deans Council in two weeks so that they would know what I was about and assist me or at least not hinder my work. With this, I concluded my first visit having gained overall official access to the College.

Access to the faculty and other administrative participants thus came through recommendation by Vice President Galligan. Neither Dr. Galligan nor I wished her office to make any contacts with individuals, since this could make their participation less voluntary, might cause them to view me as representing the college administration, and thus produce questionable data. When I received Dr. Galligan's leave to proceed following her meeting with the Deans Council, I sent an email introduction of myself and my research to more participants from the several teams and departments than I would finally need to interview. I assumed that some would not respond, and some would respond negatively, as was indeed the case. In fact, however, more candidates agreed to participate if I needed them than I had time or space for in my design. I thank them and all at Midwest who have so graciously

cooperated throughout this project. They know who they are. I followed up the email introductions with telephone calls to again explain my overall purpose, collect some participant information to be recorded on a participant information form, and to arrange an appointment for an interview. I also arranged access to a meeting of the Trailblazers to observe them in action.

Data Collection Procedures

After access to site was obtained, and an initial set of interviews arranged, I planned my first visit in October of 2000. The timing of this visit was largely determined by Midwest's college calendar. By October, the academic term was well enough along, and no college events interfered with my visit. During my four days on campus in October, I gathered more official documentation relative to the planned change strategy, and made general observations in a variety of public settings. The purpose of this data gathering was in large part to obtain a view of what might be termed the "official" rationale for the Learning College intervention, its purposes, the results sought, the paradigms desired, and the official meanings to be made. I was able to make participant observations of one meeting, the Trailblazers, after which I also arranged additional interviews with participants. I continued my observations of the setting in terms of physical layout and apparent cultural symbols, and took occasional field notes using the two-column format. Later, after reading through these notes, I extracted some and transcribed them onto a laptop computer using Microsoft Word.

My earlier interview with Dr. Galligan had enriched my understanding of and given voice to the vision that drives the intentional change efforts surrounding the Learning College. It also had resulted in her recommending several teams or departments as seemingly exemplifying the PLC in action, as she understood it from my description. This

recommendation was important, not just in terms of speeding up my ability to discover likely teams, but also because her official recognition of these teams was part of the research process. I hoped to see what consonance there might have been between her vision of Midwest and its direction, and those of whom she believed were exemplary faculty. Criteria for selection of faculty teams within the site included: (1) at least one team which has been “officially” recognized and/or mandated by administration; (2) at least one team which has been voluntarily created and operated more informally; (3) teams with a given purpose of improving teaching practice and student learning; (4) teams whose members meet or had met often and somewhat regularly, either formally or informally. I hoped for but did not require a team that was located within one department or discipline as well as a cross-disciplinary faculty team.

Based on these criteria and my description of my research goals, Galligan had recommended the following teams: the Process Education™ Steering Team, the Read/Write Connection, and perhaps the Trailblazers Team and the Curriculum Modularization Team. She had also strongly recommended the Communications and Speech department for at least three reasons: First, she told me they were “a department that I would say works as an informal learning community all the time.” Second, they were active with the Learning College Grant process, having applied for and received three, including two to redesign the two introductory speech courses and develop shared course materials. Third, they were “very scholarly people” who had completed or were working on research themselves, and who had completed doctoral research as well, and so might be understanding and cooperative with a sojourner on the doctoral journey.

Interviews

I interviewed a total of seven faculty members and one administrator during the period of October 24 to 27, 2000, and sat in one committee meeting, the Trailblazers. One scheduled interview with a faculty member had to be canceled because of a family emergency, and could not be rescheduled. After the initial analysis of documentation and data from each interview, I modified the exact language of the interview protocol (see Appendix A) to take advantage of what I was learning in general and about the specific projects with which the individual was involved. I also gained two more names for further interviews, which I scheduled and made during two visits in March of 2001. Again, the exact language of the protocol changed, as analysis of each succeeding interview suggested new follow-up questions, which I added in a “snowball” effect (Rubin 1995). I sought to interview one additional administrator after Galligan, someone who would have some direct knowledge and observation of a team’s formal and/or informal functioning, and some relationship with the faculty involved, whether that of formal supervision or some more informal connection. My decision to interview Assistant Vice President Wayne Prange as the second administrator was based on these criteria as well as on his having a high-level view while also being himself a member of the Trailblazers Team.

After initial contact with each potential interviewee, with their agreement and written consent, we arranged a mutually agreeable time and location. In most cases, interviews took place in a conference room in the Learning Technology Center (LTC). I chose this relatively isolated location away from the participant’s office and regular work area to reduce interruptions and encourage reflection. In several cases, time and convenience required that we meet in a participant’s office. Nonetheless, there was only one serious interruption for a telephone call from home, and the continuity of no interview seemed disturbed. The

technique I used here was the long interview (McCracken, 1988), with as little prompting and with as open and neutral questioning as possible. During the interview, I asked participants to describe:

- 1) a focused personal history related to topic,
- 2) the concrete details of the participant's experience in regard to the topic, and
- 3) the participant's reflection on meaning of the experience, both intellectual and emotional (Seidman, 1998).

Participants were asked questions to encourage the exploration of:

- their roles in the intervention, program, team and/or department
- their experiences of it
- their own versions of the official vision of the Learning College and other administrative messages sent
- their memories of and reflections on this history
- the learning they achieved
- their observations about what other participants learned and with how that learning was generally shared.

My assumption here was that—in a learning organization—learning is systematically shared and affects the larger organizational community and organizational processes, procedures and systems. Therefore, participants were asked to talk about how the new learnings have affected organizational processes, routines, and behaviors. These long interviews averaged about ninety minutes, with a low of 60 and a high of nearly two hours. With the consent of all participants, every interview was tape-recorded using a small, unobtrusive, auto-reversing cassette recorder. During each interview, I took some brief notes about scene, physical characteristics, and my initial interpretation of key points. I copied these notes into my

research journal, where I summarized my own interpretations and observations using the right/left column format.

In addition to individual interviews, I was able to arrange one group interview with four members of the Process Education™ Steering Team, which took place in a conference room in the Student Center Building. This group interview served both as a way to observe group functioning and relationships and to gather data from the interchange between and mutual stimulus of group members. Since this interview took place during my last visit to campus in March, I was able to tailor some questions to check for consistency with earlier tentative conclusions, and follow up on some earlier themes. I was able to observe team members in interaction, and made some notes using the two-column chart. I tape-recorded this group interview, this time using two auto-reversing cassette recorders located at opposite ends of the conference table.

Transcribing

I typed verbatim transcripts of all the interviews from the recordings using Microsoft Word 2000 (9.0.4402 SR-1). After each was transcribed, I reviewed it while listening to the tape again, making corrections as appropriate. I played every tape through completely at least twice, and certain passages several times. While transcribing, I inserted within brackets such indicators as when a pause occurred, sounds that could be heard on the recording and might have somehow interfered with the interview process, and places where voices were unintelligible. I reproduced every word, repetition, verbal misstep and vocal interrupter in the transcripts. However, since this was not a study of speech patterns or research that required these analyzed or reproduced in the final document, when I copied passages from transcripts to the findings, I standardized most speech, removing most vocal interrupters,

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missteps, and repeated phrases. I kept only those that seemed to add to the meaning, such as when someone hesitated to answer, seemed to change mental gears, or paused for consideration. I also changed word order a few times to either improve the sense of the passage or connect disconnected pieces of a conversation into a logical history. In no case did I make a change where I thought the meaning of the original was distorted. All transcripts and tapes will be kept in my home residence so that a check may be made on my selection and use of these materials.

Member Checking

After each transcript was created, checked, and proofed, I emailed a copy to each participant or to all the members of the group interview. I asked in the email that they review the transcript and let me know if they felt that what they intended to say may not have been accurately reflected in the transcripts, or if they felt that they thought they would be harmed by something they had said. Most participants did not reply. Those who did chose only to thank me and wish me luck. Two asked if the transcript would be reproduced exactly, indicating some concern that their interrupters and missteps would make them look poorly, and were satisfied when I explained how I would standardize the language as well as make attempts to disguise their identities. During the initial data reduction and analysis, I shared tentative themes with some participants in interviews as a member-checking step, and their reflections became further empirical materials to be analyzed. No follow-up interviews seemed necessary, although one participant granted me a personal interview in October and joined the group interview in March. In this case, I was able to check for consistency in responses to certain questions, and see if her thinking had evolved in any way since the first interview. I found no significant changes in her views or stories.

Presenting Myself

My job title and role at the time of my visits to Midwest was Academic Dean at Jackson Community College in Michigan. I tried to de-emphasize this role in favor of my other roles as doctoral student at Michigan State University and occasional organizational development facilitator. My role as dean could have been problematic if it seemed to align me with the formal leadership of the organization or with the official vision and version of events. For this reason, I chose a community college out of my home state so that I would not be known. I wanted to be perceived in my role as student and learner rather than administrator. The Vice President and the Chair of the Trailblazers were the only two participants who knew my identity as dean, and they did not share this at my request. While most participants did not ask, several did query me at or near the end of the interviews as to my daily work role. At that point, I did explain my position as dean. Most expressed surprise, some saying that they had thought I was a research professor from Michigan State University, even though the informed consent form clearly described me as a student with Kathryn Moore as lead researcher. Given the apparent honesty with which all participants answered my questions, I do not believe my title in any way interfered with my ability to gather data.

As student and researcher, I had a responsibility to present myself neither as an expert with privileged knowledge nor as a representative of the official leaders either in terms of policing official realities or in any way requiring participation. Since I am a student and a co-learner, I tried to present myself clearly this way, with the real humility required of someone open to new meanings and learning. During each interview, I reflected on and tried to make meaning out of what I heard and out of the empirical materials I received. As each

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participant reflected on their individual and collective stories, they too were renewing meaning or making new meaning. And as we thus shared our meanings, in this sense, the new meanings and learnings achieved were co-created in a dialectical conversation of the researcher and researcher-participants (Schwandt, 1994). While the conclusions here are mine, and I bear the responsibility for them, it is important to me that the stories of the participants not be distorted to my ends. I tried to signal that by how I acted and who I was.

Without in any way retreating from my own voice or responsibility as a researcher and writer, I thus tried to leave space for other voices both in the research and in the presentation. Further, I made every effort to assure that participants knew this research study would further my attainment of a doctoral degree, and also contribute to the ongoing scholarly conversation about learning organizations. I hope they now consider our joint efforts to be a positive contribution to organizational learning at their college and to their own personal learning both within the organizational setting and within their individual lives.

Handling of Documentation

Appendix C lists the relevant documents I read or scanned during my research at Midwest Community College. In order to ease analysis and quotation, I used a flat bed scanner to reproduce as text files many of what seemed the most germane documents. I took notes on those documents that seemed relevant, summarizing the content and context as I understood it. I also referred to some of the documents and/or their content during certain interviews where that seemed useful. Documents are housed at my home residence along with the transcripts and other raw data.

Analysis and Interpretation of Empirical Material

Preliminary analysis of data began immediately after a day's interviews and continued throughout the collection of empirical material. I reviewed initial documents and the transcript of the interview with VP Galligan from my first visit to campus in August before returning to campus in October for more interviews. I also reviewed the observational data gathered in the form of field notes using the right/left column format. Besides getting more comfortable with the institutional context for my research, I sought a better understanding of the official vision and goals for Midwest as a Learning College. I made no thematic conclusions at this point. On my subsequent visits to campus, I made cursory analysis of the days' interviews, observations, and documents at night in the hotel, sometimes adjusting interview protocols the next day based on what I had seemed to learn. Between visits, as I typed transcripts, I made tentative classifications of data and tentative thematic conclusions, which to some extent shaped my strategies and interview questions on the next visit. All of this work was done in notes to myself, and not in the formal way described below because I wished to have all of the data before my conclusions began to solidify.

Preparation

Each set of transcribed interview data was saved in both Word and plain text formats. I used N5 (version 5, build 1252 - formerly NUD*IST) from QSR International to facilitate all of the following formal analysis, and will describe the use of that technology in the context of describing my analysis. Before analyzing data, I performed some mechanical preparation to ease my use of N5. All transcripts, scanned document text, and observational data that had been turned into computer text were imported into N5 from plain text files. Next, I created tree nodes for the following base demographic data:

1. Sex
2. Age group
3. Institutional Role
4. Apparent Ethnicity

I did not know if any of these categories would have a relationship with any theme, and wanted to be able to search accordingly. (In the end, I found no such discernable relationships.) I then created base data tree nodes for academic department and for committees and task forces. As final preparation, I created tree nodes for each “case,” that is an individual node for every:

1. Interviewee (individual interviewed)
2. Participant (individual observed but not interviewed)
3. Person (individual mentioned in documents or interviews, but neither observed nor interviewed)
4. Committee, team or task force
5. Project (organizational efforts of any level mentioned in the research data)

I then coded every interviewee, participant and person associating them with demographic nodes and with case nodes of committee or project. This made it easier to search the data for relationships or themes associated with committees or projects.

Analysis of Interview Transcripts

All interview data was analyzed separately using a process suggested by Seidman (1998). He describes the following analysis of interview data producing first Vignettes or stories and second Thematic Analysis, which I have adapted from his manual process to the use of a computerized system:

1. Read each transcript in N5
 2. Mark interesting “chunks”
 3. Create a free node using a word or phrase suggested by the language of the participant(s) or some other word or phrase which suggests a category, theme, or vignette (story) or use a free node already created
 4. Code the appropriate passages accordingly
- Profile/Vignette production:
5. Select passages from all transcripts coded for a given story or vignette and create a text file to be saved and printed
 6. Code excerpt of material in the order each participant spoke it, with that spoken by each participant grouped separate from all others
 7. Reread this new version
 8. Edit out all portions that are not compelling by uncoding
 9. The end product is either one longer story grouped by participant, or one or more smaller vignettes grouped by participant (disguised through use of a pseudonym)
 10. Coded vignettes can then be grouped around topic areas or to support themes derived by adding more coding to the new files
 11. When incorporating a vignette into the findings, be faithful to words of participant, but cut out pauses and such sounds as “Um” and “Uh”
 12. Use ellipses to mark omissions and brackets to insert necessary information to clarify

Thematic Analysis (similar through step 4 above):

5. Select passages from all transcripts coded for a given theme and create a text file to be saved and printed

6. Read these files one by one
7. In each file, sift out the most compelling passages
8. Articulate the criteria for selection and sorting in memo fields
9. Note passages that seem to contradict patterns or themes discovered—do not ignore these
10. Seek to find new connections and code
11. Reduce and categorize through a kind of dialectical conversation between researcher and material. Recode.

Final Analysis:

1. Review vignettes and thematic analysis
2. Ask: What are the connective threads? What has been learned? How do vignettes and passages explain the connections?
3. Ask: How is this consistent with the literature or how not?
4. Member checking: Ask participants what they understand now that they did not before. What confirmed their previous instincts? How do they understand and explain the connections and themes?
5. Finally, the researcher asks: What meaning have I made out of this work?

In practice, I began by creating free nodes around stories or vignettes and around possible themes. Next, in order to look for consistency or the lack of consistency with the literature, I created some tree nodes from the literature for the Learning College, and for what in Appendix B I termed characteristics of the Learning Community and characteristics of the Traditional Organization. As I read the vignettes and transcripts, I coded passages to these tree and free nodes. As the “dialectical conversation” proceeded, I moved those free nodes that I planned on keeping into tree nodes, and then began to group these tree nodes

under larger categories, treeing them finally under the broadest categories of that which seemed to foster PLCs and that which seemed a barrier to the development of PLCs. I gathered all of the vignettes under the broad category of stories, as well as coding passages under the categories of fostering or barrier. Finally, perhaps showing my age or connection to the world of Gutenberg, I printed all coded text by node and bound them together in order. Then, in an iterative process, I attempted to synthesize answers to the research questions from my analysis and reading of the literature, from the themes and vignettes and I had derived, from the observations I had made, from the data obtained from documentation and interviews. These became my findings.

Presentation of Data

The presentation of analyzed data is in an ethnographic form, with the presentation of themes and generalizations as subheadings. After initial coding by story and theme, I contemplated several means of categorizing themes. First, I thought of using the four frames of Bolman and Deal (1991), but that seemed too artificial. Then I decided to categorize by where within the organization the behaviors, processes, or characteristics would be mostly found, or within which arenas would lie most of the responsibility for those behaviors, processes, or characteristics. After several iterations within this conception, what emerged was that organization represented in the findings Chapters Four through Six below. My hope was that this classification was more organic to the data and research process, but also that it would allow researchers or practitioners to look within a section of the organization should they want to focus further research or action. In basic, the major headings thus became:

1. Individual Behaviors & Characteristics
2. Group/Team Behaviors & Characteristics

3. Leadership Behaviors & Characteristics
 - a. Administrators
 - b. Department Chairs
4. Academic Department Actions & Characteristics
5. Organization-wide Actions & Characteristics
6. Organizational Culture
7. Organizational Community
8. External Environmental Factors

Within the chapter subheadings, empirical support is offered in the form of exemplary stories told (either in summary or direct quotation), vignettes derived from interview and observation, summaries of or references to documents, and/or descriptions of icons, symbols, hero myths and other cultural data. In some cases, I retold the narrative of the team's history, its reasons for inception, its crises and challenges and responses to both, illustrating, I hope, the drama of ebb and flow derived from the stories of the individuals interviewed and the documentary record. In summarizing my findings in the last chapter, I chose to begin each section with a quotation from one of the participants. In all, I hoped that there would be present both sufficient evidence for my conclusions and sufficient drama to make Midwest come alive for the reader.

Protecting the Privacy of Participants

In order to protect the privacy of participants, and reduce the likelihood that their participation in this research could do them harm, I attempted to disguise the identities of the college itself as well as all of its members mentioned. While Appendix D describes the profiles of the participants, I have chosen not only to use pseudonyms but, as a way of

further disguising identities, in some cases I have combined two participants comments into one or to left a quotation unattributed. I first created a fictional college in a fictional city, both located in an unnamed Midwestern state. I tried to describe the college in terms that were vivid enough to give the reader a visual picture, but also vague enough that that picture would be hard to associate with the actual college. Next, I created a list of committees, teams, departments, projects, and major processes mentioned in the research data, and created new names for any that did not sound generic to most community college campuses.

To create pseudonyms that did not accidentally suggest the original name or person through unconscious associations in my mind, I created a table of all participants. I then took a telephone directory from a city and state different from Midwest's actual location. Using random page numbers, I chose a first name and then through another random selection a last name for each participant. Despite my best efforts, however, it may be possible for someone external to the real college to guess its identity, as it may be possible for someone within the college to guess the identity of a participant. Therefore, as a final safeguard, when a participant was saying something I believed could cause them some harm, especially when complaining about an administrator or administrative action, I chose not to use any name or description at all.

Comparison versus Generalizability

As Stake (1994) warns,

People find in case reports certain insights into the human condition, even while they are well aware of the atypicality of the case. They may be too quick to accept the insight. The case researcher needs to provide grounds for validating both the observation and generalization. (p. 241)

This study does not seek external validity or generalizability in any positivist sense, and leaves the applicability of insights and information to the reader. Nonetheless, to reduce the chances of misinterpretation during the research, a certain amount of triangulation has been included in the data gathering. Comparison with and application to other cases will be left to the reader.

Chapter Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how selected faculty in one Midwestern community college worked together in a team or teams to improve student learning through a focus on their teaching practice, and the extent to which their efforts can be construed as constituting a Professional Learning Community. Using literature on organizational learning and the learning organization, professional learning communities, communities of practice, organizational culture and organization development as initial conceptual framework, I collected, analyzed, and summarized data from observations, interviews, and documents at one Midwestern community college. Theories of organizational learning and community building frame the analysis. Taking a constructivist-interpretive stance and using the case study approach, I employed multiple methods as suggested in Roth's learning history model and used in many studies of organizational behavior. Appendix E summarizes the research process using Denzin and Lincoln's (1994) suggested format.

CHAPTER FOUR

Findings: How do Professional Learning Communities exist at Midwest?

Findings and Chapter Introduction

In this first of three findings chapters, I will review the ways elements of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) may be present in faculty groups/teams, committees, or departments at Midwest Community College. Using the schema derived from the research (see Appendix B) as a guiding structure, this chapter will review the empirical data that seem to support the presence of PLCs in groups, departments or the larger organization. My intent is not to “prove” that Midwest is or is not itself a PLC. Rather, I have two purposes here: 1) to see the relevance of the theoretical and descriptive literature on this one specific case, and 2) to describe real examples of PLCs in such a way as to inform the discussion in the later chapters on the other research questions. Chapter Five will then review those characteristics and behaviors that may be encouraging or fostering the development of PLCs at Midwest, while Chapter Six will discuss possible barriers to PLCs that I noted there. In all cases, my language is conditional, since I am not seeking to demonstrate causation but rather describe processes, behaviors, and characteristics that may have been a part of the development of PLCs at this one community college. The questions that, taken together, these three chapters seek to answer are:

- Chapter Four: How are the elements of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) as described in the literature exhibited in the following:
 - a. individual faculty member actions and behaviors?
 - b. faculty group and team actions and behaviors?
 - c. administrator and formal leader actions and behaviors?
 - d. academic departments actions and characteristics?

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- e. structures and systems of the larger organization?
- f. organizational culture?
- g. organizational community?
- Chapter Five: How may various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics be fostering the development of PLCs at Midwest?
- Chapter Six: How may various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics be serving as barriers to the development of PLCs at Midwest?

Organizing Scheme of the Chapter

This chapter seeks to answer the first research question: *How are the elements of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) as described in the literature exhibited in individual or group, and organizational actions, behaviors, or characteristics?* To aid the reader in the journey through my data, and to perhaps better reveal the thinking processes which shaped my findings, I will begin each findings chapter with a brief explication of its organizing scheme. In the case of this chapter, the scheme was the one I derived from the literature (see Chapter Two and Appendix B). I grouped the characteristics of a PLC under seven major categories, which become the major sections of this chapter. The general progression is from the individual and particular to the organization as a whole and the general.

- Individual Behaviors and Characteristics
- Group/Team Behaviors and Characteristics
- Leadership Characteristics and Behaviors
- Academic Department Characteristics
- Organizational Structures and Systems

- Organizational Culture
- Organizational (Real) Community

How do Professional Learning Communities exist at Midwest?

As mentioned previously, groups of faculty at Midwest Community College exhibit many of the characteristics of a PLC as I discussed in Chapter Two (see also Appendix B). Here, I will further review those characteristics with some examples as observed or detailed in interviews and documents. It is, however, important to state the obvious: The PLC is a concept and does not exist in pure form. In my observations, interviews and readings, I found examples of Midwest as a traditional organization with traditional work groups, examples of what appeared to be PLCs, and examples that were ambiguous or inconclusive. In this chapter, I will review those signs that PLCs are being formed at the college so that we can next explore what is fostering that movement. Using the classification system of Appendix B as an outline, I will review some of the highlights that suggest that some faculty at Midwest are on that journey.

Individual Behaviors and Characteristics

I will discuss fourteen sets of individual behaviors and characteristics that may be demonstrating the PLC at Midwest. First, individuals demonstrated (1) **systems thinking** by having a sense of how local and individual actions and activities impact other systems and processes across the college, and by having a sense of how the college itself is located within a larger ecosystem of systems. For instance, Walter Nesbitt, professor of Industrial Engineering Technology, described the development of modular curriculum designed around a fictitious company, Robots, Inc., which gave the students a holistic sense of the

learning and connected what they learned to problems faced by real-world industrial firms. He included a wide variety of people on his team to implement the modules, some coming from several different academic disciplines and others from private industry.

You can imagine in this very room, we had a meeting with Manufacturing faculty. We had somebody from Quality, somebody from Mechanical, somebody from Business, somebody from Psychology, somebody from Physics, somebody from Math, and probably a couple others. And we're sitting around talking about how it fits together. You know, what is the collective student experience? Is it going to fit? Are they going to make connections between math and physics and engineering?

Clearly, the group was using systems thinking; but the individual, Nesbitt, understood it as well and recognized how important it was. It seemed quite common at Midwest to use cross-functional teams, and to involve people from within and without the institution in conversations and to design programs.

Related to this is a sense of personal responsibility for the whole system. Pamela Jagiello, an English professor, told me that

I do feel somewhat responsible for what goes on in the whole institution and want the quality of the whole institution to improve.... That again may be the result of being sort of by nature a big picture person who wants the best for my students, and my students are not going to have the best if they're not getting it from everybody.... It may be more that now I feel like there might be something I could do that actually would have an effect on that, which I might not have felt before.

It was a common theme in my conversations that the responsibility for student learning was held collectively and went across departments and systems.

Finally, the words “system” and “systemic” were in common usage. Faculty and administrators both talked about systems and the challenges of working in a complex organization with interconnecting systems as well as complex connections with government, community and business organizations.

Volunteerism (2), the individual choice to participate, could be seen in such actions as the ability of faculty to choose to participate in experimental curricular design, in professional development to promote Process Education™ in the classroom⁵, and the core value among faculty of having these efforts be led by faculty themselves. Obviously, this could be seen through an alternative lens as an expression of the value of faculty autonomy within a professional bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1991), common in most institutions of higher education, and discussed further below. However, there did seem to be a great deal of participation by individual faculty in many innovative practices and processes requiring team effort, rather than as isolated individuals operating as more or less free agents.

Patience with not knowing (3) was most dramatically exhibited in faculty willingness to appear less than perfect in front of a class, rather than in the expert role of

⁵ Process Education™ is a trademark of Pacific Crest, an educational consulting company that Midwest Community College contracted with to provide professional development for faculty over several years. Process Education™ became a key intervention by a faculty team with many of their colleagues, as we shall see throughout this discussion of findings.

The company claims that “the concept of a learning college is one that fits well within the philosophy of Process Education. In fact, the Principles of Process Education match up well and support the six principles on which the learning college is based.” Pacific Crest defines Process Education™ as follows:

“1. an educational philosophy focusing on improving students’ learning skills and creating self-growers;

“2. a philosophy which utilizes a continuous quality improvement approach towards the following key educational processes: teaching, learning, mentoring, assessment, curriculum design, and administration;

“3. implementation of this philosophy involves the use of innovative concepts, processes, and tools to create learning environments which are instructive, enlightening, and assist students with improving their learning skills (in multiple domains) and assessment skills.” (Pacific Crest, 2002)

“sage on the stage.” Nesbitt described trying the new manufacturing modular curriculum for the first time:

Now if I’m trying something new, chances are it’s not all going to be great.

There may be a week or two where, boy it just doesn't work at all [laughs]

and it just falls apart and students may not like that. They may not

understand what's going on, and I always explain to them [that] we're testing

this stuff out. This is the first time we've done this so help me with this.

This takes a great deal of self-confidence, perhaps a redefinition of the role of faculty. It certainly exhibits public not-knowing in a dramatic way especially, as Nesbitt points out, when students express their dissatisfaction in student evaluations of faculty, which are then reviewed by colleagues and administrators. That Nesbitt felt no rebukes from his dean is a sign that not knowing may be officially sanctioned in similar cases.

Not knowing is exhibited also in a gleeful willingness to learn more and publicly state how much you have to learn. Charlotte Stoppert in the Allied Health department is a good example. She laughed as she told me, “Oh. You know what it means to me. I have so much more to learn. I just never realized how much there is to learn. And how exciting it is!”

Admitting classroom failures to colleagues is another way faculty members exhibit patience with not knowing. Several described occasions where something they tried in the classroom broke down, and they went to colleagues to discuss it both to commiserate and to seek other tactics that might have made the teaching strategy work. Even in professional development activities, strategies would break down. How the facilitator handled it and how his audience of teachers responded exhibited patience with not knowing. According to Jagiello:

His design totally fell apart. But I think afterward we could sit there [and] say, “Okay, that didn't work. Why didn't it work? What went wrong? How are we going to fix it? If we tried to do something like this, what's a better way to do it?” And, whatever participation role they'd had, everybody felt like they can contribute to that. So that atmosphere, I think, is important, and doesn't always happen.

Susan Birdsall, Adjunct Professor in Social Science, described this as being a “lifelong learner.” “And I think we use the term so often—lifelong learner—just sort of rolls off of our tongue. But that really means that we don't expect the student nor ourselves to be finished at any one time.”

Many faculty members at Midwest seemed both to provide and to receive (4) **emotional support** and to (5) **cooperate** in many efforts, but especially in improving teaching. Scott Therrien was one of several faculty who described the cooperative and supportive nature in the Communications and Speech Department. He compared the atmosphere in his department at Midwest with that in a large regional university nearby:

You know we do work well together. It's one of the few places I've been where there's not any animosity or divisions between people, or little cliques. You know, like when I was at City University. I only stayed there one year because... there were like twenty people in the department... And there was like butting of heads [laughs]. So I didn't like it too well. That's why I left.

Amanda Gamet in the same department agreed. She has a young child and her husband's income is sufficient for the whole family without the addition of her income from teaching.

The cooperation and support from her department members give her a kind of joy that she finds invaluable:

The reason that I bring it up to you is that while I really love teaching, what keeps me here and positive and being willing to put up with everything else is the fact that I work with a great team. I work with a great team! And I think I would be hard pressed to find a team anywhere else in the United States of America that is as wonderful as this team of people is. And they bring so much to me because they see my potential before I see it. They support me. They'll show me direction, and yet they'll also tell me when I'm being an idiot. And there's not too many places where you can find that kind of mix. So I'm very fortunate. Very fortunate in that. Wouldn't trade it. Wouldn't trade it.

Gamet also talked about cooperation between full- and part-time faculty in the creation of workbooks to be used in every introductory speech class. She personally made efforts to break the barriers between the two groups and elicit joint support to improve and use the workbooks:

And what was interesting to me about it was some of them—you know, we're all the same—but because I'm a tenure-track faculty member they treat you kind of deferentially. And you slap them around a little bit and say, “Hey, wake up. We're just the same! Let's just have a conversation [laughs]. You're not going to hurt my feelings. You know, let's just talk about this and make it better for the student.

The production of the workbooks at first caused some ill feeling among part-time faculty who felt that they were not given the same rights as the full-time faculty to teach as

they saw best. But after months of interchange, pilot testing, and revisions which took into account many of the suggestions of part-time faculty, and after full-time faculty made it clear they too would use the workbooks, greater community and cooperation occurred among all of the faculty:

And I think the end result has been an increased level of cohesiveness also between the full-timers and the part-timers. I can't tell you whether or not they feel dictated to. But I can tell you that they feel comfortable enough to say, "I think that's a bad idea." And when I first came here, I'm not sure that that would happen. [Repeating for emphasis] I'm not sure that that would happen.

Jagiello in the English Department has participated in reciprocal teaching workshops that allow faculty to critique each other's performance. While she was initially uncomfortable baring her flaws as well as virtues before her colleagues, she found the atmosphere of support and honesty such that she continues to participate eagerly, not just willingly. "It's a very collaborative environment. And it's a very safe environment where failure is just as good" as success, she says. Faculty who participate collectively create an "affirming" community whose goal is the improvement of teaching and learning.

In education, one clear example of cooperative effort is (6) **team teaching**, where more than one faculty member share responsibility for a class of students and appear in the classroom at the same time in a dialogue of teaching.⁶ While the rewards system at Midwest does not encourage true team teaching, as I will discuss in Chapter Six when reviewing possible barriers, nonetheless there were examples of team teaching as defined here. For

⁶ For my purposes here, I will define it as *serial teaching* when two or more faculty share a class but teach at different times during a term and never together.

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instance, in an accounting course designed expressly for engineering students, the Accounting for Engineering professor (Melissa McMain) has teamed with a professor of Developmental Studies (Andrea LaGest) in a different and interesting way. While LaGest does not appear in the physical classroom, she is available on the Internet and through email to help students with the reading of the text and other materials, and with study skills strategies. This may fit the needs of the students better than having both in the classroom at the same time, but also may be a compromise within the given rewards system.

Teaching circles (7) were few and mostly informal, and most occurred among faculty who were using Process Education™ techniques in the classroom. The Process Education™ Team had as a goal within its strategic plan the implementation of a formal program of teaching circles, but this had not been implemented yet at the time of my visits. As a new faculty member, Beverly Van Meter in the Communications and Speech Department had visited class sessions of all of her full-time colleagues, but this was a special case and not the norm.

There was a great deal of (8) **documentation of teaching and review by peers**, especially in terms of assessment of learning outcomes. In addition, the Trailblazers Committee⁷ had produced a video of student testimonials about the results of efforts to use Process Education™ in the classroom. Finally, the college was using Flashlight™ tools developed by Steve Ehrmann and the Teaching, Learning and Technology Group (TLT Group) to assess and document student learning resulting from web-based teaching (TLT Group, 2002). Throughout my interviews, observations and readings I observed that documentation was a regular subject of conversation and discussion, and did not overhear

⁷ The Trailblazers were charged with administering the Learning College Grants and otherwise promoting innovation at the college. More discussion on this team's work will follow below.

any objections to it or questioning of the need, although some complaints about the amount of paperwork that resulted.

Truth seeking (9) is hard to precisely define in behavioral terms and thus to document. In general, I was able to observe committee or individual behaviors that seemed to demonstrate a desire to seek the truth and not to cover it up. Disagreements were open and not buried, but still civil. Perhaps the overall picture presented by this chapter may suggest how effective Midwest could be in facing and seeking truth.

Perhaps one demonstration could be in the willingness and ability of people to (10) **speak without fear** and be listened to without censorship or retribution. The most dramatic example was the Trailblazers meeting that I attended during my second visit to Midwest. Disagreement arose over the CompuCom Project, which had received a Learning College Grant two years before, but had produced no discernable results thus far. The issue was whether funding should be continued under these circumstances. The debate occurred primarily between Nesbitt, a faculty member, and Wayne Prange, an Assistant Vice President, but there were faculty and administrators who supported Prange's position. Nesbitt appeared to be alone, at least among those who spoke out. The chair of the committee was Julie Shea from the Business Information Systems Department and a faculty member. Kim McCarthy is Dean of Extended Learning, an administrator. Michelle Roelant is Chair of Nursing, a faculty member.

McCarthy: I'm not even sure Carol [Bedard, Chair of the Communications and Speech Department] wants to do the project. There's been no effort to try to make it work, and it got dismissed pretty quickly.

Shea: The proposal seems more about equipment and furniture configuration rather than retention and student success [the main

purpose of the Learning College Grants]. It got delayed last year because Carol was on sabbatical. Now Amanda's [Gamet] on sabbatical.

Prange: They aren't playing square with us. It appears to me that they don't really want to do this.

Nesbitt: As a Trailblazer, we should be part of all the project teams as fellow team members. We should have this same conversation with them as a team, give them an opportunity to meet with us. Help them to define what the test will be in this parallel college pilot project.

Prange: There's no evidence that there is any willingness to follow through on this.

The Communications and Speech Department was asking to delay the project beyond the two years maximum allowed by the grant for two reasons: Two key faculty on the team have had sabbaticals and the classroom equipment and furniture layout in the technology classroom do not meet faculty needs.

Nesbitt: The Trailblazers have failed this team by not following up sooner.

Shea: But still, is this a chance to get more money or is this about student learning? Do we have agreement to ask them to reapply for the grant, or should we defer the decision and meet with the Communications and Speech faculty privately first to discuss the issue openly and honestly with them as Walt has suggested? Privately. Not have them be summoned to the committee meeting.

Nesbitt: I think the Trailblazers Team should be helping them through the project.

Roelant: They are three years down the pike. It's okay to help them but you have to have something to help them with. And they haven't given us much to help them with.

Prange: I'll say it again. Do they really want to do this?

Shea summarized how the Trailblazers would proceed based on what she thought she had heard as a consensus view.

Shea: Are we okay with that? [Looking around the group]

Prange: I'd like us to reconsider the proposal as part of new requests. It's not fair to their colleagues who are following the guidelines.

McCarthy: I'll check the Grant guidelines to see if funding can roll over.

Shea: Thank you. These are tough decisions.

Most notable here was Nesbitt's willingness to disagree not only with most of the group, but with two administrators including an Assistant Vice President for Instruction. There was no apparent effort to force him to agree. When the group could not reach a consensus, they deferred the decision pending conversations and some research into grant guidelines. When I returned to the campus four months later, Nesbitt spoke about the disagreement, which had not yet been resolved, the debate continuing. He expressed no fear for being in the minority or for being at odds on this issue with administrators.

I had interviewed Prange the day after the Trailblazers meeting. He described Nesbitt as a kind of conscience of the group and as a visionary. At no point did he appear to take umbrage that Nesbitt had publicly disagreed and spoken out:

You heard that a little bit yesterday in Walt's comments. He's such a good visionary as he tries to redirect us if we get ourselves stuck around administration stuff. How can we better serve these teams, rather than just

cut off the funding 'cause you didn't do it in two years, like I would have done. So I think we're trying to practice what we preach....

This seems a clear example of the ability to speak out without fear. Other examples were described to me during interviews, the most interesting having to do with teaching practice.

Beverly Van Meter, a probationary Instructor in the Communications and Speech Department, talked about being able to speak out on colleague's teaching as they could about hers after reciprocal classroom visits.

Van Meter: Oh yeah, I have no problem [laughs] saying, "what you told me to do sucked." I have no problem doing that.

Sam: Is that pretty common?

Van Meter: Yeah. Yeah, I think that helps, too. None of us are like way up here above each other.

As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, there are examples of Midwest being a traditional organization. Thus, also in this case, as some faculty interviewees expressed fear of administrative retaliation for speaking honestly to me. I do not want to present a false picture. But our purpose here is to find where Midwest is an example of a learning community, and then seek those processes, actions, behaviors, and characteristics that may have encouraged that direction. Therefore, I dwell primarily on the steps that seem to lead that way.

The next area of individual behavior involves a propensity towards (11) **experimentation**. It is hard to separate group and department efforts from those of individuals, because there was a general pattern of faculty and cross-functional teams trying planned experiments and collecting data. The Learning College Grants were designed to promote experimentation in groups and teams. Nonetheless, there are examples of

individuals or pairs of faculty experimenting either in their own classrooms just to improve their teaching or as part of a formal study.

Public reflection (12) and the expression of **public emotion** (13) were both apparent to me in the above quoted excerpt from the Trailblazers meeting (see page 98 and following) as well as throughout the entire meeting. Nesbitt's musing over the proper role for the Trailblazers, their mission if you will, was a vivid example. Other members of the team received his musings as quite the norm and as a positive thing. I saw similar expressions in my meeting with some of the Process Education™ Steering Team in my February visit. Finally, it is best to leave (14) **collaborative efforts** to our discussion around department and group behaviors, since that is where it is most apparent (see page 114 and following). Nevertheless, throughout Midwest there seems to be a culture of collaboration encouraged by structural supports like the Learning College Grant, which is available only to teams not to individuals.

Group/Team Behaviors and Characteristics

For our purposes, I will discuss in this section seventeen types of informal and formal group behaviors and actions that suggest Midwest is moving towards becoming a Learning Community, except those within Academic Departments, which I explore separately below. First, I heard of or observed regular examples of groups using (1) **systems thinking** to discuss the total student experience at Midwest, recognizing further that the total student experience existed within external systems of other lives and other institutions. Their concern was how to best foster student success. Stoppert and the Allied Health Department were working with the Biology Department because the biology prerequisite was critical to student success. Without the knowledge gained there, students could not do

well in the allied health program or in their future careers. Without success in biology, students could not gain admission to an allied health program. To answer, in part, this dilemma, faculty members from the two departments were working together to redesign the biology course to make it more “learner-centered.” In addition, the Allied Health Department was creating an on-line “image bank” of sonographs and x-ray photographs from local area hospitals. These images would be available for biology professors to share with their students, the intent to both help the latter learn biology better but also to prepare many of them for moving into an Allied Health program having some familiarity with the products of that work. This appears to illustrate not only systems thinking in problem solving and solution design, but also collaborative action (see page 114 below).

Midwest faculty demonstrated systems thinking by locating the goals of their individual classes or programs within a larger context that included external institutions as ultimate customers. I regularly heard examples of the needs of transfer institutions and businesses being used to shape the desired learning outcomes. Carol Bedard, Chair of the Communications and Speech Department, told me:

I'm pretty much not of the opinion that a student is necessarily the customer. I think the customer is the employer or, in our case, for our majors, the customer is the transfer institution. And I think we're very aware, we try to be very aware of what's best for students who are taking this class because it's required for their major. What do they need to know in that major? And as we develop course materials, we think about it in those terms—not just, you know, why do they need to know communication, but, for this particular field, what's going to be important for them to know?

The Trailblazers Committee exemplified systems thinking in its entire approach encouraging and protecting change efforts at the college. Their conversations and documents show a deep concern with how efforts have an impact on the larger system and vice versa. The Learning College Grant that the Trailblazers manage is a positive reinforcement of collaborative cross-functional group efforts, not just as value in and of itself, but as a way to bring as many of the voices to the table as possible (Weisbord & Janoff, 1995). Their debates and conversations, like those of the Process Education™ Team, were filled with examples of group systems thinking. For instance, in the meeting of the Trailblazers that I attended, the discussion for a while focused on how the Trailblazers had aligned projects around certain institutional goals like retention and student success. Then Nesbitt said that he felt they needed to pay more attention to what the Trailblazers Team should do to make a difference across the entire college. "Are we limited to the Learning College Grants—is that enough?" He felt it was not enough. Discussion then revolved around the perception that there was no longer sufficient connection of the Trailblazers with administration, especially with the new Provost. Some believed that the conversations the Trailblazers had had with the previous Provost, now President, had helped "shape his thinking about innovation." In Trailblazers and Process Education™ Team discussions and reports, there are regular references to the connection of a particular project, problem, or event with larger systems. As Julie Shea, Chair of the Trailblazers, said in an interview with reference to the challenge that the Trailblazers had and were facing:

And we had, at the point that the institution-wide reform grant started, just all these different change drivers on the campus and all sorts of issues to integrate them. And we still have that [laugh]. But I think that's probably a sign of a healthy institution. And I love Margaret Wheatley, and one of the

things she says is the systems that are the most stable are nearest death. Well we're a far cry away from that, you know. You've got all these things happening. And so the original institution is the barrier and how can we get at these systemic challenges to sort of overcome the barriers? And I think we all have a differing sense—we don't have a common perspective right now on where can we make the greatest impact in the team.

Jagiello described the (2) **mutual trust** that was necessary for faculty to take risks during teaching workshops where one faculty member would demonstrate their teaching of a given module using Process Education™ strategies to colleagues who were role-playing students. After each faculty member was done, colleagues would note strengths and areas of improvement.

And I guess there were probably 20 people, not all of whom did an activity. The ones that were willing did an activity. And I did an activity that day and survived. And it didn't go perfectly. There were some problems with it. I think that kind of gave me confidence that I can get feedback from my colleagues that's not going to be judgmental but it is going to be helpful. And you do have to get over that hurdle because I think as university [sic] faculty we like to think we have all our acts together. And we don't want anybody to know we have weak spots. And to perform in front of colleagues means that somebody will see that you have a weak spot. You're not perfect. And I think that that's maybe the biggest hurdle, that for a lot of faculty, to get over that. That's a real risk-taking behavior, especially the first time.

The trust that grew among those who participated encouraged a willingness to share teaching materials and get feedback and advice on improving them.

If I've written a new activity, I could send it over to somebody and say, "Would you look at this?" Or if I have one that doesn't work, I could send it over to somebody and say, Here's what happened. What went wrong with this one? And I wouldn't hesitate to do that now. But I'm not sure that that developed right away. I think that probably developed over maybe the first couple of years.

Having mutual trust in colleagues is one thing. Another is mutual trust between student and teacher. Being able to express such trust in a supervisor is more difficult yet, given the formal power possessed in that role. Julie Shea, Chair of Business Information Systems, described an incident between a faculty member and a student. They had had some misunderstandings in their relationship, with the instructor providing guidance in one learning style and the student interpreting from another. When they both took an assessment of Kolb learning styles, they made the discovery of their differences, and were able to work together to help the student learn the material. Not only did this incident illustrate student/teacher trust, but also the faculty member then described the incident before a group of colleagues that included the supervising dean, thus exposing personal imperfections before all. The faculty member was willing to share a "lesson learned" in public, something that Shea believes "wouldn't have happened in my department" a few years before.

We have already seen several examples of (3) **people freely sharing their experiences**, whether experiences in the classroom both good and bad, experiences in professional development workshops, experiences in committee or team meetings, or the experience just mentioned between the student and teacher. Other examples I noticed include personal experiences with Process Education™ shared by faculty as part of a written

project report, and shared experiences of faculty attempting to implement the modularized curriculum.

Group and team learning was synchronous and just-in-time (4) in both unplanned and planned cases. We have seen some unplanned cases where groups of faculty learned together in workshops or in meetings. Shea described a planned occasion involving making meaning from data derived from surveys of local employers.

I co-led the faculty development Fall Workshop last year. The administrative leader and I decided we would use a workplace authentic activity where we would discover what employers wanted of our students so we'd have a guided discovery process across the college, what employers really wanted of the community college students. We did some remarkable focus groups, got some amazing data, and we were doing team activities to understand what the data meant to what we at Midwest do.

A Learning Organization plans every activity, process, meeting and event to be, in part, an occasion for group and individual learning (Senge et al 1994). I saw some examples of that at Midwest as suggested here.

Next, I will focus on the (5) **generative conversations** that are supposed to be a key part of the Learning Community, creative conversations that take talk beyond a reiteration of past actions and thoughts and produce new meaning and knowledge in the group. We have already seen examples of faculty conversing about practice in order to problem solve teaching methods. Fran Scullen, Professor of Legal Assisting and a member of the Process Education™ Team, described to me a trip three years ago that eight faculty members took together to a week-long conference on Process Education™ before the college had decided to invest in that set of methods. Not only did the group members bond well as a result of

the time together and the workshop experience, but their conversations between sessions also brought about the shared idea that Process Education™ would be a great set of tools to offer faculty and students at Midwest. From these creative conversations, a subgroup of the eight, with the blessings and support of the rest, wrote an application for a Learning College Grant that was approved by the college. Most of these eight also became the original members of the Process Education™ Team. In a separate example, Stoppert described a chance hallway conversation that led to greater cooperation between the Allied Health and Nursing Departments (see page 118 for more details).

Again, we have already seen some examples of the (6) **sharing of teaching practice and the sharing of expertise/collaboration**. Nesbitt talked to me about sharing the modularized technology program not only with faculty in other departments (e.g., Fire Science and Automotive), who took the module concept and adapted their own curriculum to fit, but also sharing same with colleagues at other colleges. Bedard described sharing small group methods with colleagues in other disciplines around Midwest's campus. Meanwhile, the Process Education™ Team's workshops were designed to foster sharing of practice and conversations about teaching and learning and, according to participants I interviewed, had succeeded to a great extent. Scullen talks about the latter:

And every now and then if something goes very well, then I'll share it with someone. And in Process Education™ when we would try things and they would succeed, I would send emails to Julie [Shea, Chair of Business Information Technology] and Rene [Muldar, an adjunct faculty member in English] and say, "Oh I tried this today, and this really worked and I'm really excited."

There was evidence of increased use of technology-mediated sharing of practice and expertise, using email, electronic bulletin boards (threaded discussions), and the internet. Jagiello mentioned the use of these tools to discuss how to promote interactive class discussions, a topic that continued for about one month in spring of 2000.

There's a lot of lurkers who don't ever post. But there are probably 25 people who actively post things and respond to each other and a lot of other people that are learning from listening to it. And then we found out at Fall Faculty Workshop that our Provost is actually reading it because he said something that he would not have known about [laughs]. That's where it was.

The sum of these observations suggests that there is a (7) **community discourse on teaching** taking place across Midwest, certainly not involving every faculty member let alone every employee. Nonetheless, a significant number of faculty have been involved in this discourse to a greater or lesser degree. At least 25 according to Jagiello have held forth electronically. The entire Communications and Speech Department (six full-time faculty plus some adjuncts) have regularly talked about teaching and learning. According to the Process Education™ Team, about 200 faculty have taken part in their workshops, many of whom have continued the conversation since.

I witnessed some of the discourse in miniature when I met with some of the members of the Process Education™ Team. Their interchange suggested a long relationship with comfort in talking about hard issues, and sometimes disagreeing. Deborah Wild is Chair of the Team and a Professor of English. Susan Birdsall, Fran Scullen are members of the Team:

Wild: When you look at the big picture of... faculty members, I think that given personality profiles, this approach [Process Education™] is not

conducive for everyone. It's sort of like distance learning. I did distance learning for a year. And I really liked it. There was a lot of energy. But they [administration] sort of wanted everybody [laughs] to try it in the department. And it's an unfair premise, as with process I think almost, because everyone is not tailored for the kind of characteristics that smoothly run a process environment. Do you know what I...?

Sam: When you say "everyone" you mean all the faculty members?

Wild: I mean we're not generic. We're not that homogenous. And... not that we can't change and aren't fluid, but just in our fiber some people have a very difficult time with the openness that's required in process, that you can't be defensive, you know, if you build that trust thing.

Birdsall: The challenges from the students.

Scullen: But do y...

Wild: I don't think everybody's comfortable doing that.

Scullen: But do you know what? But when we ask the students, when we say the way you grow... Because when I first came here, the idea was that you didn't make the students do anything they weren't comfortable with because you didn't do that to them. You know. If they didn't like to participate, you didn't call on them. Do you remember how that was that idea that you... ?

Birdsall: Sensitivity to the students.

Scullen: That's right. That you... would hurt them. Well now, you push people outside their comfort zone. Right?

Wild: Right.

Scullen: And I tell the students, "That's the way to grow."

Wild: Right. Right.

Scullen: And then you try to get them to pick skills that they need to improve.

Birdsall: Um hmm.

Wild: Right.

Scullen: For me, I'm just way across the scale as an introvert, and so I am a slow processor.

Wild: I didn't know that!

Scullen: Oh, I am... really! I am a slow processor. And to stand up and lecture. I love that!

Wild: [laughs] You told me that!

Scullen: That's easy! You know, you can stand up there, and then you can be clever and witty and you call the students when you want to. But when you have to be a facilitator, that is hard.

Birdsall: Um hmm.

Scullen: But I think if we just say, "Oh well, no... not all faculty are suited for that," then I think we let... We're saying to the students, "You have to be risk-takers and we want you to work outside your box." But faculty, they shouldn't have to.

Wild: I know. That's not right is it?

Scullen: They shouldn't have to... [unintelligible]

Wild: Well, I might think about that then. But I have noticed that it goes against some people's grains. It seems to go against their grains.

Scullen: And I think, for some of us, it is hard.

Birdsall: Oh, yeah.

Wild: So I don't know, now. Well. I'll think about that.

Here is a vivid example of several of the characteristics we have been describing, including mutual trust, the free sharing of experience, shared experience, as well as a community of discourse.

Nesbitt described the effects of the modularized curriculum, something that has proved to be controversial:

Another way we're getting folks to talk is [laughs] through some of these controversies. We have had and still have some faculty that have some very strong complaints about some of the implications of the modularized curriculum. One complaint is that by imposing—and we aren't imposing—but if we were to impose the module architecture, that in some ways [that would be] taking away some of the academic freedom of the faculty. And, in my mind, that's a good debate. [Another complaint is that] if we are making it more activity-based, does that mean a class needs to have more lab component, and a lab component doesn't get paid as well as a lecture component, which to me is a good debate.... You know, do we value lecture more than activity-based learning? Well on a pay-basis, Midwest does. And that's something we need to talk about. This [modularized curriculum] has been a very controversial project at times, and I see that as evidence that we're at least changing things. I mean, if we are talking about this very new

student experience, and it went very smoothly, well it's probably not very new then, and you're probably not making a lot of changes. And that's something we need to stir some things up a little bit. And this project and really a lot of the things we're doing are really pushing the issue. And that's one thing you're probably seeing in different interviews, that a lot of folks here do kind of push the issue. And I feel good about it. I mean, it's very awkward at times [laughs]. Sometimes it's not fun. But, you know, for the most part, if people are [laughs] upset, I know we're making some changes at least.

This is also a good example of public disagreement, that is, differences are visible and publicly explored (see below under Real Community, page 169 and following). It is important to connect these two characteristics of a Professional Learning Community. Having a public and shared discourse around teaching practice does not imply that this will be smooth and without disagreement. People may passionately agree on missions and first principles, but passionately disagree about methods and strategies. Senge (Senge et al., 1994, 1999, 2000; Senge, 1990) and Argyris (1986, 1991) among many others make this point.

Jagiello mentions what she believes is now a common occurrence, illustrating shared discourse:

The fact that other people are having the same struggles with changing their way of doing things is very affirming. And yes, we sit in the cafeteria and talk about, "Oh I tried to do this and it didn't work." I have people to talk about those kind of things with from every area in the campus. Not just... the English department faculty. But there is a community of those of us who are trying to do the same kind of work.

This is not just talk. Jagiello talks about a real change to practice that has real results:

And I just reviewed last night some materials from Mary Snell [Professor of Legal Assisting], who was the innovator of the year last year. She's a wonderful teacher. She sent me over new material she wrote for a class in legal assisting. It's a class about how to probate wills. Okay? I read her materials on how to probate wills and wrote notes about it two days ago. That's not something you would normally find going on at many colleges. And she asked me because we've been in those workshops together and had developed respect for one another and figured out that what the other person had to say would be useful.

Many others mentioned similar sharing of ideas, methods, criticisms and practice because of a conversation about teaching and learning carried on across Midwest's campus. As Nesbitt said in summarizing his experiences:

You know, [in] this campus-wide dialogue on student learning, there is certainly not consensus on what it means, how we're doing, what we need to do differently. But there is discussion. And that's great!

Collaborative action (8) may be taken by a pair or a few individuals informally, by informal groups, by formal organizational groups such as teams and committees, and by academic departments. I separate the last out both because the department is an organizational structure as well as a group of faculty, and because the department is a locus for intervention in and of itself, and thus discussed as a special case later. We have already seen examples of collaborative action above, mentioned when we discussed Individual Cooperation, Team Teaching, and Teaching Circles, and in Group/Team Shared Practice and Expertise. Here I will review examples of collaborative action that fall into the seven

categories described by DuFour (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) and to some extent by Louis (Louis, Marks, & Kruse, 1996).

There is a clear overlap between (9) **reflective dialogue**, the first of these seven, and generative conversations and the sharing of practice mentioned above. As I have noted, a number of faculty described themselves in conversations with colleagues that illustrate reflective practice and dialogue about same.

Since I have been here, there has just been a tremendous dialogue going on about... student learning at Midwest. What works, what doesn't. Even... if I'm having lunch with a Fire Science faculty and, you know, I'll talk about something. We're trying this. This doesn't work. What do you do to address this issue? And just that dialogue, that campus-wide dialogue of how do we improve the learning situation, I think, helps a lot. It lets me know that I'm not in it by myself. There are other people taking chances, taking risks, making major changes to how they conduct their courses.

Here Nesbitt describes one of the benefits of reflective practice, a reduction of the sense of pedagogical isolation identified by Shulman (1993). Reflective dialogue can be informal, as above, or built more formally into a meeting structure, as Amanda Gamet describes the Communication and Speech Department meetings:

Then they [adjunct faculty] were very frank about some things that they felt should change. And also very forthcoming in terms of the effect that it had in the classroom: "It worked for me in this way." "It didn't work for me in this way." And we have instituted now in every department meeting time that we talk about how are things working in Public Speaking? And how's the workbook working in Interpersonal [Communication]. And so there's always

that thread of communication and it's formalized on the agenda, so you have that kind of permission to talk about it.

Gamet also described lunch or hallway conversations about successes and failures in the classroom. There was honesty among department members so that if one tried something another had recommended, and it "just tanked," both could talk about possible reasons for the failure.

And everybody else will pitch in and say, "Well God... think about it this way. Did you think about it that way?" And, as a whole, we're very welcoming and then, yeah, we will try and try to help each other. I think we're pretty cognizant of the fact that we all come up together and we all go down together. So if we all help each other coming up, that's what's important. That's what's important to us.

Here Gamet seems to speak towards the idea that joint dialogue fosters a sense of community responsibility, again part of Shulman's theme. Gamet continues, showing that the hunger for communication about practice, especially successful practice, is high:

The buzz is teaching. So when you have a great class, I mean everybody will just walk around and just, "God, I had a great, a great class! This went great." [laughs] And we all can talk about it and revel and it's really, that's a really good thing. And if you can't find anybody around, then we tell the secretary. [laughs] "Yeah, I know. You had a great class." "Oh, wonderful." And she's so patient and kind and let's us do it.

We have already reviewed (10) **reciprocal classroom visits** above under Teaching Circles. While there was one clear example of this in the probationary Communications and Speech instructor, Van Meter, and a plan for "peer coaching" as the Process Education™

Team referred to it, reciprocal classroom visits were relatively rare and not the norm at Midwest. In fact, while the Process Education™ Team report in Spring 1999 listed the development and implementation of a plan for peer coaching as a goal to be completed by Fall 1999, it was clear that this had not occurred as late as Winter 2001.

There were, however, many instances of the (11) **joint development of curriculum and assessment**, within departments, across departments and academic disciplines, and college-wide. The modular curriculum development process was funded by a national grant and developed within the Industrial Technology Department for courses in that program area. Nonetheless, the process was shared college-wide and is being used in many occupational and other courses. The development of the manufacturing curriculum using modules involved faculty and courses from many departments, including Manufacturing, Quality, Mechanical Engineering, Business, Psychology, Physics, and Mathematics. We mentioned above the introductory accounting class in the engineering curriculum with modules co-designed by an accounting and a reading instructor and a similar effort in Allied Health classes. All introductory Communications classes have certain standardized curricular units, have common learning outcomes, and are commonly assessed. Finally, the recent redesign of General Education was a “grass roots effort” led by faculty and carried out across the college.

Collaborative efforts have extended beyond the Midwest faculty into partnerships with other colleges and universities, and with business and industry. Shea described a curriculum development effort of the latter type to create a customer service module for Business Information Technology students:

And we didn't have in-house in our department expertise in what really customer service is. We hired a course developer to help two of our faculty

members collaborate in a threesome on a highly extraordinary customer service course that wouldn't be just, well let's pick the McGraw-Hill book and teach. So we created our own portal tapping into some CBT courses that are amazing and awesome and used by Fortune 100 companies. We tapped into a course developer who worked for a Fortune 500 company in a global customer service role and we collaborated, the three people, and I kind of helped to get the money to support that. And that course is being offered. It's in its second day in the Learning Technology Center today. That kind of collaboration wasn't possible a few years ago. It's still is not happening because of the system but rather in spite of it because there's no way to compensate the second teacher on it.

Besides the common assessment of student outcomes within a program, there is also the sharing of assessment methods between departments. Sometimes this is formally designed and planned, and sometimes it is informal and impromptu, as Stoppert describes in one instance:

I'll never forget, one day I was walking in the hallway and the Nursing faculty were going into a [department meeting]. They were working on their assessment tool that they have for their students in the clinical setting.... They've got a large department. They've got about 50 faculty in their department. We have got a measly little—one, two, three, four, five [in Radiologic Technology]. They've got 50. So they have their own assessment committee. And they've got their own curriculum committee. And they've got all these opportunities to get together. And they were getting together to work on an assessment tool. And I said, Ha! [audible exhalation of surprise].

“Can I go to your meeting?” And they all looked at me like, “Are you crazy?”

But, oh did they ever give me ideas about what I needed to do! I thought, this was an exciting time. And they didn't say that I couldn't come to the meeting. They said, “Well, come on.”

Likewise, there are numerous examples of the (12) **joint creation and implementation of new programs and strategies**. One criterion for a Learning College Grant to be awarded now is that the project be jointly planned and carried out by a cross-disciplinary, if not cross-functional, team. Such projects as the modular curriculum, the communications and speech workbooks and common curriculum, the general education initiative, Process Education™ and the Learning to Learn™ Summer Camp for new students all have resulted from this or other grants and have been joint efforts involving a wide variety of faculty and staff. I believe it is safe to say that joint planning and implementation is a strong organizational norm at Midwest.

We have seen a variety of examples of the generous (13) **sharing of teaching materials** already, whether done informally as part of hallway and lunchtime conversations about practice, or more formally in such efforts as the modularized curriculum. Scott Therrien, who often proved to be skeptical if not iconoclastic about anything like an organizational party line, nonetheless was effusive about this generous sharing. “We're not at all protective like that,” he said. “It's like if you want to use that, that's fine. You know. We're not into this intellectual property stuff on everything.” He described numerous examples of his sharing and receiving materials with department colleagues. This sharing occurs between and among departments as well. The Allied Health Department's sharing of its image bank with the Biology Department is but one example. Faculty found that many materials translated easily and usefully from one discipline to another, or as Wendy Howard

in the Nursing Department said, “And the other thing, too, is sharing. Even though you're not in a discipline, I can take something, I'll pass it on to Fran [Scullen] and say, ‘Read this and see what you think.’ It's not necessary that she necessarily knows content.” Lastly, materials from Process Education™ have not only been shared among faculty from many disciplines, they have also been shared with Student Services staff, and have been incorporated into New Student Orientation activities.

Of course, we can view many of the above instances as examples of (14) **collective problem solving**, but we'll take a further look at this characteristic here. The teaching of reading in the introductory accounting class in Industrial Engineering Technology arose from the problem of many students lacking the necessary reading and study skills to know how to effectively read a difficult textbook. The Developmental Reading faculty member joined with the faculty member who teaches the accounting course to solve the problem. Together they designed a discipline-specific and textbook-specific approach and set of reading strategies for these particular students.

The Communications and Speech faculty noted that students who were ready to graduate in terms of having taken all the required courses were not necessarily ready in terms of having a consistent knowledge of interpersonal principles and speaking techniques. The problem resulted in large part from the great number of adjuncts teaching the introductory courses, but more generally from the lack of coordination among all of the faculty who taught these courses. To resolve the problem, a team of three full-time faculty developed the workbooks and common outcomes, standard course units, and common evaluation and assessment instruments. Even after the three completed the first version of these, it was the cooperation of the rest of the full-time and most of the adjunct faculty in the piloting and revision of the materials that enabled the department to move towards more consistent

learning outcomes as measured by capstone assessment of student knowledge, skills, and abilities.

The last of DuFour's seven collaborative activities, (15) **collective action research of practice**, was designed into the Learning College Grant process in a dramatic, systemic way. Each successful proposal had to include how the results would be measured and used, and the pilot was performed in real time within current practice. However, if Professional Learning Communities are becoming a part of the organizational climate and culture, we should be able to find examples of collective action research that are less formal, smaller, more immediate in application, and not directly supported by a budgetary or other reward. One partial example is the research Carol Bedard completed in Fall 2000 using students in her classroom and that of Amada Gamet. I say "partial" because Bedard has an additional motivation of using this data for her doctoral dissertation. Even so, Bedard is analyzing the data on two sections of the same communications course, one that used computer technology and one not.

A more "pure" example of action research occurred in the same department. Gamet herself took a sabbatical in Winter 2001 to research how using Kolb's learning styles and an assessment instrument, Computer Anxiety in Learning Measure (CALM), may be effective in assessing students' readiness to use computer technology for learning. I asked her why she was doing the research—to publish, as part of a grant, just to do it. She said she hoped

to take our time and make sure that we allow that technology to truly help our students to learn as opposed to having it really create a psychological barrier because they're afraid of it. . . . I'm going to use the CALM—the Computer Anxiety in Learning Measure—which was developed in Australia in '99 along with the Kolb instrument. And if I find some really strong

correlations with our students, given that the Kolb instrument is only twelve items, when the students enter into their degree program they have to go through a battery of placement testing anyway, this could be a very simple way for the college to kind of have a first line investigation as to how well will the students do and also might help them prepare for distance ed., things like that. So maybe I'll get it published, but the foundation of the study is really something that's important to me that I really want to know.

This is near the classic definition of action research, a project done with real students by a teacher with the primary motivation of discovering knowledge that can be immediately applied.

I believe that we have many examples to suggest that the characteristic of collaborative activities is present at Midwest. Will this collaboration continue, transforming the norm of solitary teaching practice and creating a new norm of joint action? Shea, Chair of the Trailblazers, sees great hope for increased collaboration to “respond more quickly to the community needs.” She thinks a critical mass of faculty has been reached, and “it grows, you know. Just the language of transformation that I'm hearing from my newcomers and their interest in doing things collaboratively and in thinking beyond their discipline, their department is real encouraging.”

Again, we have seen examples above of (16) **shared information**, especially in the sharing of teaching methods and materials, and of personal teaching experiences. Certainly, there was mandated sharing of results achieved in any project funded by a Learning College Grant or by an NSF grant. There were institutional organs such as the Learning College Grant annual report, and Learning Technology Center newsletter that disseminated projects and results. While I heard of and directly observed a real generosity, an eagerness to share

what groups and individuals had learned, I am certain that there were examples of private and/or political hoarding of information at Midwest. Nonetheless, the cultural value I saw in action was this sharing.

The last group/team characteristic I will review here, (17) **people making contributions beyond narrow job descriptions**, is also supported systemically through the Learning College Grants. These grants promote cross-functional teams over homogenous teams, and teams over individuals. What we are looking for here, however, are examples of the informal willingness to go beyond the narrow job description in the course of daily activities. Sherry Hudock, an academic counselor, voluntarily joined a Process Education™ workshop, even though that seemed outside the duties of her nonteaching position:

I continually look for ways to become better at facilitating learning. So, when I saw that a workshop was being given for Process Education™, I eagerly signed up. Although most faculty are not aware of it, I often am creating curriculum in the form of workshops and orientations and use the same skills I use when I am teaching part-time.

Furthermore, she then shared the results with colleagues in Student Services, and then joined a cross-functional team to redesign Orientation, in part using Process Education techniques. Another example involves writing across the curriculum. I heard faculty in Business Information Technology and in Legal Assisting talking about their responsibility for teaching writing and research to students, rather than seeing that as belonging to the English Department exclusively. Overall, Midwest seems to exemplify Group/Team Behaviors that suggest it is moving towards becoming a Professional Learning Community.

Leadership Characteristics and Behaviors

Leadership, both formal and informal, is both a signal that a Professional Learning Community may be developing, and a facilitator or barrier to that development. In this section we will look at leadership characteristics and behaviors which indicate that a PLC may be emergent at Midwest. Later we will review leadership twice again below when we look at what fosters development of the PLC and what serves as a barrier.

Shared leadership (1), the idea that to be a leader is to empower others to demonstrate their own leadership, is the first PLC leadership characteristic. When the Learning College Grant was first established, the Vice President for Instruction, Paula Galligan, had the authority to determine the distribution of the funds, selecting the projects that would win. She formed a team of faculty and administrators, and with that team made those decisions. After two years, she passed the authority entirely to the Trailblazers, as they then decided to call themselves, and became an advisor to the team rather than a member or the final decision-maker.

Department Chairs at Midwest are administrative positions held permanently by faculty members hired to be chairs either from within or from external searches. Therefore, the faculty of the department report to the Chair. Nonetheless, probably because of the culture of collegiality in higher education among other reasons, chairs share decision-making with their department faculty. One of them, Carol Bedard, summarized what this has meant in her department of Communications and Speech:

The meaning that it has for me is I think that we've really done some good things departmentally. I'm not sure I could take responsibility for any of them or take credit for any of them, because they truly are efforts that have been initiated by lots and lots of people. I mean I'm glad that I was able to be

the umbrella, for lack of a better term, to be here, to try to insure.... I mean, that's what I've tried to do is try to let people know of those things that are available and help encourage interest. Saying that, you know, I'm pleased that what we're doing does seem to be helping outcomes for students.

From this quotation, we can conclude that part of sharing leadership is sharing the credit for success. Bedard also described the willingness of faculty across the college to take on leadership roles:

Yeah, and across the college... this is a fairly autonomous group of faculty, that are leaders. I mean so many of them are leaders in their own right. So if anything, our faculty tend to be viewed just as much as leaders as anybody out there in the college.

Julie Shea, a founding member of the Process Education™ Team, was one of several faculty who led the effort to bring Process Education™ to Midwest and then educate faculty and encourage them in its use. While the initial invitation to attend a conference workshop in Process Education™ came from Assistant Vice President Prange, it was three faculty especially, Shea, Fran Scullen, and Rene Muldar (an adjunct) who took the lead in this effort. The three wrote a Learning College Grant and received a \$50,000 award, one of the largest ever given. The recent General Education revision was likewise faculty-initiated and led. Indeed, according to Shea, there are many similar efforts where formal leadership played an important but not a driving role. Indeed, she sees it as fundamentally necessary that leadership pervades the organization rather than exists as an exclusive privilege and responsibility at the top:

If I pull back and look at the longitudinal view that we have over time, [it's clear] that the change is organic. No matter how or to what degree we want

to put on this change agent hat, change is still organic. And you pull back and you see the impact of these collaborative efforts. They were authentic. They weren't solely top-down. They weren't solely bottoms-up, although, they had a heavy, heavy degree of team-based decision-making. And I can't say that in either case [Trailblazers or Process Education™ Team] they were heavily influenced by anyone other than the team. But in terms of the difference that it makes institutionally, and to me individually, I think it just has to be that change is organic and you have to be content with seeing the influence as opposed to the control, 'cause you don't control it.

This, from a Department Chair and Committee Chair, indicates again that shared leadership was an intentional goal at Midwest.

A first example of (2) **leaders fostering trust** at Midwest I mentioned above in the section on group mutual trust. The faculty member who learned from a Kolb learning style assessment that a student was in need of a different approach than he had been giving shared that “failure” not only before colleagues but also before the dean. If the dean had not proved trustworthy, the faculty member would have been unwilling to go so public before him. A second set of examples had to do with the group behaviors of the Trailblazers team, as we noted above (see page 98 and after). Given that this is a faculty-administration-staff joint team, and given the level of open discussion and willingness to disagree openly, the administrative and faculty leaders together had fostered a trusting relationship. Finally, Scott Therrien was only one of several faculty who described a trusting relationship with a dean and department chair, a strong enough relationship that he felt supported and trusted himself. This may support the belief that to earn trust you must first trust others.

Assistant Vice President Wayne Prange demonstrates (3) **patience with others** in the Trailblazers debate regarding whether to continue funding for the CompuCom project (mentioned above, see page 98). He strongly advocated his own opinion, but was not willing to force it on the group, or to force a decision of the group. He made his case but seemed to trust the team and the process to come to a good decision. Department Chair Julie Shea in the above long quotation in saying “change is still organic” also showed patience with people and the speed of change.

There are many organizational systems in place to (4) **encourage risk-taking**, especially the Learning College Grant and the Learning Technology Center, a four-story building which includes the Faculty Professional Development Center, experimental classrooms and labs, and which was intended as a place to “incubate” change. Leaders at Midwest seem to have designed the Learning College Grants in order to encourage groups to take reasonable chances with pilot projects and then measure results before an attempt is made to apply the new initiatives across the college. Walter Nesbitt describes how risk-taking can spread beyond the systems to normal behavior if supported and encouraged. There came a time in the development of the manufacturing modularized curriculum where the beginning third of courses were redesigned and ready, but not the rest of the program, which was still in the process of being developed. Nesbitt, the Dean of Technology, Jeffrey Tolwin, and the rest of the Design Team met in the conference room in the High Technology Building.

It was fairly early on where we as a leadership team for the NSF grant were faced with the decision of do we go ahead and launch this Manufacturing Program, knowing that the modules aren't complete. You know, do we wait till it's we have a complete modular program and then implement it that way?

Or do we go ahead and get started and modify and transition as we go? I think that was a turning point because I was very much in favor of going [forward] for many reasons. One is, there's a need in the Urban City area for these graduates.... There was a very strong contingent at Midwest and within the leadership of the grant saying, "We should wait until we have a complete modular program and then make a more revolutionary implementation of this program." You know, Bam!

Nesbitt and Dean Tolwin opted to move forward rather than wait for every piece to be in place, knowing that the risk was twofold: One, the other pieces might not be completed in time and two, the initial pieces might fail if more time were not taken to design the whole. But Nesbitt believed that the failures along the way could actually benefit the design of the uncompleted modules. Leaders promoted risk-taking, as demonstrated both by Nesbitt's behavior as Chair of the virtual department (thus as a leader himself) and by Dean Tolwin's support for him.

And I had a lot of support from my Dean in going ahead, launching the program, and building in the modules as we go. If we had decided to wait until we had a completely modular program, we still wouldn't have anything. We might be—we'd still be pilot testing here and there, but we wouldn't have the rich experience that we have now in terms of what are the challenges, what are ways that that you can get around those challenges, and just really serve as a great reference of lessons learned. So I'm very happy we did that.

The implementation of these modules was risk-taking also in terms of the students' response to teaching strategies that were not "perfect" and occasionally failed, as we noted above in the section on willingness not to look perfect in the classroom. That administrators

did not react to these failures and punish or embarrass faculty encourages the most important risk-taking behavior of experimenting with classroom methods and techniques. Nesbitt saw this occurring throughout the college. “There are other people taking chances, taking risks,” he told me, “making major changes to how they conduct their courses.”

Assistant Vice President Prange agrees that the college is good at encouraging risks. However, he sees this as a double-edge sword:

We're very good at encouraging people to participate in innovation sort of risk free, for them. It's okay to fail around here. You're not penalized. But what we're realizing is that we don't really have the luxury of that anymore, because there's so much going on for a college our size, and there's a lot of demands on us from the outside: competition, the changing job market, technology and the transforming role of technology. So we have to come up with a way to better focus our efforts.

If the college cannot afford to do everything, it has to better focus on those areas in which it chooses to take risks. That balance may prove difficult to achieve.

Leaders should exhibit (5) **systems thinking** at least as much as other members of the college community, if not more often. I found evidence of such systems thinking, especially with regard to a focus on student learning, the need to harmonize rewards systems with the goals of the college, the need to involve voices from throughout the system in complex projects, the importance of infrastructure supporting the goals of the college, and a sense that change will occur systemically only if systems thinking predominates. What follows are examples of these.

I heard many times that Midwest was a learner- or learning-centered college, a Learning College, and that there was near universal (6) **focus on student learning**. One

manifestation was in leaders talking about the need to see the student experience at Midwest as a whole, a system in itself, and to shape that experience in an interdisciplinary way within academics, but also to see that experience across college systems. Leaders preferred cross-functional teams for this reason, as well as to get the whole system in the rooms, as we mention below (see page 145). Nesbitt himself came from manufacturing, and described manufacturing itself as “very interdisciplinary.” Therefore, a successful manufacturing curriculum had to be. He was one of the driving forces in both the modularization of that curriculum, but also the creation of Robots, Inc., the virtual company. Robots, Inc. was intended to give students not just a real-world application of their learning, but also to connect the different courses, modules, and learning tasks together in a way that taught students to see the whole system and connections between its parts. Vice President Galligan herself understood both this conception and the details of the manufacturing curriculum and celebrated it for systems thinking reasons.

Chair Julie Shea saw problems at the college created by the fact that “it's not in the payload of any one faculty member to study what happens to that student in the next learning experience.” The division of the college into separate departmental units, and the curriculum into separate disciplines and courses, did not encourage a unified student experience. Shea’s analysis here is clearly an example of systems thinking. Assistant VP Prange summarized this aspect of systems thinking quite well:

Really, when you get down to it, every individual's purpose at the college should be how can I help the student succeed? You know, and we we'll debate what success means. But all of us are dedicated to that. So these projects relate to how can we help our students learn better and measure that? That's what a Learning College is. It puts the student in the center and

says, what can we do, anytime, anyplace, anywhere, for our students, not what can we do for ourselves to be convenient.

Several leaders spoke of the need to (7) **harmonize rewards systems with college goals**, sometimes showing how that was being accomplished and sometimes noting where there was a failure to do so. Both Prange and Julie Shea noted that the compensation systems for faculty did not reward team teaching and other collaborative efforts. VP Galligan showed me the revised criteria for faculty evaluation, promotion, tenure, and merit pay, and celebrated their closer connection to college goals:

Now are you sitting down? Because this is quite a charge. I chaired this task force and our charge was to review all of the policies related to faculty compensation and review them against the principles of the Learning College. So the six critical performance areas on the faculty evaluation and promotion, tenure and merit are scholarship and professional growth, learning facilitation—it's amazing. Think about that—assessment and evaluation—that's amazing too—student development—it's amazing, it's wonderful! —curriculum design, and workplace and/or community service. And the faculty evaluation now has continuous improvement targets.

Galligan also described an improved employee evaluation system for all nonfaculty, and a college-wide merit system based on the college as a whole achieving its goals.

There seemed to be a common assumption that if you wanted to get something done and done right, you needed to (8) **involve voices from throughout the system**. Fran Scullen described the complex chemistry of putting a grant team together, balancing different areas of the college on the team so that it could be effective. Galligan emphasized the importance of the executives on the President's Council, each representing different

organizational systems, all talking the same talk to each system. She also noted that the All-College Development Day in Fall 2000, employees worked in cross-functional teams to review the principles of the Learning College. The Learning College Grants require cross-functional teams, demonstrating again that leaders value this. Galligan told me of the history of these grants, and the decision to support cross-functional teams:

So why don't we say that teams of faculty have to apply for these resources.

And we tried that and then we said, well you know we really want this to be an organizational transformation, so we don't just want faculty on these teams. Let's let them include people on the teams who are from other areas of the college, like Student Services and staff, if they have a staff member or a technician that they want on the team encouraging transformational activity.

It is rare now for a proposal to be awarded a grant unless the team writing it is to a great degree cross-functional.

Charlotte Stoppert explained how her department chair sought a personal understanding of complex organizational systems through a direct route:

When there was an issue that was happening in our department, that we were not getting addressed, she'd join the committee on the campus to find out what it is she could improve there so she could bring it back to the department. This is her strategy all the time. Things were not going well with student services, so she joined the committee to find out what it was that was going on so that she could come back and say, "Alright, you guys, this is what I'm learning. This is what we need to do."

Or, as Jagiello said, "Cause obviously if we want to change the institution, we have to bring everybody in with it."

Consistently, I heard the importance of (9) **infrastructure supporting the college goals**. This was often expressed as a problem, that is, the infrastructure was not keeping pace with the demands of faculty to meet those goals. Galligan celebrated the faculty at Midwest, and their readiness for change, in this case for the use of technology for teaching and learning. However, she also noted a real danger that faculty would get too far ahead of the college's ability to support them:

Most institutions are still at the stage where they have the early adopters....

They're really working hard to get that critical mass of faculty on board.

Midwest is at the point where we have the early adopters and we have the critical mass. We don't have the telecommunications infrastructure in place to support the development that we've done. So, in a sense, we've overdeveloped our faculty [laughing], because we don't have the telecommunications infrastructure in place to support where they are ready to be. ... [We] need to do something quickly, because if you lose that critical mass of faculty, it takes twice as long to get them back on board again.

Galligan saw the same problem and danger with the modularization of curriculum. Faculty were eager to rewrite curriculum in a wide variety of disciplines, but the institutional support was inadequate to meet the demand. And as we heard from Prange above, he views this as a global issue, that the demand from faculty and staff for trying innovations outstrips the college's ability to support the results in any broad and meaningful way. His answer was to limit support to strategically selected initiatives. This points to a real danger in planned

change efforts: Success may be as dangerous as failure, perhaps more so, if the implications for long-term fiscal and infrastructure to support the change are not fully explored.

This leads naturally to the last set of manifestations of systems thinking, the (10) **sense that change will occur systemically only if systems thinking predominates.** Galligan mentioned the importance of the college's effort to do true strategic planning, and connect initiatives to that plan so that none are "working in a vacuum." Organizational change, the "transformation" as she and others put it, means not just finding new things to do but also identifying the organizational systems that prevent implementation of the new in any global way. According to her, the Trailblazers

was a team that was originally conceived in the institution-wide reform grant to be a "skunk works" team and their focus was to be: identify the barriers, and identify solutions. That was supposed to be their focus. But this is the toughest part of transformation is unbundling the old policies, the old processes, the old procedures and formulas in preparation for the new.... They identified the barriers. Identifying the barriers was a piece of cake. But they haven't been able to identify the solutions and neither have we. I mean they're working on some solutions to certain barriers but there's a mega-barrier [laughs] that the whole College faces and everybody who wants to be involved in this transformation. And how do you identify all the internal and external barriers?

Prange echoes this concern, iterating a similar version of the early purposes and history of the Trailblazers. They were to establish a "parallel college" which would try out the new, and then any successful innovations would be moved to the larger institution. He sees a systematic approach to organizational change as a necessity, but one that eludes Midwest yet:

It's a great college in the sense that it's been around for a hundred years, and has a history of promoting innovation. And one of the strengths, I think, has been, lots of innovation in pockets all over the campus. But I think a lot of us are realizing that for the future, for us to be successful, we have to come up with a way to harness that, or to focus it, or to align it in a way that makes sense for the vision and the mission of the college. We're not very good at that.

Shea, Chair of the Trailblazers, in a similar vein to what Prange was discussing, provides us with a good conclusion to this section on systems thinking.

There's nothing wrong with a lot of fragmented efforts as long as there's a sense that those seemingly dependent efforts have an interdependency that is moving in the right direction. And I think the other thing that has been very challenging to many of us is that the closer you get to trying to connect what you're doing to the college's strategic direction, the more you understand the organic nature of change.

Change cannot be forced, but can only be grown the way a garden is planted and tended. This sense of change as organic is a characteristic of systems thinking, a kind of organizational ecological awareness that contrasts with the mechanistic thinking of some organizations and organizational leaders.

We have noted a number of examples of (11) **shared vision** above where we have seen leaders fostering a sense of Midwest as a Learning College, a learner-centered college, a place of innovation. Midwest has an organizational vision statement that is the formal part of shared vision. Its leaders speak in common terms and to a similar powerful picture of the desired future. Even when some members think they are disagreeing, as several faculty

criticized administration for having a “party line” that may not reflect what is real, they still speak in similar terms of a focus on student learning and disagree only about when that began and how it came about. Faculty leaders and administrators told me similar tales of the founder, who started the college as a small technical training center in the beginning of the 20th Century and had as a motto, “If there’s a need, we will meet it.” The shared vision still involves serving the needs of the local community. And whether it is Nesbitt referring to local manufacturers, Carol Bedard talking about local transfer institutions, or others speaking of students, parents, and community members, there is a shared vision that Midwest must be there to serve. And the bottom line is always students, as Shea notes: “But it was really about helping students learn more and grow more and be more effective in whatever's next” in their lives.

Collective inquiry (12) is built into the Learning College Grant process, and thus supported by leaders in a dramatic and practical way. These grants require cross-functional teams to pilot projects, collect and analyze data, and report to the college on results and recommendations. Furthermore, the Learning Technology Center has, as one of its primary purposes, serving as a laboratory for faculty to try new things and share results. Thus, in these formal ways and in others, leaders (13) **support a culture of sharing.**

Department chairs promote sharing among their faculty, most powerfully by modeling the willingness to share and to ask for help. Stoppert again describes her department chair:

Everybody [in the department] says, “Now you can come in [to my classroom] and you can assist me.” And you'd be surprised how we're doing so many collaborative type things. You know, “Do you want to come in and see how this is going?” And “Could you help me with this?” And sharing

tests. "Do you think this test sounds fair?" Do you know how many times that that was never done before? And we'll look at them and they'll say, "Do you think this is a fair assessment of what we want to really have our students learn?" And they'll pass it out to everybody and we'll kind of evaluate it and turn it back in.... So, actually we've just become more of a team than faculty teaching in a department. I think that's neat. I think that's really neat. And I really attribute it to Virginia, because I think Virginia is so ahead, and so willing. She lets us do what we need to do as long as we're effective. I think that's wonderful.

Sam: What else does she do to promote that?

Stoppert: She encourages us to do everything, and if there's something going on, she never discourages us from going to any kind of seminars, anything that's going on.... If there's something that she knows that we have a real interest in it, she'll highlight it, send it to us and say, "Why don't you try to attend this? We'll find a way for you to get there." She's very encouraging about that. Very encouraging. And she's actually a very strong leader in the college.... And she's such a hard worker. And she sets an example of what it's like to be a chairperson that's truly a leader for every department in the college.

In a previous quotation (see page 121), Carol Bedard, as Chair of Communications and Speech, saw herself much as Stoppert portrayed her department chair in the above quotation. Bedard described herself as an "umbrella" to protect her department and an encourager of their participation in projects that would promote student learning.

Related to both of the above is the leadership characteristic of (14) **creating learning spaces**. Stoppert mentions her former department chair, now deceased, who took the department on a retreat to his cottage by a lake. She is convinced that this was the beginning of the collaborative learning and sense of team in her department. That was the creation of an emotional space, but there is also the creation of a physical space for learning. The Learning Technology Center with its Center for Faculty Professional Development is such a place, championed by many organizational leaders and made manifest with a large expense of money and time designing and building the four-story structure. Even before it was built, the Faculty Professional Development Center was located temporarily in one of the technology labs at the college. Finally, there is the organizational space for collaborative learning represented by the All-College Development Days in the fall and the faculty and staff professional development days several times during the academic year. These represent both an opportunity for learning, but also an expectation as attendance is required contractually.

In all of these ways, leaders (15) **invite conversation** about learning, teaching practice, the purpose and goals of the institution, and its future. Also an example is the funding of the Process EducationTM Team and its efforts to share best practices and conversations about teaching among participants. The All-College Development Day in Fall 2000 was a set of structured conversations within cross-functional groups of employees on the meaning and purposes of the Learning College. All are attempts to (16) **create a supportive culture** at Midwest, a culture wherein it is safe for faculty to share failures as well as successes in professional development workshops, mention their failings at department meetings and in front of the supervising dean, and share best practices without jealousy or fear of looking less than perfect. A culture, finally, wherein members may

disagree over the specific paths to fostering student success without disagreeing on the larger purpose and common values. In many ways, I think we have seen Midwest is becoming that kind of place.

Finally, there is a set of leadership characteristics and behaviors that form the (17) **leadership role described by DuFour** (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour, 1999). DuFour describes seven characteristics needed for instructional leaders in a learning community. The first of these is the paradoxical traits of being (17a) **urgent about the need for change but patient over the long run**. We have seen the urgency exhibited in Chair Nesbitt and Dean Tolwin and their decision to proceed with implementing the manufacturing modules even when the whole curriculum was not ready. Patience over the long run appears in the same two and their understanding that these modules will need to be redesigned and re-implemented, and their acceptance of “failures” and willingness to learn from them.

We may see DuFour’s next two characteristics— (17b) **focused on the future but clear on current reality**, as well as (17c) **able to see the big picture as well as the details**—in the following anecdote by Galligan:

I came to Midwest in 1992, so I just finished my eighth year.... When I interviewed for the position, I was meeting with the president... and he took me over to the window of his office, and he said, "Now Paula, look out there." He said, "What you see is a pretty traditional institution, a very successful institution, a college that has a very good reputation, and a quality institution. Do you realize that within the next 10 years, nothing you're looking at will be the same?" Well I really wanted this job, so I said yes, "Yes! I realize that" [laughs]. And I thought at the time that I knew what he was talking about. But I really didn't.

President Aaron Moeller required that the newly hired Vice President along with faculty develop

a white paper on a "Vision of Learning Excellence." Now this was 1992, so this predates any of the League publications [on the Learning College], for example. But here was a president who wanted a document that would have a series of scenarios about learning excellence and a vision for learning excellence. Now there was a lot in the literature at that time about the need for certain fundamental changes in how higher education does business, the business of learning. So, it isn't as if he were working out of a vacuum; but I guess what I'm trying to say is he's a very visionary person. And an avid reader and has his finger on the pulse of where the college needs to be.

While Galligan gives credit to her president for being a visionary leader, she herself exhibited a similar capacity during my talks with her by telephone and in person. She also had a remarkable command of the details, recalling data, budget numbers, and having knowledge of a wide range of activities, projects, and people across the college.

The fourth characteristic from DuFour, that (17d) **leaders foster autonomy** unless it violates shared mission/vision/values, requires a delicate balancing act. Administrators and department chairs somehow must keep a certain amount of alignment among a very independent group of people, college faculty, for whom individual autonomy is a strong cultural value. Yet, at the same time, leaders must encourage the autonomy to explore a wide variety of manifestations of the college mission in many academic disciplines and with a wide variety of students to teach. We have seen already Stoppert's description of her department chair as someone who "encourages us to do everything." Stoppert also described Virginia Bentley as "an embracer all the way around." Even so, Bentley was not comfortable with the

changes that Process Education™ required in the classroom. “Yeah, and actually Virginia was not really ready for it.” Even so, Bentley encouraged Stoppert to try new things on her own, and protected her when there were difficulties with angry students:

When I first started doing some things that were different, my chairperson, who is right here [pointing at a photograph],⁸ she literally had to cover my butt all the time because the students fight it tooth and nail. And they came and complained, and complained, and complained. I had to make some adjustments because maybe I went in too radically and wanted to change everything at once. I wasn't going to offer a lecture. I was just going to make them do their own research. Well, they had never experienced [being so much responsible for their own learning].

Eventually most of the faculty had become convinced that varied teaching methods would lead to better results. Even though Bentley was far from an early adopter, she fostered Stoppert in this and other new activities in which the latter was eager to be involved. Moreover, she encouraged Stoppert and others to take time away from campus to go to conferences and workshops to learn new things.

Midwest's big enough so that they've offered us a lot of seminars and opportunities to explore new avenues of teaching. The biggest problem is that if we're here on campus, we have too many obligations at home. We need to go away so that we're more focused on what we're doing.

⁸ We were meeting in Bentley's office while she was on leave and Stoppert was serving as Acting Chair.

Bentley understood this and supported faculty. Similarly, as we have seen above, Chair Carol Bedard sees herself as an “umbrella” protecting and encouraging faculty who try new things in her department.

Shea said she and the members of the Trailblazers see themselves as fostering autonomous team activities in support of the college mission and strategic plan. While they approve grants, support the teams, and monitor results, they are not involved in the creation of proposals and encourage a wide variety. This fostering role has its own challenges.

And so, where the strategic Learning College teams are being successful, Trailblazers are always being successful, too. And I think that's challenging for some of us to be able to see that we could be successful in what we're doing and we can be an enabling entity, but at the end of the day they're not going to crack the bottle of champagne over us.

Assistant VP Prange, as much as he was an advocate for limiting what the college could support because of limited resources, still saw his roles as an administrative leader and member of the Trailblazers as principally to empower others:

I'm sure there're lots of things going on in the departments, too, that encourage informal teams working together, that I'm not even aware of. And that's appropriate. That's good. Because we want the departments to be doing those kinds of things.

We have already seen examples of DuFour's characteristic, (17e) **leaders celebrating successes**. And we have just seen an example of a philosophy expressed well by Shea that one's success comes from helping others succeed. I heard VP Galligan taking much of her interview with me to celebrate successes. She recommended the Process Education™ Team, saying they were highly effective as a team and as change agents. She

promoted my studying the Communications and Speech Department, not merely because they were innovative, but also because “that is a department that I would say works as an informal learning community all the time.” Galligan described the Midwest faculty in glowing terms:

Because, you see, we wouldn't be in this situation if our faculty weren't exciting and innovative people. But they just run with things. They love creativity. I mean, I've never worked in a place that had a more extraordinary faculty.

We have also seen a number of examples of leaders who (17f) **abhor the status quo**, as DuFour describes it. Nesbitt, the chair of the virtual department, told me that it was important to create an atmosphere of innovation, even if that caused some pain. In fact, that discomfort was not just a good sign but also a necessity:

It's been important [pause] that we're stirring things up, I think. We're pushing issues, making some people uncomfortable. The results, the outcomes aren't always really obvious which, as an engineer, I struggle with. You know, I'm used to seeing product going out the door. But we are stirring things up. We're making people think. And a lot of times I don't value that enough. But I do think it is important.

Chair Shea told me that “Trailblazers is probably one, and Process Education™ were sort of the things that I cling to, my glimmers of hope for what this place should really be like down the road...”. The creation of the Trailblazers, the parallel college, the Learning College Grants, and many other actions by administrators are all suggestive of an abhorrence of the status quo. This characteristic seems to begin internally, with a view of the self that includes

necessary growth and change. Fran Scullen spoke for many of the faculty and administrative leaders I interviewed.

Probably more than before, [I think] of myself as... evolving, a work in progress, that'll never be finished. I think before I thought, yeah, there are ways to improve. But now it's constant, how can I be better, what can I do?

The last leadership characteristic listed by DuFour, and the last we shall review in this section, we have discussed to some extent above under fostering autonomy: (17g)

Leaders empower others. I believe there have been sufficient examples presented not to have to explore this characteristic further here.

To summarize, it is possible to conclude that many of the characteristics and behaviors of a leader in a PLC are present at Midwest. Again, we are not making a judgment that all leaders are at the same place. Nor are we making a judgment about Midwest on the continuum between a traditional organization and a PLC. We are looking for signs that Midwest is moving towards a PLC and, as we have seen, there are such signs within leadership. Next, we look within academic departments for further signs.

Academic Department Characteristics

The academic department is a critical organizational structure in any college, as well as a potentially strong local community within the larger organization. Therefore, the department may be one incubator of the PLC. According to the review of the literature, there are seven characteristics of a department that is functioning as a PLC. Again, we will look for ways in which departments at Midwest may exhibit these characteristics as signals that they may be moving towards the PLC.

The first of the seven requires that the department have (1) **team structures**. While academics have always worked in collegial bodies, here we are talking about real teams, that is, groups of faculty with a common, explicitly stated mission and specific goals to be accomplished together (high task), who have a focus on good relationships (high team) (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993). Some of the examples we have noted above are suggestive of team structures in academic departments. For instance, many of the faculty in Manufacturing Technology and supportive disciplines worked as a team for the explicit purpose of creating the new modularized curriculum. This teamwork required that the involved faculty collectively redesign each course and the way it was taught. The Communications and Speech Department formed two small design teams to remodel the Introductory Speech and the Interpersonal Communications courses, but then piloted and redesigned the new courses as a whole department, including part-time faculty. A third example that we have not previously alluded to involved the entire Nursing Department redesigning its curriculum, not just to meet changed state requirements, but also to alter the way the content was taught from purely a lecture mode to more interactive methods.

The success of all three ventures suggests that these teams were indeed high task. But there was also a focus on high team as well, manifested in a concern for relationships but also an openness and an honesty among team members. Therrien described the noncompetitive and mutually supportive atmosphere among most of the full-time Communications and Speech faculty:

We're all kind of humble about what we do, except for maybe one person [laughs].... So, yeah, we get along well. If we do anything, we complain about the administration together.

This is not the only example of faculty finding some unity in their disparagement of administration, nor is this unique to Midwest. The main point here, however, is that individuals downplay their individual contributions in favor of a sense of team and community success. Amanda Gamet in the same department describes the honest relationships and productive conflict that are hallmarks of a well-functioning team (Argyris, 1992; Katzenbach & Smith, 1993; Tuckman, 1965, 1977; Wheelan & McKeage, 1993):

Okay. [laughs] I'll give you very frank answers. In some ways, you know, when you work on a team and you're working under a deadline, that can expose things about people and personality that you would not know about them if you weren't working with them. Typical small group stuff. And so you learn more about your colleagues when you're in these situations. You learn more about what they do well, and you learn more about the things that you're never going to do with them again. [laughs] But through that whole learning process of learning each other's strengths and areas in which we could improve, our department is still incredibly cohesive, which is great. I think what these two projects have done is opened up an absolute necessity for quality communication between the full-time folks and the part-time folks. And I think the end result has been an increased level of cohesiveness also between the full-timers and the part-timers.

She believes that the members of her department are even more cohesive in spite of the flaws in individuals that the stresses of working closely on a difficult project produced:

We all went into it so positively. As we began the process we never thought that there would be a negative impact on our relationships. Although, you know, as a teacher of small group communication, that was pretty dumb. I

mean, we should have looked back and said, “You know, taking on these very large jobs could really fracture our relationships in the department. In fact, more likely than not it will in some way.” But to have come through it and not having any fissures, instead still having that bond, that positive attitude, that Want-to-go-on-and-do-more-things, maybe that was the biggest unexpected thing. ... I just have to say we're just a very positive department. Really. And that has not faltered, I don't think.

Similarly, the Nursing faculty had some open conflicts over delivering the content versus using interactive methods. Nonetheless, Wendy Howard believes that the product (the new curriculum) and the process (the relationships among the faculty) have both improved as a result of the department working as a team to redesign the curriculum.

Much of the above discussion also illustrates (2) **collaboration** within the departments. Beyond collaboration on projects, however, there are examples of faculty within departments sharing methods, materials, and experiences even as we have seen such sharing across disciplines and departments. Departments also collaborate in attending and presenting at national conferences. According to Therrien, the Communications and Speech Department collaborates in mentoring new faculty. “And we always kind of protect the first-year people to make sure they only focus on teaching,” he told me, “and they don't get involved in anything else.” Therrien also described the atmosphere of collaboration in his department, say that “we do work well together.” He sees a very different culture in his department at Midwest from other paces he has worked. Here, there is a willingness to share, an openness to admitting that something tried did not work as planned, and few or no boundaries between department members despite the fact that their offices are located on two floors of one building and in another building across campus.

Further examples of departmental collaboration include the development of the image bank in Allied Health, the sharing of techniques using Process Education™, but especially the mutual support faculty members give each other in learning new technologies, especially software to produce internet-delivered courses. In fact, as we will discuss further below, the challenges of learning the new technology, learning how to make it interactive, and dealing with technology failures and limitations were all significant in facilitating faculty collaboration within and between departments. As an example, Andrea LaGest in Developmental Reading received significant help from her department colleague, Joan MacDiarmid, in learning how to use web design and multimedia software, as we will see again in the next two chapters.

An (3) **action orientation to achieve real results** appears in many of the above examples. The desire to have consistent student outcomes led the Communications and Speech Department to produce common workbooks, assessments, tests, and study units. The desire to have students learn more effectively and be able to apply that learning to something like real-world situations led the Manufacturing Department to modularize its curriculum and establish the simulated company, Robots, Inc. Other examples abound. Amanda Gamet described the decision to impose a standardized curriculum in the two introductory communications and speech courses:

But I would have to say that looking back, we decided to be dogmatic about it because the core faculty that were developing both of these grants realized that you can ease something in for increments, and it's going to take you forever to do that. It's not necessarily going to win anybody over if they already have a predisposition against it. And sometimes there's no guarantee that everybody will take each step with you. So let's just, you know, jump into

the ice cold lake, submerge everybody right away, wake up together, and move forward. And you know, knock on wood, we've had such good luck with that [laughs].

The way in which departments went about piloting these things first, gathering data and experiences, and then redesigning on the fly suggests that there is a (4) **focus on experimentation and research into practice** in some departments. Likewise, we saw the example above of Gamet and Bedard doing action research in their classrooms and other examples of (5) **collective inquiry into practice** in the Manufacturing Department modular curriculum. We have also seen examples of collective inquiry into practice in the Communications and Speech Department (see above page 121). There is no need to repeat that detailed discussion here. Especially in this department, to which I was referred by VP Galligan and where I spent more time and focus, we see elements suggestive of a Professional Learning Community.

The sixth and final departmental characteristic is (6) **shared vision**. Certainly, the faculty I interviewed and observed were remarkably in alignment with the college's vision of itself as a learning-centered institution, even while the language of the Learning College brought forth a great deal of skepticism. Shared vision within a department is harder to document, since none of them had a formal, written vision statement. Therrien did describe a sense of common purpose and direction, and cohesiveness in the Communications and Speech Department. "I think we have a sense that we're looking for the good of the department rather than the good of the individual." A common theme I heard among the faculty in that department has to do with consistent quality of student learning, or as Gamet described it: "The challenge has always been maintaining quality in the classroom, and still to this day."

In the Communications and Speech Department, a shared vision of what students should achieve and gain drives how the department makes use of college resources (the Learning College Grants), how it transforms its curriculum and approach to teaching (the workbooks and standardization of the two courses most students take), and how adjunct faculty will be trained, supervised, and supported (using the workbooks, common resources, assignments, and evaluations). All four Communications and Speech faculty I interviewed echoed this theme. Combined with other examples noted in this section from the departments of Nursing, Allied Health, Developmental Studies, we have some evidence that the characteristics of the PLC are present in academic departments at Midwest.

Organizational Structures and Systems

The literature reviewed in Chapter Two of this study suggests nine primary ways in which organizational systems and structures may indicate that Midwest is moving towards PLC (see also Appendix B). At this level, we begin to see whether the organization as a whole is evolving or consciously moving in that direction. As we progress through this chapter, I will refer back to previous examples to avoid needless repetition, and add additional examples as they occur.

Throughout the above discussion in this chapter, we have already seen clear examples of (1) **team structures** and of (2) **team learning** present at Midwest. Indeed, teams seem to be consciously encouraged and created. For instance, a self-managing team, the Trailblazers, administers the Learning College Grant. Furthermore, in order to write a successful proposal for that grant, you must now write it in such a way that a team designs and pilots the project, preferably a cross-functional, cross-college team involving student services as well as academics. Grant guidelines require that the proposals “demonstrate

cross-functional/cross-divisional teaming.” Other college teams mentioned already include General Education, the Process Education™ Committee, plus various curriculum design and modularization teams. In the documents I reviewed there were reports and references to many other teams that were a formal part of the organization or were set up on an ad hoc basis. Now many of these may not be true teams as previously defined (Katzenbach & Smith, 1993), but the two that I was able to observe in whole or part (Trailblazers and Process Education™) exhibited the characteristics of such a team.

The same is also true for (3) **collaborative learning and collaborative action**. We have already seen such action both formally and informally across the college, whether fostered by the Learning College Grants, created by groups of faculty informally and then made into a formal team (e.g., Process Education™), or existing temporarily in professional development activities involving all faculty or indeed all employees (All-College Development Day). I was not able to observe the highest administrative officers at work together, since this was not the focus of my research. However, Galligan did suggest that kind of collaboration was at work when she talked to me about the President’s Cabinet and its officers working together to move the college increasingly towards a learning-centered focus:

This was from the very beginning a college-wide movement, not college-deep, college-wide. Okay? So, it was a common topic of President's Council. And as I was trying to work this agenda with faculty and staff in instruction, the other Vice Presidents were also talking this talk, and working with this language.

The language of collaboration was evident at all levels of the organization from the individual to the highest officers and official documents. The guidelines for applying for a

Learning College Grant state that “teamwork and collaboration have always been strongly encouraged by the policies and procedures governing the program.”

An (4) **action orientation** is clear in the guidelines for receiving a Learning College Grant. To be successful,

Projects should... [Ellipsis in original]

- Support the Learning College Principles
- Demonstrate cross-functional/cross-divisional teaming
- Measure retention improvements & student success in large populations
- Be scaleable and transferable
- Produce learning improvements at an acceptable cost
- Build on effective strategies such as collaboration, process education, learning communities, and other known successful retention efforts
- Incorporate (or readily adapt to) asynchronous delivery.

We can see in the third, fifth, and sixth bullets a clear prejudice towards practical application of the results of the projects, in the fourth a preference for those which can be transferred to other parts of the organization, and in the first a connection to the college’s mission and vision. Much of the conversation of the Trailblazers meeting I attended, and the conversations I had with members afterwards, was on how to more directly apply the results of the projects across the college. A major example of an orientation to take action and not dwell forever in plans and words is the Learning Technology Center. The idea of a building to promote faculty learning new teaching/learning technologies, to house a training center, resources for faculty and students, experimental classrooms, and the technology infrastructure and support personnel came about in the mid-1990s. Galligan told me:

We brought some folks in from institutions where we felt there were some best practice initiatives going on and had a two-day session with the faculty to try to develop our own learning center. That was kind of what we were calling [the Learning Technology Center] then, a "learning center." And then what we were trying to achieve among others things was to stimulate interest in the faculty in initially using technology in learning environments, shifting from sage on the stage to coaching and facilitation, and all of the other components of 21st Century workplace requirements that would change the way people teach, get us away from traditional lecture and that kind of thing.

But funding had to be found, designs produced, architects and contractors hired, and the building constructed. This would take at least two years.

We didn't want to wait till we had the building, so what we did was we started a Learning Technology Center, the Laboratory, and it was sort of a prototype of one thing that we wanted to happen in this building.

This prototype was located in a computer laboratory in one of the already existing buildings. Some staff members were hired, and training could begin there immediately.

It was a place where faculty could come to develop their curriculum using technology. And it was also a place that was responsible for measuring how well we were doing with this faculty training, and how many faculty were involved, and whether they were learning anything as they went along, whether they were applying it in their classes. So, the LTC lab was responsible for establishing institutes of faculty training and development and for bringing faculty in to the lab to experiment with cutting edge technology.

In this example, we can see an action orientation at the college level in the unwillingness to wait to begin to test the concept and get some results from it. We can see an action orientation in the desire to know that they were achieving useful results. Finally, the action orientation resulted in a multi-million dollar building being constructed, one that I visited several times during my research.

This extended example along with others previously mentioned—the Learning College Grant, for one—illustrate a clear orientation to action on the part of Midwest Community College. Further, this example and others also demonstrate a (5) **focus on experimentation and research into practice**, (6) **collective inquiry**, and (7) **discomfort with the status quo**. Throughout my discussion thus far we have seen examples of piloting projects, gathering data, analyzing data, and attempting to apply the results more broadly, all very much in keeping with the Shewart-Deming cycle. The process and often the language of action research pervade the documents and interviews. Discomfort with the status quo is implicit in the Learning College Grant process, the desire expressed by Galligan above and others as well that the teaching/learning process must change, and in the desire to try new things. It is also apparent in the above example where Galligan says, “We didn't want to wait till we had the building,” and “shifting from sage on the stage to coaching and facilitation, and all of the other components of 21st Century workplace requirements that would change the way people teach.” It is evidenced in the name of the Trailblazers, as well as in their original designation as a “skunk works.” Finally, we can see this orientation in the words of the president to Galligan, also quoted above: “What you see is a pretty traditional institution, a very successful institution, a college that has a very good reputation, and a quality institution. Do you realize that within the next 5 to 10 years, nothing you're looking at will be the same?”

I am certain that not all members of the college community were comfortable with either of these characteristics. None of the people I talked with or observed expressed any disagreement with these notions in theory, although they disagreed with them in practice on several occasions. It seems likely that at Midwest, as at any institution, there are those who value tradition and consistency over experimentation and change; but the focus of my research made it unlikely I would meet or interview them. The point again is that I was trying to see where a change in faculty towards a PLC was occurring, and then note what may be fostering that change.

The (8) **integration of learning into work** is evident in some of the same examples we have reviewed concerning action orientation, experimentation, and collective inquiry into practice. We have especially seen it in the Learning College Grant process and in the Process Education™ Committee and its efforts to promote peer coaching, or reciprocal classroom visits. I cannot say that I saw evidence that processes, meetings, planning, and budgeting were viewed as organizational and individual learning experiences, but that does not mean this was not the case.

The last organizational characteristic, a (9) **shared vision**, was formally exemplified by the college's publicly espoused desire to "move towards a Learning College" as central to its vision statement. The college strategic plan incorporated the Learning College principles. The Year-end report on Process Education™ in 1999 included a table showing how the principles of Process Education™ aligned with those of the Learning College. And in other ways official college documents, pronouncements, and systems were often clearly connected to the vision of the college as a Learning College. There were many formal and official pronouncements and public displays of this vision. When I visited Midwest Community College for the first time in August of 2000, I noticed along the walkway in the central

courtyard of the campus eight black light poles with globe lights at the top. On each light pole hung a vertical banner with "Midwest Community College" and the college logo. The phrase "A Learning College" was printed on two of the banners in white letters. On the others were the six Learning College principles, one per banner. In the hallways, I viewed signs repeating the principles of the Learning College. Certainly, the vision was publicly prominent on the campus, in publications, in documents, and in official language.

However, a shared vision is more than a vision statement.⁹ A shared vision is present in the words, deeds and dreams of most of the employees much of the time while they are working. It shapes decisions at the local and college levels (Senge 1990). This is a hard characteristic to assess without living in and with an organization for a long period. Evidently, the Learning College label is controversial, not viewed by many faculty as an especially useful descriptor but rather as "just another fad." Nonetheless, the actions and words of many of these same faculty members still suggest they share in a vision of Midwest as a college focused on student learning above everything else.

The college vision statement (see Appendix G) begins with a quotation from its founder, "If there's a need, we will meet it." You would expect the college executives to speak the language of the vision, and they do. Galligan used this quotation in her interview with me. What about faculty who are not formal leaders? Amanda Gamet also used the quotation, although she felt a tug of embarrassment in doing so:

I mean it sounds so corny, I'm not even going to.... I can't believe I'm even going to say this but, you know, Midwest's motto is "If there's a need, we will meet it." And that's what we do.

⁹ The discussion on shared vision that follows has direct relevance to our later look at organizational culture. See p. ??.

This is shared vision. It may be that faculty culture does not encourage belief in an organizational vision, given the skepticism inherent to the graduate research process and the acculturation that results. Shared vision should bubble up as much as be driven down, if Senge (1990; Senge et al., 1994) is correct. It is interesting that Process Education™ has been incorporated into the strategic plan and vision statement, when we recall that, in the beginning, this initiative was largely driven by three faculty members.

Faculty members expressed a great deal of skepticism about the college executives, and whether “administration” believes all of this or not. I heard several times that the Learning College was a “fad,” “the flavor of the month,” and similar expressions. Nevertheless, like Gamet, these same individuals then described activities, projects, actions, and beliefs that were in harmony with the principles of the Learning College as written by O’Banion and incorporated into the college’s vision. While it is not within the purpose of my research to come to any conclusion about whether Midwest is indeed a Learning College or not, even if such could be determined to any certainty, it may be useful to explore this concept a little further, since it is central to the vision of the college. Obviously, what we will give here is not a population sample but rather a set of examples.

One of the faculty, heavily involved in Process Education™, described her ambivalence to me this way:

I'm always critical of Terry O'Banion because... he called us the epitome of a Learning College. And I would always say, “Well, and the administration believes that! And it's, I mean—There are, things that I think are very right with this college, but there are things that—I mean, just like there—I mean it could use improvement, and I just said, “No, No. They're going to start

believing what Terry O'Banion said” Because I think that you can't rest on your laurels. Not that this college is.

We can see in the hesitation and ambivalence a combination of pride in Midwest and what it has accomplished with a fear that administration will trumpet the successes without looking at all that is left to be done. Here, it is not so much a disagreement with the vision of Midwest as a Learning College as it is a debate over how far on that journey the college has indeed gone.

Another faculty member who took pride in being a skeptic, told me that there was a lack of clear definition to the terms as Midwest would officially use them:

Many people do not understand what they mean. [Laughs] They're kind of ambiguously worded, if you've ever noticed it.... We're trying to tell the administration this. Last graduation, Dr. Moeller sat up there and talked to the students and the relatives and friends and the parents of everybody that was at the commencement, and spouted about how we are one of the so many schools in the League of Innovation. And we were sitting there thinking, Dr. Moeller, nobody knows what the hell you mean by that. I don't think half the school knows what we mean by that, you know, that we're in the League of Innovation. It's like, tell them what that is. Tell us what that is!

Nonetheless, this faculty member clearly shares the general vision of the learning College, as evidenced in what was said next:

I finally got that down to the point where I'm just defining it as: It focuses on being the learning-centered college.... In other words, everything that the President does or the Provost or the administrator or a grounds worker or a cook in the cafeteria, every one of their jobs are jobs that are supposed to be

geared towards the student. Okay? And if they want to do that, that's fine, but you got to be consistent.

Again, although there is skepticism about administration in this statement, there does not seem to be anything disharmonious with the vision of the college as desiring to be a Learning College. Indeed, this faculty member's definition seems not only in line with the general tenor of O'Banion's work, but also echoes one of the original articles in this vein by Barr and Tagg (1995).

The same professor then further explained how the administration had to be consistent in its use of terms and expressions of the vision:

That's what it's supposed to be; but sometimes we find contradictions in what they [administration] say and what they do. You know what? It's like if they're going to use that language, then we're going to use it right back at them and use the terminology they do.

Barr and Tagg (1995) noted that many faculty had been moving towards a learner-centered classroom, but that the organizational systems and structures did not support it, and in many cases actively discouraged it. They then called for changes to the college to make it more learner-centered. So again, there is no fundamental disagreement with the Learning College vision. This professor did believe that while most faculty now understood the Learning College in principle, and indeed many had been practicing those principles for a long while, there might be some for whom the changes required would be dramatic and uncomfortable:

And so, yeah, I think everybody understands what the Learning College is about now.... We sit around and laugh in our department because people have been doing this for many years. We just never called it that. In other words, you know, have an interactive classroom, have discussions, group

activities. That's what they [administration] want and I've been doing that for the 12 years I've been teaching. This is really no change for me, but I guess to some people it was a heck of a change, 'cause they were used to just straight lecture.

Another professor agreed that this was nothing new, but seemed dubious that the learner-centered classroom could work without a motivated learner.

They have to realize that learning doesn't just happen overnight, and that it takes a bunch of practice. So, you know, the comment throughout Midwest is, "Haven't we been doing this all the time?" Haven't we always been learning communities where you learn something, I share, you hear about something, we'll try it. It doesn't work, we go back to square one. Yeah, we add a little bit of this, we add a little bit of that, we create something which we might call new. But it really doesn't work until the learner wants to learn, until the learner is motivated to put the time and effort into it. So is this something new and wonderful? I don't think so. We are repackaging it into something that we've been doing all along.

This is a more serious objection. However, the Learning College principle number two states that "the learning college engages learners as full partners in the learning process" in order that they become "independent, lifelong learners." The debate here is over how much motivating a teacher can do, and how long to support the student before s/he is able to truly be an independent learner. The process described in the above excerpt from my interview with the faculty member suggests that there is still a community of learners in the classroom, and that the teacher tries a variety of strategies to foster that growth towards independence. This is harmonious with the Learning College principles.

More excerpts follow, showing similar themes:

There's a bit of cynicism about the whole push to be a Learning College, because some of us don't feel that there needs to be a push because we're kind of there anyway....Nothing new there.... I'm sure most of us have looked at it because of ideas that have come out of that initiative. And I'm not really sure they're ideas that have come out of that initiative. But, you know, concepts like Process EducationTM and cooperative learning—well a lot of that stuff we've been doing already.... I don't think any of us have seen the need to completely reshape what we've been doing.

This next excerpt shows someone who is disconnected from the concept of the Learning College because it is an administrative theme, a “flavor of the month,” but who agrees with the above comments that faculty have been doing this for years.

It almost comes across as a flavor of the month kind of thing. Every year there's a different theme or something they want us to do or adapt to. And so, we do. But, okay, what's it going to be next year? I don't think people take it as seriously as maybe the Vice President or President hopes that they do. I mean, at one time it was technology, [another] time it was diversity. And, you know, there's always a theme. Now it's the Learning College. I don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing, cause you do want to get faculty members exposed to different ideas and you want to keep up with what's out there, what people are talking about. But it's, I don't want to say a joke but, okay, what's the flavor of the month now?

A last speaker, who takes the concept seriously and sees personal advantage to being in an organization like Midwest as a result, connects the different “themes” that others see as disconnected:

When I first started working here full time, there was a big push going on with this Learning College stuff and the "Don't be the Sage on the Stage" and all that stuff. And my training in teaching was old, and I thought, hmm, ...I'd better learn how to do it. And at the same time the Process Education™ activities were starting up and promising to teach me how to do that. So I thought I had a good fit, and I started going.... The Process Education activities that we've had here are very much collaborative learning activities. And you're not functioning in a vacuum. And you are growing and not just staying in the same place all the time. 'Cause if we're a Learning College, that means everybody learns, not just students. And in fact, if we're not learning, the students won't learn as much either. We need to be role models of learners. So that's important to me.... We're getting philosophical here. [pause] It means that I'm in a workplace where the things that I need to do a better job are respected and brought to me, where I can try new things and grow without fear that I'm going to be punished or put down for that.

The above excerpt suggests that certainly Process Education™ and perhaps the movement to become a Learning College too have helped foster a community of learners among faculty.

I believe that this extended aside to listen to some faculty members' views of the Learning College as an official vision for Midwest College has shown several things. First, the appreciation of the Learning College as a useful concept is far from universal. Many

faculty have become jaded by apparent management shifts in theme, and have stopped consciously paying attention. Nonetheless, none of the faculty I interviewed, with just one exception¹⁰, seemed to express beliefs that were not consonant with that vision and those principles. Indeed, some felt that the Learning College was just a “repackaging” of principles that they had been working with for years.

Therefore, I believe there is a shared vision among many faculty and administrators that goes deeper than formal statements that Midwest is a Learning College as espoused in the college vision, mission, and values. Even with the skepticism born of changing management themes, training as critical thinking scholars, and a fairly common antagonism towards administrators as a breed, the faculty I observed, listened to, and interviewed, all expressed a remarkably similar set of beliefs that were quite harmonious with the fundamental principles of the Learning College. There did seem to be a shared vision that had grown naturally within the college community, and the debate was over whether the administrative focus on becoming more of a Learning College was helpful or not. Then there were some who profoundly believed in the vision, and were quite aware of the gap between the current reality and the desired future that the vision described. Or as Julie Shea, Chair of the Trailblazers said,

If we're ever going to become this Learning College or Vanguard Learning College— and we're on the road to that—all faculty have to know [that they and their students are all learners and that they learn at different rates and in different ways.] And we don't, yet, as an institution. You know, I call it "learners all." We don't get that we're like our students yet.... I think we're

¹⁰ The one exception seemed to doubt the ability of any teacher or any college to help students become independent learners where the individual student did not see that need.

seeing it in little pockets. You know, we are definitely seeing that this is happening across campus. If you would ask folks, “Is it the common understanding, that we're learners all and that what works for our students works best for us and that we build our own meaning,” there'd be some [who] would say, “Yeah,” and some [who] would say that “You don't understand. That's not the way it is here.”

Organizational Culture

This study is not intended to be a thorough cultural analysis of Midwest Community College, and so we will skip across the surface of that subject here and elsewhere. Because I did not have months or even years to spend at Midwest, much of the culture was hidden to me, and I was able to see only glimmers through my visits and in the words and documents of the organizational members. Still, it is important to look for indicators that the culture at Midwest is one moving towards that of a PLC, again using the review of the literature and Appendix B as the source of my classification. Nonetheless, we may also choose to see much of the discussion thus far as talk about culture.

I will make use of Schein's (1992) definition of culture:

A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 12)

Schein noted three levels of culture: (1) artifacts, the visible products, structures and processes which are easy to see but difficult to interpret (e.g., architecture, language,

technology, style or dress, emotional displays, myths and stories, public values statements, rituals and ceremonies); (2) espoused values or justifications (e.g., strategies, goals, philosophy statements); and (3) fundamental underlying assumptions (e.g., unconsciously held beliefs about the way of the world, the way things work, and the place of the organization in the world) (Schein, 1992). Of necessity, I dwell mostly at the first two levels in making very tentative suggestions about the third. In other words, I will look at the visible artifacts and espoused values to suggest how the culture of Midwest may be moving towards that of a PLC as defined in the literature.

The literature describes five major sets of characteristics of an organizational culture that may promote PLCs at Midwest (see Appendix B). As I have said, much of my previous discussion has been about culture, and I will not repeat it here but rather refer back as appropriate. In particular, we have just discussed at length (see p.155) (1) **shared vision, mission, and values**, concluding that there seems to be a significant amount of commonality and agreement regarding the desired future of Midwest College, its purpose, and fundamental values, at least among those I was able to speak with or as seen in the documents I had access to. Likewise, we have previously reviewed (2) **collective inquiry into practice** (see p.121), (3) **collaborative teams** (p. 114) and (4) **an action orientation and focus on results** (p. 148). In this current section, I will therefore focus on the last set of categories derived from Bielaczyc and Collins (1999) in terms of having a (5) **“Culture of Learning.”**

Bielaczyc and Collins (1999) divide a culture of learning into four parts, the first being that the organization has a **“diversity of expertise** among its members, who are valued for their contributions and given support to develop” (p.604, emphasis added). Midwest does seem to meet this criterion, as we have seen. For instance, when Fran Scullen

talked about putting together an effective grant team for a Learning College project, she talked about building a “balanced” team from the many areas involved. Amanda Gamet previously described the stress on the Communications and Speech Department members working closely together on tough projects: “But through that whole learning process of learning each other's strengths and areas in which we could improve, our department is still incredibly cohesive, which is great.” She implicitly valued her colleagues for their differences and different contributions to the projects. The high value the college places on cross-functional and interdisciplinary teams suggests an underlying assumption that the diversity of members abilities and backgrounds is a good thing in projects, and that from the diversity of their contributions will come better results for the organization.

The second element of a culture of learning is a “**shared objective of continually advancing the collective knowledge and skills**” (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999 p.604). This is evident in the apparent value placed on pilot projects, measurement of results, and the sharing of information through reports, sharing of practice, and electronic media. Galligan, Prange, Shea and others repeatedly talked about the importance of transferring best practices to the rest of the college or “scale up” as was the parlance at Midwest. Certainly, this illustrates, in part, the practitioner’s preference for taking action on a larger scale. However, this all suggests an underlying assumption that the sharing of knowledge throughout the whole college community is a good thing, and results in improved performance and greater value for students and stakeholders.

Third, we have “**an emphasis on learning how to learn**” (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999 p.604). Certainly this has been a strong theme throughout my conversations with organizational members and in the documents I reviewed. However, here we are not talking about student learning, but rather employee learning. Can we say that the professional

development activities, Process Education™ training, and the sharing of practice has been at least in part about improving employee abilities to learn? There is evidence that this may be so from the statements of some of the interviewees. Charlotte Stoppert told me that

I never realized how dumb I was [laughs] till I started teaching. But how much I had to learn! So my biggest handicap was my lack of knowledge within the educational aspect of our field. And I thought I would know it all, and I did not [laughs]. So it was a learning experience.

She spoke of having to learn how to learn to teach, having come from a technical field and having been hired because of that technical experience. Even so, for her this was a positive revelation.

Oh, you know what it means to me. I have so much more to learn. [laughs] I just never realized how much there is to learn. And how exciting it is.

It may be that this is a personal characteristic of Stoppert's:

I don't know. I just like to learn. I just can't imagine what it's like not to learn... I guess I'm a lifelong learner, aren't I? [laughs] And you know, I was talking about the fact that I'm thinking about retiring. You know what I think about retiring? I can hardly wait to take some courses full time. I want to learn how to build a house. I've never done that. But I thought, oh that would be wonderful.

Collaborative learning was new to many faculty members who saw themselves as independent learners. This was a set of skills they needed to learn as well as teach their students, and Process Education™ seemed to help in both. Pamela Jagiello suggested that this revelation was partly about herself as a teacher and partly about her students in general.

I think what I probably learned that time is some kind of basic stuff really, about how poorly people learn from traditional lecture-type formats. To be truthful, I was pretty good at [that], and most university faculty are, or we wouldn't have gotten where we are. So I don't think I really realized how bad most people are at learning that way. And that kind of motivated me to know that I needed to change more. And I saw some value right away in orchestrating group work.

So not only did she come to value group work because it helped her students, but it also was an improved way for her to learn and to build community with colleagues across the college.

‘Cause if we're a Learning College, that means everybody learns, not just students. And in fact, if we're not learning, the students won't learn as much either. We need to be role models of learners.

In her portion of the 1999 annual report on Process Education™, Jagiello wrote:

However, the more I do Process Education™ and the more I attend the Process Education™ sessions at Midwest, the more I realize that there's a lot more to learn and that I can do a better job for my students if I know more about Process Education™.

So it does appear that some faculty who participate in this training learn as much about their own abilities to learn and learning styles as they do about their colleagues and students. In trying to better teach, they discover how to better learn themselves.

There does seem to be evidence at Midwest for the fourth and last characteristic of a culture of learning, having “**mechanisms for sharing what is learned**” (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999 p.604). We have seen electronic conferences for sharing learning, grant project reports which have to discuss what was learned, plus formal and informal sharing sessions

between faculty. We can say that there is evidence for a culture of learning at Midwest. How dominant this culture is, I cannot say from the evidence I have collected. Certainly, there are other counter-cultures or traditional cultures within the college that have different sets of values and assumptions. Again, we are only looking for evidence that Midwest may be moving in the direction of a PLC, and thus we need only show that there is evidence for a culture of learning however nascent it may be.

Organizational (Real) Community

The final set of characteristics of the PLC derives from the literature on community and community building. Again, I will refer back to previous examples and note others here as we do a brief exploration for indicators of real community at Midwest, remembering that it is as least as difficult to interpret community as it is culture. I found eight characteristics of real community in the literature that may encourage the development of PLCs at Midwest.

The first characteristic is that (1) **people empty themselves of assumptions and motives** in public meetings and gatherings. I visited with two groups together, the Trailblazers and the Process Education™ Team, while I heard of other meetings through participants' recollections. During the disagreement I witnessed in the Trailblazers meeting, people certainly exposed their assumptions about the motives of the Communications and Speech faculty. In my private interview, Prange noted his own assumptions as an administrator and how the presentation of an alternative view by Walter Nesbitt was a good thing because "he's such a good visionary as he tries to redirect us if we get ourselves stuck around administration stuff." The group may be so comfortable with each other that the exposing of assumptions and motives is taken for granted, part of a long-standing conversations and relations, but that is speculation on my part.

During the Process Education™ Team meeting, participants remembered one training session where a geology instructor exposed her assumptions and motives and emptied herself sufficiently to be able to change her mind significantly, as recalled by Deborah Wild:

Then we had the geology [faculty]. There were two of them, I think. One was a lady. She said at first she had thought it [Process Education™] was just like fluff stuff. But that by the end of the workshop and when they went through the process of working together, and it was so creative! And I mean at the end of that her attitude—and actually a number of their attitudes changed drastically, actually I think.

So the geology professor exposed her assumptions about the superficial nature of Process Education™ and emptied herself enough of those assumptions that she could see in them a solution to a problem she faced, a problem which may be a kind of motive:

Because her class—I don't know about geology, generally—has been almost entirely lecture-based. And it's a large class. They have large classes. And the back row goes to sleep. [laughs] It's really sad. And so I think she's looking for a strategy. They don't have to love geology, but she would like to engage them so that they learn and not go through the text and sort of, you know, regurgitate. I think she was very sincere about it. And she's fairly new as a faculty. She's only been here maybe about six years, a little shorter than me.

Given the image of infallibility that many faculty often feel the need to project, this took some courage, and may serve as an example of this characteristic. A number of faculty I interviewed or heard about found they had to give up their assumptions about delivering content, covering the material, and about how and how much students learn, all in order that

the faculty become better teachers. This happened privately sometimes, but it also happened in small groups or pairs as well.

Also during both the Trailblazers and the Process Education™ Team meetings, I witnessed several of the next characteristics: that (2) **differences are visible and publicly explored**, struggle is open and disagreement allowed; and that there is some use of (3) **Dialogue**, that is, of people publicly exploring and exhibiting their own assumptions, seeking understanding while searching for common meaning. I have quoted at length from both above and will not do so again here.¹¹ But clearly these are examples of disagreement that is directed at issues and not against people, although the suggestions that the Communications and Speech faculty were “not playing square with us” comes close to an ad hominem argument. I think we can conclude that there are clear examples of these characteristics. Likewise, these are also examples of the next two characteristics, that there is (4) **real listening** demonstrated by active listening of content and affect and that (5) **people do not try to convert or control each other**. In both cases, we have seen people trying to understand each other and seeming to demonstrate they really heard, exhibited during the meeting and in comments to me privately later. And in both cases we have seen that disagreements were discussed, but group members were willing to let the disagreement hang there rather than force someone to accept a decision or point of view they were not ready to accept.

The sixth characteristic of real community, that (6) **individual pain and incompleteness as well as joy are publicly expressed**, was not something I was privileged to observe first hand. My movement from outsider towards insider was very slight in my time at Midwest. I can say that in the interviews people seemed quite candid about

¹¹ See page 98 and following plus page 109 and following.

their own failures, foibles, and successes. Some spoke eloquently of discovering the learning-centered classroom, Process Education™ techniques, and other strategies that helped students learn and themselves be more effective teachers. The descriptions I heard of the Process Education™ training suggests some of that went on publicly. Another set of evidence lies in the public reflections faculty wrote in the Process Education™ annual report. Fran Scullen wrote:

One of the tenets of Process Education™ is that students should empower themselves and take charge of their own learning. That is exactly what one class did when the students told me they did not like the way I was conducting the class. I was crushed! After all, I was the instructor, the sage on the stage, and knew what was best. Despite my initial inclination to give up teaching, I worked out a compromise with the students and we proceeded with a modified version of Process Education™. I have continued to learn much from the students and I am continually revising what I do.

That she was willing to make this admission twice, once in front of her students, and second in print before her colleagues, seems an example of the public expression of incompleteness. Another example in the same report comes from Sherry Hudock, a counselor:

In the beginning, I was challenged because I was one of the few non-faculty participants. So, I felt as though I were isolated and working alone, not really receiving much support. I didn't have other colleagues collaborating and empathizing with me.

This emotional expression of incompleteness and loneliness has a tinge of personal pain about it as well. Pamela Jagiello writes:

I needed the incentive to move away from the comfortable role of teacher as dispenser of knowledge. Making such major changes was a threat in some ways. I knew I'd have to do a lot of work, and I wasn't immediately convinced that the old ways were all that bad. After all, the students seemed satisfied, and I "covered" the required material.

This example exposes Jagiello's incompleteness and her previous assumptions about teaching as well. Therefore, while I do not have clear examples in meetings of the public expression of incompleteness, pain and joy, these written reports are very much public and more or less permanent examples of this characteristic.

By a (7) **shared history**, I mean not the official organizational history and references to the founder and so on, but rather that people have stories in common that describe their time together in the organization. I heard such shared history from original members of the Process Education™ Team who went together to a conference and came back committed to bringing this back to Midwest. There is also a shared history of individuals going through a similar process of letting go of the teacher as sage role, and moving to that of facilitator. Indeed, I heard this story often enough from individuals and groups that it was almost an archetypal journey. The faculty that I interviewed from the Communications and Speech Department told a remarkably similar history of that department over the last decade or so, its challenges in getting sections staffed with qualified adjuncts, its battles with administration over getting another full-time position, its concerns with consistent quality within the two introductory courses most students take and the process of creating workbooks and common assignments, outcomes, and assessments that was answer to that concern. Thus, there are examples of a shared college history, a shared departmental history, and shared small group histories.

The final characteristic, (8) **mutual dependence is not seen as threatening** to the individual, was visible to me only in people's recollections and conclusions. For instance, Wild thought that real community was forming between faculty and staff as they come to realize a common purpose and mutual dependency:

And you know what, David, I don't know about other campuses anymore, but I've noticed—they [other members of the Team] can correct me—and it might just be my view—But I've kind of noticed a better res.... I'm hoping there's a... I actually see a kind of better respect among faculty and staff. There was a division, I think, between staff and faculty, perceived or real, I don't know. But I know staff perceived it to be a real kind of chasm. But in the last year, I'd say, I've been in projects with staff outside of Process Education™, separately, and I've noticed there's a different kind of mutual respect because I think we merge. We blend. And it might not be as deep yet. But at least it's like the beginning steps.

On hearing this, Susan Birdsall said, "It's a start. Yes." The other members present agreed with Wild's tentative conclusion that faculty and staff were beginning to respect each other as mutually dependent members with a common cause.

Chapter Conclusion

In summary, we have shown that there are signs that Midwest is moving towards becoming a Professional Learning Community as described in the literature. We have also reviewed the extent to which there is a shared vision of Midwest as a Learning College. I have belabored the point that we are not concluding that Midwest is or is not a PLC or an

LC, but rather just describing some characteristics that suggest it may be heading that way.

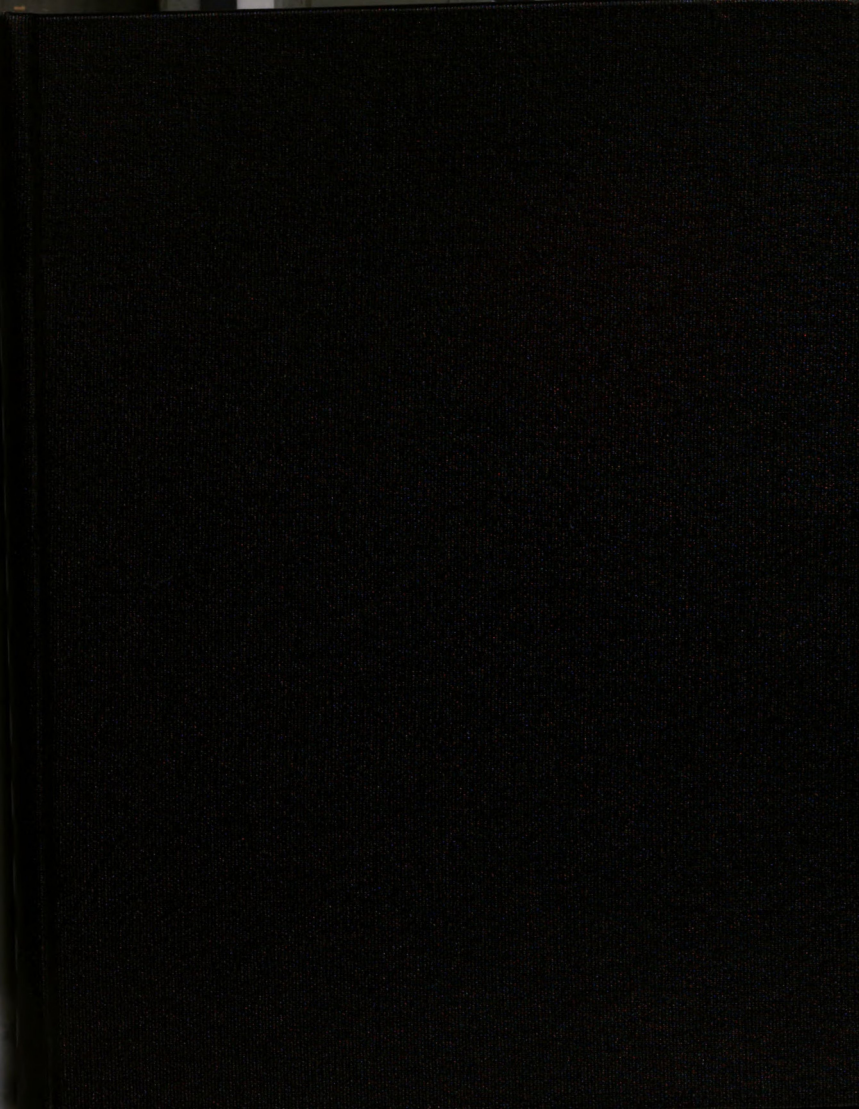
Why is this the case? What fosters this movement? That is the subject of the next chapter.

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THE JOURNEY INTO COMMUNITY:
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY IN ONE COMMUNITY
COLLEGE

VOLUME II

By

David Anthony Sam

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
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Department of Educational Administration

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CHAPTER FIVE

Findings: How are PLCs being Fostered at Midwest?

Chapter Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed those individual, group, and organizational characteristics that suggest PLCs were being formed in some places within Midwest Community College. This chapter will seek to answer the second research question: *How may various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics be fostering the development of PLCs at Midwest?* Again, I am not seeking to prove causation, but to describe processes and actions that may be fostering the development of the PLC at Midwest.

Organizing Scheme for the Chapter

As is described in my discussion of methodology (see Chapter Three), the findings in this and the next chapter were organized by a scheme that I developed in conversation with the data during analysis. That organic and I hope practical categorization required that I classify the findings by where within the organization the behaviors, processes, or characteristics described would most likely be found, or within which arenas would lie most of the responsibility for those behaviors, processes, or characteristics. Again, the general progression is from the individual and particular out to the organization and the general. A seventh category, Environmental Factors, looks at what may foster the development of PLCs, but which is outside the organization and thus beyond the direct influence of the college's leaders and members. These seven major categories form the major sections of this chapter:

- Individual Behaviors and Characteristics
- Group/Team Behaviors and Characteristics

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- Leadership Behaviors & Characteristics
- Academic Department Actions and Characteristics
- Organization-wide Actions and Characteristics
- Organizational Culture
- Environmental Factors

How are PLCs being Fostered at Midwest?

Certain actions, characteristics, and structures may be fostering and facilitating the development of Professional Learning Communities at Midwest Community College. Given the nature of qualitative research, what I have gathered here are inferences of how that fostering or that development may be occurring at Midwest. Therefore, I do not suggest causal connection or generalizability. Further research may seek to explore to what extent any of these possible processes, actions, and behaviors may indeed be causal.

Individual Behaviors and Characteristics

The first class of processes, behaviors, and characteristics that may be involved in fostering PLCs at Midwest includes those that lie within the individual faculty member. There may be certain personality or character traits, personal or life experiences, or individual characteristics which may make one individual faculty member more likely to seek out others in order to share teaching practice, more likely to join in or even to create a Professional Learning Community. As I will discuss in the final chapter, this suggests two avenues for change to promote PLCs: First, colleges may make hiring and other decisions based in part on some of the individual characteristics noted here. Second, individuals who

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wish to promote PLCs may choose to adopt those characteristics or associate themselves with those who have those characteristics.

Personal Characteristics

Through my observations, interviews and reading of documents, I inferred four **personal characteristics** that may incline a faculty member to become part of a PLC. I will not speculate on why one person possesses the characteristic when another does not, since that is beyond the purview of this study, although it is a fascinating question.¹² The first characteristic we will review is (1) **the love of teaching**. Those faculty members for whom the desire to teach and see students learn is stronger may be more driven to working together to find better strategies for doing so. Their joy and frustration may be more vivid and more a part of their normal conversations, thus leading them to a community of reflective practitioners. Obviously, many are drawn to college teaching for reasons other than a love of teaching, including a love for research or a belief that the working conditions in a college teaching job are more amenable to their other personal needs or goals in life. And some may lose that love of teaching over the years as the challenges of helping students learn or disappointments in career or with their college or university wear them down.

Among those faculty members who were actively participating in a PLC at Midwest, this was a common theme. Amanda Gamet talked about her colleagues in the Communications and Speech Department, identified as a Professional Learning Community in my research:

¹² The mystery of why two people make different choices is best left to biographical studies and oral history.

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We all, every person in our department, from the newest person to the oldest person, loves teaching. I mean, that's the buzz. That's why we're here. I mean, we enjoy doing our research, we enjoy doing presentations and training and all that stuff. But the buzz is teaching. So when you have a great class, I mean everybody will just walk around and just, "God, I had a great, a great class! This went great." [laughs] And we all can, you know, talk about it and revel and it's really, that's a really good thing.

Here, the passion for teaching leads to informal conversations that may then breed the development of PLCs. During the course of my meeting with the Process Education™ Team, the participants in conversation made a distinction between “instructors” and “real teachers” and demonstrated their own passion for teaching:

Susan BIRDSALL: Because there are instructors and there are real teachers. An instructor gives facts, I think, and wants them back and that's necessary. A teacher, in the heart of his or her being wants to explore ideas with people.... There are two different sets of skills, I think.

Fran SCULLEN: ...I had a conversation with someone years ago, and we were talking about enjoying classes. And I know you enjoy some classes more than others...

Deborah WILD: Um hmm.

SCULLEN: ...'cause there are some students who are just...

BIRDSALL: Fun.

SCULLEN: But there are days when I go home I would do that Oprah Winfrey's "Your Five Most Memorable Moments of the Day" and so I try to pick out my five best moments of the day.

BIRDSALL: Well, that's interesting.

SCULLEN: ...And so a lot of days I'll go home and something happened in class that just is, just is—a lot of my days some of my best moments are in the classroom. And with when you're in process [using Process Education™ techniques] and the students will—The other night it was just so great. They were in different teams and they'd all read the statute and they were doing this little case study. Well at the end, three of the four teams got the wrong answer because they didn't read the whole section of the statute. So I said, "Who has a different answer?" Well this one team read the [right] part of that statute and everybody said, "Oh my God!" And the whole class realized instantly.

BIRDSALL: Right. Read the small print.

SCULLEN: And the winning team that discovered that and no one else did, they got stickers. So they were...

WILD: Oh!

SCULLEN: ...just such a big deal!

WILD: That is good!

SCULLEN: And everybody, they love these stickers. And I was telling someone else, I said, "That was just one of the highlights of

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my day.” And I think it's what Susan says. I think that people who really love teaching—you know what I mean—it's not we're just here because we...

WILD: Yeah.

SCULLEN: ...don't have anyplace to go. Or that might be one of the reasons. [laughs] But it can be when it works...

WILD: Oh, it's neat.

SCULLEN: ...the best. I mean it's...

WILD: It's terrific. It is the best.

SCULLEN: ...just—it's the best.

WILD: It is. I think it is.

SCULLEN: It's one of the best experiences.

WILD: I...

SCULLEN: And what I think process does is it allows you to have more of those.

WILD: Yeah. More of those moments. Like some kind of...

HOWARD: It's what you get out of it kind of thing, I think like what you were saying: There are instructors and there are teachers. There are good ones and there are great ones. And kind of where you put yourself in line with that.

This conversation itself may be an example of what Palmer (1993) calls for, “good talk about **teaching**.” Further, the conversation itself may add credence to our inference here that a **passion** for teaching is one personal characteristic likely to promote PLCs.

Closely related to this is the idea of some (2) **inner spirit**, an expression of love and passion that some teachers have and some do not, even if both seem equally committed to teaching. As Charlotte Stoppert told me, “I also think that some of the faculty don't have a lot of **spark** [laughs]. You know, I think it's an inner thing. And those of us who are excited about **doing things** connect with those who've got that inner spirit.” Community may be more likely to form when there is a commonality of enthusiasm, “spark”, or “inner spirit” among **group** members. This enthusiasm may arise in part from (3) a **desire to give back**, to **contribute**, to serve. Many of the faculty I interviewed volunteered as part of their story their own **sense** of commitment to serving. They described this as one important reason for their going **into** teaching as a profession, and in some cases linked this to their desire to teach at a **community** college where teaching was most valued. Beverly Van Meter, a new instructor in **Communications** and Speech, spoke eloquently of this sense of mission, and mentioned another **common** theme, that of taking a cut in pay to teach:

I have a different background from a lot of the people in our department in that I used to be in the business field. And like I mentioned earlier, I always wanted to teach. So I came in with a master's from in business. I had another focus, but I wanted to get back to my love, my heart, communication. So, it means to me happiness because I'm doing exactly what I want to do. The money doesn't mean a thing. I took a pay cut to come here. I'm doing it because I want to be here. I want to help people.... And I'm very proud to be here. So that's pride, happiness, just sheer glee, glad that I found my career, my niche, this early in life.

Fran Scullen, a veteran teacher with two decades of experience more than Van Meter, spoke of the same desire to serve, saying that she “always liked to think I was going to make a

difference, which is one of the reasons I teach in a college.” Scullen described her joining the Process Education™ team as part of the same desire to teach, to be better at teaching, and to make a difference at Midwest. These themes of taking a pay cut, wanting to teach, wanting to serve and make a difference, thread throughout most of the transcripts I analyzed and were a central part of the interviews I recorded.

I mentioned briefly above that this love for teaching is connected to a (4) **commitment to teaching in the community college**. This commitment seems to spring both from a desire to teach more than do research, and from a desire to teach the varied students at a community college, especially those who might not have a chance for higher education anywhere else. Scott Therrien told me “to be honest with you, I also am not a person that wants to go to a research institute and have to worry about that for five years as well. So, I'm really into teaching more than research, if you will. So that's why I came here.” Andrea LaGest illustrates the desire to teach a particular clientele as part of her personal mission:

I'm a lover of math so I got involved in literacy through the GED program as a mother coming back into the workforce. And loved teaching and the enthusiasm of these students who had screwed up at some point in their life and said, “You know, I really want this education.” And most of them were really inspirational. So, anyway, I originally wanted to work with our developmental students, and see if we could break the cycle of illiteracy.

It is possible, therefore, that those who teach in a community college may be more likely to participate in a PLC, where those in a research university may be more likely to participate in the community of research scholars, as Shulman (1993) suggests.

Personal Experiences and Background

The next set of individual behaviors and characteristics include **personal experiences and background** that may make it more likely for someone to participate in a **PLC**. These include experiences as a student, as a teacher, and experiences at Midwest **Community College** outside of the classroom.

The first of two sets of experience as a student, (1) **experiences as an undergraduate**, may have shaped some individual faculty members, their view of teaching **and learning**, and their willingness or desire to participate in a community of learners. Having **experienced** mostly lecture classes in which students were expected to be inactive **receptacles**, some faculty conclude they want to teach to a more active classroom. This **seems** to lead them to experimentation, and towards colleagues who are likewise trying out **new methods**. Ann Dolland, professor of Criminal Justice, wrote:

As a new faculty member, I desired to learn diverse approaches to assisting the students in learning. I knew lecture as that was what I experienced in undergraduate. I knew experiential and collaborative learning from graduate school. I wanted to be effective and efficient for my students.

Members of the Process Education™ Team had the following conversation:

WILD: Oh because high school, graduate school, undergraduate school—all my academic life, I don't think that I had one learning environment that was truly a learning environment. I do well with lectures, because that's how I was trained, but that sink or swim mentality doesn't work for so many people from the traditional classroom. It's not an excellent learning strategy. It just works for those of us who—I don't know— [laughs] can focus or something and are just excellent test

takers. But I've always thought it was really deficient in a lot of ways.
I think it's just easier for the professors and teachers to do it that way.
But overall it never has really worked in my observation.

BIRDSALL: I think first of all that person's paradigm has to have changed. You know, we're shifting—in one of the very first Process Education™ workshops I went through, we were trying to picture this. And my thought was—I went through the Catholic schools and I'm a Catholic school product of the '50s. And we learned extremely well. And thank God the nuns beat the grammar into my head. You know, we diagrammed poetry sentences.

WILD: Um hmm. Um hmm.

BIRDSALL: But it was [a] learning process. And we were good workers. We were good technicians. And that was very appropriate, I think, maybe for the '50s and '60s. But with the—we blame everything on techno—on the computer. But I think it really has changed. It's opened up so much. You can be exposed to so much that just wasn't available at that time that there's no pattern to fall back upon. And you have to realize that that's the world your students are going to be placed into.

MC: Um hmm.

BIRDSALL: And if you prepare them just to repeat the patterns of the past, they are not going to be...

WILD: They'll drown. Just drown.

BIRDSALL: ...prepared. Uh, yes. Or they will be sucked into Jonesville.

WILD: Right. Right.

BIRDSALL: Or, you know, w...

WILD: Whatever. Yeah.

BIRDSALL: Yeah.

HOWARD: Um hmm.

BIRDSALL: The paradigm is sort of an overused word, too. But at its deepest meaning, I think, the paradigm did change, and change rather quickly and very deeply.

Here we see both an example of how experiences as a student suggest there must be a better **way**, but also the reshaping of that experience by other experiences later in life and by social **change**. Birdsall puts forth a hypothesis that technology requires a different sort of employee **and** thus a different sort of learner. Therefore, the classroom must change. Wild and Dolland **seem** to suggest that they were dissatisfied with their experiences in the lecture classroom **regardless** of the impact of technology.

One other experience as a student occurred in graduate school. Here, most faculty **members** received a degree in a content area with few or no methodology courses. Some **have since** developed the (2) **perception that being a content expert was not enough**, **that the** lack of training in education and teaching is a weakness when it comes to teaching **others this** content as well as skills as a lifelong learner. Charlotte Stoppert talked about how **unprepared** to teach her practitioner's degree in radiological technology made her:

But how ill-prepared I was! I have the technical skills, but I had no teaching experience. And I never realized how dumb I was [laughs] till I started teaching. But how much I had to learn! So my biggest handicap was my lack of knowledge within the educational aspect of our field. And I thought I would know it all, and I did not [laughs]. So, it was a learning experience.

And, you know, what's really unfortunate is that community colleges actually were built on the fact that it was a technical skill that we're trying to prepare our students for. I mean, a lot of the programs that we've got. And so they hire people who had the same experiences I do, thinking that we can share this experience and get the material across really well. And it's difficult when all you've got is your experiences in your classroom. And what did I have in my classrooms? I had strictly lectures.

For our purposes here, these excerpts may suggest that experience as a passive student either **directly**, or after being shaped by late experiences, may lead towards a desire to change how **one** teaches and hence to a community of like minds. Likewise, training in a content area, **when** coupled with the need to train others in that content area, may lead faculty members to **a** similar dissatisfaction with how they teach, and thus to others who have that **dissatisfaction**. What is not clear is why other well-meaning faculty interpreted the same **experience** in the lecture classroom as evidence that all learners should be able to learn **equally** well through that methodology. Perhaps this experience must be coupled with some **others** described below to result in the desire to participate in a PLC.

Experiences as a Teacher

Perhaps certain experiences as a teacher catalyze this previous experience as a student into the desire to continuously improve ones teaching. I found seven common **experiences as a teacher** that may be fostering the development of PLCs, either alone or in some combination with other experiences. We have already suggested the first set of experiences that may be key here, that is, the (1) **decision to teach in a community college**. Perhaps those who choose intentionally to teach at a community college come with

a different set of assumptions and motivations than those who chose to teach primarily in order to do research or meet some other life need. Time after time, those who were active in a PLC at Midwest spoke of their desire to teach taking them from careers in business and industry. This desire was strong enough for them to take pay cuts and to feel uncomfortable when they realized they were not capable teachers from day one. Others spoke of their dedication to teaching those students who needed extra help, who were not excellent students to begin with, and who often left school for jobs only to return to college years later when they found their calling or desired to make more of themselves. Two more examples follow:

WALTER NESBITT:

One of the big reasons for me, taking a very big pay cut to come here [from an engineering position] to Midwest and get into education is that I enjoy the learning experience. I'm not the kind of person who likes an audience. You know, some people just like teaching because they have an audience there. They have a captive audience that they can talk to. I'm not like that. I'm a little more quiet. But I really am fascinated by the process of learning. I think I have certain talents I can bring to the table. I enjoy making complex things simple to people. I enjoy helping people.

JULIE SHEA:

I took an eight-year hiatus in the corporate world working for a Fortune 500 company that was bought out by a Fortune 100 company and spun back out into a Fortune 500 company here locally. And all the while kept thinking, Midwest should be my home. I was teaching here part time for, oh gosh, eight or nine years, before I came on board as a full-timer. And in the

department that I'm in now, BIS [Business Information Systems], there had not been an opening for some 17 years for a faculty member. And when the opening came about in 1993, I said, I don't have another 17 years [laughs] to wait for another position. I better move while the moving's good. So I cut my salary by more than half, left the corporate sector, and moved on as a full-timer to Midwest, and it was just coming home, you know, for me. I said all this is what I had wanted to do because it really was my heritage. So that's how I came back to Midwest and back to the community college effort and had just a whole lot more to offer the community college because of my seven or eight years with a major corporation than I would have ever had to offer had I come from community college to community college.

Both of the above examples involve individuals who had taught previously and part time **while** working in the private sector. Something in that experience convinced them that **teaching** in the community college was like coming home. Most of the faculty I spoke with, **and one** administrator as well, described this missionary feeling, a calling to teach and to **teach a** particular kind of student. Does this calling and experience make it more likely that an **individual** will be willing to participate in a PLC?

Others, prior to teaching at the post-secondary level, had (2) **experience in K-12 education or in training** in another sector where the sharing of practice and varied **methodologies** are more the norm. Pamela Jagiello was one of these:

I don't think I ever really just lectured. Starting out as a high school teacher, and having taken methods classes for secondary ed., when I first started teaching [college], I'd already been taught some curriculum design stuff that incorporated other methods than lecturing. And there's no way that you can

take high school sophomores and lecture to them all hour every a day. And I did, I started out teaching in high school. So I had already done other methodologies because I simply had to in high school. And I'd done group things, I'd done research projects and presentations and those kind of things that high school teachers routinely do.

For those who began teaching in other sectors, the idea of teaching using more than the **lecture** method was not a new one. Nor perhaps was it odd to be part of a learning **community**, as this has become the norm in more and more public schools as we have seen in **Chapter Two**.

Faculty teaching at the college level may experience dissatisfaction with the level and **quality** of student learning, which causes exploration of new ways of teaching, and thus **moves** them towards the PLC. A number of interviewees expressed (3) **dissatisfaction with traditional methods** because of their desire to see more students succeed, and thus they **participated** in Process Education™ or other sharing of teaching practice. Stoppert describes **her own** transition to more varied methods and to community:

So, my big thing was that when I first started teaching, the first year I was just kind of trying to find my way around, literally. The second year I was thinking, "I'm not getting this stuff across. I'm not doing something right." And I think it was about six years ago that they had this thing with Process Education™. Actually before that we had something called "Teaching Effectiveness." And we had somebody come in and evaluate our teaching in the classroom. And I always found that [in those] classes that I taught that I used a lot of visual aids, had the students explore, had them come down, look at the films, we had open discussion—that there was always a better

response to the material than when I was just standing up front in the classroom. But we were videotaped. And then we were critiqued by our peers. And for somebody who didn't have a lot teaching background, that was kind of a scary thing to do. But I thought, "Well, how am I going to find out how bad I am if I don't—or how good I could be, you know? And they offered a lot of good suggestions and it was a very effective way of doing things.

Cheryl Nielsen in Nursing wrote, "I wanted to make my classroom more interactive. I chose **Process Education™** because I thought it was based on group work. I like it because it is **student centered**." Fran Scullen described her decision to join with others in using **Process Education™** (which later led her to join the Team):

I was so taken with it [Process Education™] because I was at the point—I think this has been five or six years ago—and I was at the point where I knew that lecture was not getting it, and especially with the younger students. I think it's probably the video generation that, you know, lecture is [especially inadequate]—And the night students are a little older or engaged. And the day students, some of them are engaged and some of them [are not]. But I knew that lecture wasn't working as well. I had done some group stuff, but I wasn't particularly effective at it. And Process Education™ provided a more engaged way for students to be involved, to make them more responsible, which is what in the Legal Assisting program—that's what we try to get students to do, to be more responsible.

For Scullen, and for others, this dissatisfaction seems to be related to (4) **boredom with teaching the same things in the same ways**:

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Okay. I've been a full-timer, I think I said, since '78, and I think you get to get to a midpoint where you—I don't want to say stagnate, but you just sort of slow down and you're not quite as enthused about it. And really Process Education™ has been tremendous growth for me because it's really changed the way that I taught. And it's meant a lot more risk-taking for me because one of my strengths is I'm a good lecturer. And in Process Education™ you don't do nearly the lecture that you did. And I did a lot of lecture.

Members of the Process Education™ Team talked about this same motivation:

HOWARD: But if you were teaching the same things over and over and over for years and years and years—myself I just, I have to change my...

BIRDSALL: I, too.

HOWARD: ...modus operandi every year...

SCULLEN: So you don't lose your mind.

HOWARD: ...just to, you know, to present it in a different way.

So **the** connection may be that a dissatisfaction with traditional methods due either to a **desire** to see more students learn and learn better and/or a desire not to be bored or to **stagnate** leads some faculty to tools such as Process Education™ which in turn connects **them with** colleagues who are in a similar place in their careers. This connection then may **become** community because of the sharing of experiences while trying new methods and **strategies**.

Howard's comment above suggests yet another personal experience that may foster the development of PLCs, the (5) **fear of being outdated** by changing trends in methodology and in student needs. Andrea LaGest told me that she did not want “to be left back in **the** purple passion mimeograph sheet generation,” and this encouraged her to take

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chances with technology. Scullen said she got involved with Process Education™ partly because “my training in teaching was old, and I thought, hmm, if I’m going to learn to do **that I’d better learn**” new methods. In this way, the fear of being bored and the fear of being **outdated** may intermix with the desire to find new methodologies, which in turn may lead to **the sharing** of teaching practice.

Two faculty members more or less explicitly referred to the pedagogical isolation **that** Shulman (1993) described, that is the (6) **loneliness of teaching practice** when you do **not** share experiences and strategies with colleagues. Howard spoke about there being eight **faculty** who began to work together and share as a result of Process Education™. “That was **really** pretty remarkable because, from my perspective, there were people that had taught **here** as long as I had that I didn’t even know [what each other was doing] ‘cause of the **immense** size of the institution and those kinds of things.” Stoppert told me one of the **emotional** and practical benefits of community as opposed to isolation:

But it’s hard when you’re doing it all by yourself and that’s why when Process Ed. was first introduced, it was really neat because, gosh, I got so many neat ideas from the other departments. And when I started working with the Process Ed., we were sharing ideas about things. And it was so neat to find out everybody’s kind of doing the same thing. And they’re all still struggling with it. And it was just, what a wonderful learning experience! That’s why I think that you—in a department, you can’t be in isolation. I mean, I have learned so much from the Nursing Department. And I have shared things, I mean, with the PTA [Physical Therapy Assistant] Department. I mean, all of them are just, Oh it’s just amazing! I don’t know how any department can work in a vacuum.

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A final set of experiences comes from (7) **being an adjunct faculty member** rather than full-time. The data here is equivocal, since below I will discuss how the characteristic of **being an adjunct** may make it less likely that you can or will participate in a PLC. But here I want to discuss the possibility that being an adjunct faculty member may mean you either are **less defensive** or hungrier for experience and credentials, and thus more willing to try new **things** and share with others. Stoppert told me:

But I did find out in this Teaching Effectiveness program is that a lot of tenured faculty did not volunteer to do it. I would have thought that they would have been excited to be able to be evaluated on their skills. Many of them did not do it. There tended to be more adjunct faculty.

One of the founders of the Process Education™ team and movement at Midwest, Rene **Muldar**, was a regular adjunct faculty member, as is a current member of the Team, Susan **Birdsall**. These may be exceptions or they may signal that adjuncts may be hungrier to try **new things** and to participate in a PLC.

Other Experiences at Midwest

We move next to three sets of experiences outside the classroom that may have **influenced** some faculty members to move towards a PLC. First, it may be that a (1) **major change in the role of faculty** may have encouraged some individuals towards the sharing of practice. This change in faculty role came about in large part because of certain external factors mentioned below in another section. Here I will explore how that changed role may have moved some at Midwest towards developing the PLC. As faculty members have **recognized** that students learn in many ways, and only a few learn well in the lecture mode, faculty have had to change teaching methods. A change of methods required a change in

role, from the “sage on the stage” to a facilitator. Individual faculty also have recognized that students in the post-PC and post-MTV world view media differently. Faculty have also changed their role through the use of technology and because of the use of technology.

In a section above (see page 93), Nesbitt talked about the piloting of modules, and how that meant he had to give up the expert role and admit that things would not always go well the first time, exposing himself to criticism both from peers and from students comfortable with the faculty as expert teacher. Fran Scullen described how she believes Process Education™ caused her individually and the college collectively to see the faculty role differently:

For me personally, it was important because it helped me make a change in the way I teach and it was important personally just because it helped me grow and not stagnate. We used to say we teach the students and now that we try to facilitate student learning. For the college, I think it's important because we've exposed people, I think. And we don't hear about everyone doing this, but I think people generally are just working to a more interactive approach. You know, more involvement in the class, less sage on the stage standing up there and telling them everything. So I think that [pause] as the world is changing, people standing up in front of the room and lecturing is just not the way to go. And on the web, too, you have to find different ways to teach, because what's the point of having a class with a bunch of lecture notes if the students can go to the library and read that material. So I think it's that we've exposed people to the idea that there is more to classroom than lecture, and here's a way to make your classes more interactive.

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Process Education™ workshops required that faculty share experiences together and offered the opportunity to teach in front of other faculty. Julie Shea described the effect that she believed Process Education™ had on some faculty:

Early on, I think, one of the top one or two resistances that we experienced—One was just that Process Education™ encourages—It's built on constructivist thinking and it encourages students to build their own personal meaning from the experience and as a faculty member who has grown up through I'd say traditional thinking and sat through many delightful lectures in, you know, large lecture halls [laughs], it really challenged faculty members to say, “Gosh you mean the lecture's not effective? Especially those in a community college who aren't necessarily educators. But they were discipline experts. And so the lady who is the Radiology Technologist and now teaches Radiology Technology, and has never gone through the courses in education, was saying, “You mean my, my lectures aren't working? You mean when I show this x-ray and I explain it that my students aren't just, you know, unzipping the upper parts of their heads and dropping in the knowledge?” So what happened early on is the faculty began to question their own practice, and saw Process Education™ as, you know, “Oh my gosh, is this another thing that administration is forcing on us? Is this questioning my value as expert?” So that was a big resisting factor that we had to face. What we tried to do is as a team to respond to that in a method that I think helped. And we said, chances are 50% or more of what you're doing today in the classroom is really built on the philosophy and underpinnings of process education. And sometimes it

wasn't happening in an explicit and well-thought out way, but it was just happening because you were smart about what helped students learn.

The change in faculty role also may have come about as a reaction to the change in students (see page 271). Therrien noted the change in students, which he posited has a great deal to do with the technology, media, and entertainment they have been exposed to:

And you know, you got to remember, teaching now and about 20 years ago or 15 or whatever is a lot different because—I've had discussions [about] this with Amanda [Gamet] and Carol [Bedard] and all of them—but kids today are growing up with entertainment stuffed in their face, you know. They have email. They have Internet. They have games. They have CDs. All this stuff is media-related and they're being entertained, and so I always feel like I have to be an entertainer now to get my points across because the days of just standing up there and talking aren't going to work with the kids coming up and how they've been raised and, you know, all this stuff they have access to.

Another manifestation of the change in faculty role involves the greater demands on individual faculty members outside of the classroom. There are more committees and task forces for more faculty to serve on, more service to the community or local businesses by which they are evaluated. Furthermore, in many fields where information is being produced at an increasingly rapid pace, there is the need to revise curriculum much more often. These things are not done alone but in teams. In sum, this changed role leads to faculty working together and talking together, and perhaps towards a PLC.

Participation on college-wide teams (2) may be another way in which faculty have come to share and to build community. Faculty who agree to serve on such teams may find there an opportunity to converse and share practice with colleagues from many different

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academic disciplines and departments, especially where the task force or team is focused on a project with an academic or teaching/learning focus. The Process Education™ Team is one very clear example, but there are others. Faculty members served on such groups as the General Education Redesign Committee, Faculty Senate, Accreditation Self-Study Team, and All-College Development Day Planning Team. Faculty I interviewed believed that there was increased sharing as a result, and personal benefits to them as individuals.

Charlotte Stoppert felt connected beyond her department and even affirmed as a result of serving on a team:

So I've had opportunities to serve on really interesting committees. Faculty Senate, you know, this type of thing. So it's broadened my horizons and I know that we're all alike. At first I thought our department was kind of, "Oh, nobody wants to talk to a Rad. Tech." But then I found out, you know, we're okay. Part of it was just getting to feel good about me [laughs] and what we do.

The benefits to this connecting seem clear to her:

Sometimes we get together in a committee meeting, and we'll have things that we'll discuss. What could we do? How can we solve this issue? What worked for you and what didn't work for you. Other times it's just coming into the office and let's talk about this. This is what happened. What was your experience with this? And it tends to be kind of a relaxed atmosphere. And we went in and we actually discussed what we were doing with each other, and activities that we were doing. And it was neat to share them because it's interesting to see how each department handles different things

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and about what they do. But it gives you ideas. You know, would this work for me or would this not work for me?

Jagiello felt that as a result of the intense period of time working together towards a common committee mission:

...there is a community of those of us who are trying to do the same kind of work. And I just reviewed last night some materials from Mary Snell, who was the innovator of the year last year. She's a wonderful teacher. She sent me over a new material she wrote for a class in legal assisting. It's a class about how to probate wills. Okay? I read her materials on how to probate wills and wrote notes about it two days ago. That's not something you would normally find going on [in the past].

Jagiello suggests that sharing among faculty and across disciplines has increased because of the experience of working together on cross-college and cross-discipline teams. This theme occurred in many of the experiences of faculty I heard from during my visits.

Similarly, a faculty member may find that (3) **taking on a leadership position** fosters community. Julie Shea, Chair of the Trailblazers and Cathy Alexander, Chair of the General Education Committee, seem to have done more sharing after they began serving in these leadership positions. This experience and a variety of other personal experiences and characteristics may make an individual faculty member more inclined or receptive to sharing practice, having deep conversations about practice, and becoming a part of a PLC. In the next section, we review what individual actions may result in their participation in a PLC, or in catalyzing the involvement of their colleagues.

Actions by Individuals

Two sets of actions by individual faculty members at Midwest may have made it more likely that they would participate in a PLC, and three sets may have fostered colleagues' participation. Individual faculty members may choose an action that may lead them into a PLC, even if that was not their intent. The first of these, (1) **volunteerism**, the personal choice to join and participate in learning, seems critical for faculty who have autonomy as a value and often view administrative mandates to change how they teach as a violation of their academic freedom. Repeatedly faculty and administrators stressed how participation in Process Education™ or other initiatives was “optional,” “voluntary,” “not required,” but rather “encouraged.” When there was a suspicion of an administrative hand behind the scenes, this served to dissuade some and give others the reason not to participate.¹³ On the other hand, when a faculty member stepped forward to try something new and shared it with colleagues, or joined with a few to promote it, as in the case of Process Education™ for instance, then it was more likely that others would participate or at least give it an ear. Similarly, it may be that those faculty who willingly and eagerly step forward to volunteer to try new methods, test and research them, and share with colleagues may be those more likely to join a PLC. Thus, over 100 faculty have participated voluntarily in Process Education™ workshops, although not all are still making use of the techniques.

Julie Shea talked to me about how the Process Education™ Team and the Learning College Grants encouraged some faculty to step forward eagerly and participate in elements of the PLC:

Then what was wonderful to see is that, you know, one person said, “Yeah, I want to own the web site.” And somebody else said, “And I'll support the

¹³ We will discuss this factor below in more detail when we review barriers to the PLC.

different ongoing faculty development efforts. And someone else said, “And I really want to study this relationship between our distance education interactive two-way video, two-way audio, and I want to study how Process Education™ helps that.” And so having more people on board to own Process has helped it become more of a mainstay across the campus.

She described the danger of any initiative being too closely associated with administration:

There are still faculty members who aren't on board, who think it's, you know, an administrative push versus a faculty push. But we faculty who are involved know otherwise. I mean, they know otherwise. And as it grows, you know, our intent is that it's just going to be there. It won't feel like it's a forced thing.

Again, she reinforced the value of voluntary faculty action and autonomous decisions as well as the increased learning that occurred because participants willingly participated:

The nice thing about Midwest is we're not coerced into going—for the most part. There are instances—but usually we're not coerced into going into this seminar or that workshop. You get to pick. And so, what was important about Process Education™? Let's start with that one. That it was faculty-led, authentically, even if people didn't believe that. That it was and still is faculty-led. That it was not mandated or required of anyone. That it was always an open, you know, join us if you like system so that people were able to participate by their choice not by coercion. That it had rich value to start with, you know, as we began to look at the choices people had to hook up or not with the people who were studying Process Education™ at the college. And that there were these ongoing discoveries as a team.

The second set of actions, (2) **reading or hearing the research on how students learn**, may have caused faculty to be willing to be open to discussing practice and to testing teaching strategies. The culture of higher education is one that values research and scholarship. Most faculty members at a community college have graduate degrees from programs that are research-based, or that value research as a key component of the degree. It may be that one door to participation in a PLC is through a focus on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (Agee, Kehoe, Lont, & Palkovich, 1999; Cross, 1994; Hutchings & Shulman, 1999). Shulman (1988a, 1988b, 1993, 1999) has been consistent and eloquent in making this or a similar argument. I found some evidence that for some faculty at Midwest, the literature on research into teaching and learning opened up the conversation about teaching with their colleagues at Midwest and elsewhere. Faculty who read in journals or listened to presentations at conferences sometimes came back dissatisfied with what they were doing, willing to experiment, and eager to share with colleagues.

For example, Jagiello told me that

...when you go do the research and you read stuff about people remember 10% of what they heard in a lecture, and you think well, then, why am I doing that? I ought to be doing something else that that will have more lasting value to my students. And that kind of motivated me to know that I needed to change more. And I saw some value right away in orchestrating group work in more organized and structured way than I had done before.

Still, Jagiello admits that readiness to hear what the research is saying is critical to this transformation:

And so I kind of had these amorphous, unformed ideas back here, and then when I looked at somebody [who has] done research and could say, “Okay

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here's the theory that matches this all neatly lined up. So it did feel comfortable that things I had wanted to be true, here is somebody affirming that those are true and telling me why. So I think that that's one reason it appealed to me is that I was ready for that to fill in that hole.

Therefore, it may not be that the research alone is a catalyst. Some of the individual experiences and characteristics we mentioned above may need to exist before the research can be heard.

Three sets of actions by individuals may encourage and foster participation by other faculty members. First, faculty who are (1) **champions** may promote the sharing of practice and foster community. Walter Nesbitt believed that it was relatively easy to involve a few pioneers in the modularization of curriculum. The challenge was then to spread that innovation beyond the early adopting few:

But then you got the middle majority and that's where the challenge was. These are the faculty who needed a little convincing. They're not going to jump on the bandwagon until they can see some successes. And they might be a little skeptical so that was the greatest challenge in working with faculty. It was very important to get some early successes and get some early champions of this module architecture. And in that way, it's getting contagious.

We have already seen how three faculty members, one an adjunct, who attended a Process Education™ workshop together, became the core of the team that promoted and developed Process Education™ at Midwest. They not only served as the initial champions, they applied for a Learning College Grant and helped to systematize the effort within the budget, strategic planning, and structure of the college.

Some faculty are brought into community through (2) **invitation by a colleague**. Stoppert sees herself as an “idea person” who brings new techniques into the department and recruits her colleagues there into participation. Recall that she “invited” herself into a meeting with the Nursing faculty to learn how they assess student learning, and promoted Process Education™ among her colleagues. Andrea LaGest credits Joan MacDiarmid with inviting her and many others into using technology, and into working together on best practices. Fran Scullen told me:

And another faculty member in my department, I got her to come to Process Education™ and she also has worked with some NSF stuff, too. And so we team teach a class and she developed activities and then I started team teaching with her and we revised some of them. And so we're constantly trying to work on that.

In several cases, faculty members mention certain colleagues who invited them and supported them as they began to try new practice.

Third, faculty who make (3) **reciprocal classroom visits** with colleagues seem more likely to remain in community. While this is still relatively rare at Midwest, it is common in the Speech and Communications Department, where a strong PLC seems to exist. Those faculty who participated in the Teaching Effectiveness Workshops or Process Education™ training seem more likely to continue to visit each other's classroom. In this case, as in many within this section, it is not clear how much the action is fostering PLCs and how much the action itself is a symptom of an already extant community. As we will discuss in the final chapter, these questions may be meat for further research.

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Group/Team Behaviors and Characteristics

Certain group or team behaviors or characteristics may make it more likely that members will form a PLC. I will discuss three. The first is (1) **joint curricular or cross-curricular development**. It may be that such cooperative curricular design efforts may foster conversations and community. The joint development of notebooks and common curriculum, assessment and evaluation in the two introductory Communications classes seems to have brought full-time and part-time faculty in the Communications and Speech Department into greater community. Certainly, conflicts occurred or were revealed; but true community does not bury conflict. I did not interview any part-time faculty in that Department, so their perceptions may be different from the full-time, who described the improved communication and relationship among full- and part-time faculty. Amanda Gamet described this progression in her conversation with me. The impetus, she believes, was a concern about students receiving a consistent level of teaching:

The challenge has always been maintaining quality in the classroom, and still to this day. Maintaining quality in the classroom throughout all those sections. Which has led us to the two standardization things. How can we take our two strong Gen. Ed. courses—the Public Speaking course and the Interpersonal course—make sure that they're standardized, make sure that the students are getting a quality educational experience without putting a stranglehold on our part-timers?

This concern led the department to form a three-person team to develop a common core curriculum, with standard evaluation and assessment and standard learning outcomes. Certainly, this may have then brought those three full-time faculty members into greater

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community. But the next challenge was to involve the part-time faculty in implementing the pilot programs, and in providing useful feedback.

And so that really led to us trying to move forward into achieving the grants to be able to develop the workbook and the course pack and the redesign of the Public Speaking class and lift some of the burden of course creation and curriculum creation from our part-time base and allow them to deliver as creatively as they like, but to have that curriculum ready for them.

The implementation was by decision of the tenured faculty, but adjunct faculty were involved in the pilot and in the revision process:

When it came down to selling the idea to the part-time faculty, we just told them. We phased it in. For the workbook, we gave them a pilot copy of it and had them all make comments and changes and so they had some input and ownership. Every quarter there is a department meeting. Actually there's two: One in the day and one at night so that we can cover the needs of all our part-timers. We talked about it the quarter before we introduced it, told them it was coming. Kind of gave them a couple sample exercises. Then we ran a pilot quarter, asked them for the written feedback so they would feel like they had some ownership and impact. And then third quarter we rolled it out. And it was never a choice. I mean, in fact, it's kind of on their informal contract that they sign with Carol [Bedard] that you will integrate this.

Every faculty member was required to teach using a department-produced workbook/course pack. While individual faculty were allowed a great deal of freedom in their daily classes, certain assignments, including a PowerPoint production, were mandatory for all students in

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every class. Adjunct faculty responded to having this imposed on them in two different ways, with some eager and some feeling put upon:

There were people who said, "Thank God. I had no idea what I was doing in there and now I have this to work with." There were people who would vocalize and say, "This is great! This is what we need. I'm so happy that we have that." Some of our part-time faculty were excited because we trained them in how to use PowerPoint and use the web. They didn't know that before. So that gave them a huge personal bonus. And, yeah, there were people who thought, "Well this is stupid." Other people were very high technology apprehension. One gentleman who had taught part-time for us for 27 years was more like, "This is crap! And I don't want to do it." You just saw him holding the course pack—We gave everybody a sample coursepack for the Public Speaking class—holding it in one hand, you know, his elbows on his knees, rubbing his forehead, shaking his head like this. Now after kind of a rough introductory quarter, he's rockin'. He loves it, you know, he's overcome whatever psychological barrier that he had to teaching the course in this way.

Full-time faculty began to realize the barrier between them and their part-time colleagues, **and that this barrier** made it difficult to get honest and useful feedback to improve the **product**:

Being the point person on both grants, I would have conversations with faculty members, most of whom were fairly positive. "I'd like to see this change in the book." And what was interesting to me about it was some of them, you know, we're all the same, but because I'm a tenure-track faculty

member they treat you kind of deferentially. And after you slap them around a little bit and say, “Hey, wake up. We're just the same! Let's just have a conversation[laughs]. You're not going to hurt my feelings. Let's just talk about this and make it better for the student.” Then the faculty members open up when they realize it's not a personal thing and I'm not ego-involved and this is not the Holy Grail of teaching. This is a tool in progress and their input is vital. Then they were very frank about some things that they felt should change. And also very forthcoming in terms of the effect that it had in the classroom. “It worked for me in this way. It didn't work for me in this way.”

Because of these intense departmental meetings and the resulting improved communication, the Communications and Speech Department has changed the agenda to foster more conversations:

And we have instituted now in every department meeting time that we talk about, “How are things working in Public Speaking?” And “How's the workbook working in Interpersonal”? And so there's always that thread of communication and it's formalized on the agenda, so you have that kind of permission to talk about it.

Gamet's description suggests that this process of shared development over time combined with open conversations may have helped members of the department to a deeper community, embracing part-time faculty more effectively in that community:

Oh, yeah! And [I received] a lot of emails, a lot of phone calls. That has died down considerably. We did two heavy revisions of the workbook. The last one was last fall. So we'll be doing another revision probably next year. And

it really does get better and better. And the faculty will come up, the part-timers especially will send a note to me or drop a note in my mailbox or give me a call and say, “This change is great! Thank you for making it.” Or, “Why did you take that out? I really enjoyed it.” And so there's a very, very open line of communication about it. And I think the whole thing—and in general, I'd have to say our department's pretty good about this—no big egos, and no big ego-involvement. And, I mean, everybody knows everybody, and most of our part-timers now have been around for a while, too. So there's a kind of familiar air to being able just to sit down and talk with the people and have a good time, and having everyone know that criticisms when they're given are not personally-based.

Other members of the department (Bedard, Therrien, and Van Meter) in separate interviews described this story with remarkable similarity.

A second example occurred through the shared development of a modularized curriculum in the Manufacturing Engineering program. Walter Nesbitt described the closer working relationship and coordination required for developing and implementing this curriculum, not just among faculty within the department but also involving those in required supportive courses. Similarly, although to a lesser degree, we have seen improved contacts between faculty in Allied Health and Biology because of some limited joint curriculum development and between Allied Health and Nursing because of sharing of assessment materials. We have also noted how the joint development of reading units within content courses has increased communication and collaboration between faculty in Developmental Studies and those in Engineering and Allied Health.

Pamela Jagiello described how some faculty came together to create a summer bridge course for at-risk students teaching them Process Education™ techniques and strategies. Volunteer faculty from many academic disciplines were involved as “coaches” to facilitate small groups of students in improving their academic skills. The first effect was in the students:

The amazing thing is that those students really changed dramatically in even the way they walked down the hallway by the end of that class. And we had a reunion last week. And the students are saying, “Thank you so much for helping us.” And “I’m doing fine.” And “I needed that information.” And more so than anything else, I think they needed the confidence that we tried to instill in them. They got a lot of help.

The second, perhaps unintended, consequence was the effects on the faculty-coaches:

I was one of the coaches. There were three coaches and then each coach had ten kids, and then each coach had two assistant coaches. So see it was very intensive. I mean, they [the students] couldn't get by with anything. We were right there on top of them all week. Now, this is also a faculty development opportunity because the faculty participants in this are encouraged to use our active learning, Process Education™, collaborative learning things. And we talk to different sessions. And then, when we weren't teaching, we watched each other's sessions. So then we did a lot of peer coaching to each other, like “Here's what I saw when I watched your sessions,” and “Here are the strengths and here's the area of improvement.”

Thus, faculty-coaches formed a kind of Professional Learning Community around their experience of developing and delivering this specialized curriculum for at-risk students prior to their first semester at the college.

Deborah Wild described this increased collaboration across disciplines as a more general phenomenon at Midwest, a change she has observed first-hand over the years she has worked at the college.

And the other thing is, David, that on campus there's a huge thrust for collaboration among disciplines. And there wasn't when I first got here about eight years ago. That was not really the case. You sort of stayed in your little hole. Yeah. But in the last few years it's—oh, it's just super-encouraged to collaborate with [other faculty in other disciplines]. You know, I did a module with business. You just do stuff with a lot of different other people. It's a great thing! And that is new. And I think it's so good. Because you get to be with people from [other] disciplines and do projects. And that's just great. There's just a lot of opportunities available for those kinds of collaborations, whether it's modules or doing team teaching, or just stuff. There's just like bunches of stuff here that you can plug into that I think is exciting. And it's almost always with people from different departments.

I will mention just briefly the last two sets of group behaviors that may foster the development of PLCs. **Disagreements over how best to help students learn** (2) may be a means of fostering conversation and thus community. We have seen previously how disagreement was open in many situations. Walter Nesbitt, for one, believed that one way of “getting folks to talk [laughs] is through some of these controversies” such as over when to implement the modularized curriculum. He spoke of a “campus-wide dialogue on student

learning” that he saw as partially the result of disagreements over how best to do this vital mission element. Disagreements are likely when the goal is hard to measure, and where the outcomes are divided from any actions by time and an uncertain causal connection. However, these disagreements may be productive of PLCs as well as of better decision-making.

The last group behavior we will look at is what used to be called bandwagon, that is, the power of (3) **early successes** to encourage other groups or individuals to join in. Early success in modularization, the use of Process Education™, and the projects promoted by the Learning College Grants all may have encouraged more involvement, more dialogue, more willingness of faculty to share practices.

Leadership Behaviors & Characteristics

We next move to what is clearly the most controversial influence on the development of PLCs at Midwest, at least among faculty that I interviewed. Administrative practices and the behaviors and characteristics of formal leaders were spoken of as both key to any success and as a barrier to that same success, most often by different speakers, but sometimes by the same one. What problematizes reviewing these behaviors and how they may have fostered the development of PLCs even further is that these behaviors blend easily into institution-wide efforts, supports, and programs that may also foster or hinder the development of PLCs. Nevertheless, as this is an exploration, let me describe what I have observed or heard in this regard. I deal separately with formal administrative leaders and those leaders who were at least in part faculty and served as quasi-administrators, that is, academic department chairs

Administrative Behaviors and Practices

When we review **administrative behaviors and practices** that may promote the development of PLCs, many of the organization-wide actions, practices, processes and characteristics we will mention below (see page 271 and after) will also be relevant here. As Deming (1986) liked to maintain, a significant portion of the responsibility for those organization-wide systems and practices belongs to those who hold formal power. Nonetheless, in my interviews I noted twelve generalized behaviors and practices by administrative leaders that may have contributed positively towards Midwest's becoming a PLC.

The first we will look at is (1) **administrative support for risk-taking and protection of new efforts**. Any new initiative outside the organizational norm faces an uphill battle. Systems, procedures, processes all may attack the new. Budgets and resources may be allocated elsewhere to more "proven" initiatives. But the culture may be the most difficult to change. If formal leaders seem to punish any failure, then risk-taking is something only heroes and martyrs will do. Faculty mentioned several times their recognition of such support for their taking risks, including initiatives that brought faculty together in aspects of the PLC. Recall the critical meeting in the joint development of a shared, modularized curriculum when the decision to implement was made, even though the development was incomplete. As Nesbitt told me,

Our dean for engineering, Jeffrey Tolwin, has always been very supportive of the module architecture. And at one point we had meetings with every [involved faculty member]. And I had a lot of support from my Dean in going ahead, launching the program, and building in the modules as we go.

The entire creation and support of the Learning College Grants was a way to promote calculated risk-taking, as was investing the responsibility for these grants in the Trailblazers Team. Another example was the investment in the Learning Technology Center (LTC) to promote the use of computer-assisted learning and other new technology in the classroom. The multi-million dollar building was itself an example of risk-taking, but its purpose was to promote experimentation and collaboration among faculty.

Next, administrators can (2) **encourage and even recruit participation in activities that promote collaboration** and a PLC. One of the early but quiet advocates for exploring Process Education™ was Assistant VP, Wayne Prange. Fran Scullen, now a member of the Process Education Steering Team and herself a promoter of its use in the classroom, was invited to attend a conference off-site by Prange. When she hesitated because of many obligations on campus, Prange still advocated that she go. Julie Shea, too, got involved because of Prange's invitation. Galligan's creation of the Trailblazers and promotion of the Learning College Grants led to many joint efforts to improve student learning.

Support for collaborative efforts is clear in the criteria of the Learning College Grants that require that cross-college teams will receive preference in the awarding of dollars. Deborah Wild saw this as a general feature of Midwest:

But in the last few years, oh, it's just super-encouraged to collaborate. One, there's money, but [laughs] even more important than money, there's just a lot of opportunities available for those kinds of collaborations, whether it's modules or doing team teaching, or just stuff. There's just like bunches of stuff here that you can plug into that I think is exciting. And it's almost always with people from different departments.

Wayne Prange recognized that this was something that he, as an administrator, could foster but not control. This presents a paradox for any administrator seeking to support the development of PLCs:

I'm sure there're lots of things going on in the departments, too, that encourage informal teams working together, that I'm not even aware of. And that's appropriate. That's good. Because we want the departments to be doing those kinds of things. We have informal learning communities all over the place. And then if you talk about institutionalizing them or formalizing them, that turns some faculty off. And yet to be productive, to be efficient and to make it count, and maybe make it more popular and attractive to more faculty, I think you need to put some parameters around it.

How this could be accomplished, he was not sure. "It needs more work."

Clearly, as in the Learning College Grants, one primary and vital role for administrators is to (3) **provide funding**. Many have noted that the real strategic plan of any organization is in its budget. So how funding is allocated speaks loudly in determining the level of seriousness in the support for any initiative. The administrative decision to institutionalize Process Education™ funding beyond the initial grant is a clear example. As Fran Scullen said:

The grant didn't have to pay for all of it because the administration would pay for some of it. So part of it was, would we be accepted by the administration to carry on the program once the grant had expired? We prepared a budget, and we did a report. And [Julie Shea] met with the Vice President for Instruction and then the Vice President said, "Sure, we can fund it."

Charlotte Stoppert agreed that administration backed up initiatives with funding. “I’ve never been told ‘No,’” she said. “At least not that I can think of. I don’t remember ever seeing that.” Certainly, administrators have had to say no at Midwest. That a faculty member would feel this way, though, is a sign both that she has submitted reasonable requests, and that administrators are ready to provide appropriate funding. Has this resulted in more of a PLC? Carol Bedard thinks so:

I mean, maybe in the last five years, I think faculty are doing more things together. And some of it is because of the availability of Learning College Grants. I mean, to be able to do something like that is certainly easier to do when you’re funded for it.

Providing infrastructure (4) is just as important, especially with efforts that require learning laboratories for faculty, technology, and electronic communication. The LTC is one multi-million dollar manifestation of this kind of support, as is the purchase of computer hardware and software, and the network to connect it all. Supplies and clerical support are other forms of infrastructure necessary for many of these collaborative efforts to succeed.

Funding and infrastructure are ways that administrators (5) **recognize and publicly support** initiatives and faculty involved in a PLC. This is a mixed blessing, as we will see below, because some faculty members view public administrative support as something to be at least suspicious of, and may be the kiss of death. This is true for a significant minority of faculty, but not for all. Still, for many the public support of leaders is a yardstick for determining how serious they are about a change effort. Members of the Steering Team knew Galligan as a “champion of Process Education™”. Speaking and writing to support the initiative are both important; but support can be less serious as well:

There was a group on campus and I remember they said, “Oh will you come and do a presentation for Process Education™. And, at one point as part of our workshops, we did a little rap about process. I wrote a poem about the old, traditional teaching and then the Process Education™ Rap. So we would just get real silly and do it. And Julie Shea made us t-shirts. So we would get up there and do this rap. Well, one time the Vice President for Instruction, Paula Galligan, came up and she did the rap with us.

Public support requires public understanding of the risks and consequences of change efforts. Susan Birdsall noted that administrators recognized that Process Education™ active learning techniques meant that not all the material could be “covered” as in a lecture class. This could be problematic if one assumed that covering material equated with learning occurring. Thus, administrators had to publicly accept this change in thinking and support it. Finally, to recognize and support changes in behavior means that rewards systems should be adapted accordingly, something we will review in more detail below.

Related to this is (6) **walking the talk or modeling behaviors** the administrator would promote. Pamela Jagiello witnessed administrators participating in the staff development initiatives exploring Process Education™. Those administrators who seemed to behave with integrity were singled out for praise by interviewees, while others were criticized for failure to be consistent between word and deed.

Yet another kind of support is to (7) **provide time and space for learning to occur**. Administrators at Midwest accomplished this by providing release time from normal teaching assignments, sabbaticals, professional development opportunities during the normal work schedule and on site, and physical space for learning to occur, as in the LTC.

Administrators also should recognize that people need time away from work to revitalize.

Charlotte Stoppert saw this characteristic in the President's words:

And our President of the College said that he really wishes that no faculty would teach during the summer. They really need the time off. And he said he never taught in the summer. Cause I don't know you can do without having some time off and just do nothing related to this [daily work].

This last also illustrates administrators taking (8) **personal concern** for faculty as human beings. This may or may not directly promote the development of PLCs. But several faculty praised administrators who seemed genuinely to express human concern for the health, well-being, and spirit of faculty members involved in change efforts. One faculty member who was clearly the most critical of all that I had talked with also praised a dean for having personal concern:

He even was a little concerned about me maybe [doing] too much work right now, because I'm teaching six classes, four different preps, two of them are new because I changed the book, and then I have the three committees [I'm serving on]. My dean's very nice. He said, "You've got to have time to relax." That's why he doesn't push any of us full-timers to work in the summer. He thinks we should take that time off and enjoy ourselves and be with family and friends. I'm glad he agrees to that cause there's other departments that the chair or the dean can kind of force people to teach classes. Here, he never does that and he just said, "Well, after this quarter you're going to have your preps caught up and everything. I said, "Yeah." I said, "The winter quarter will be a lot better." "And," I said, "the spring will even be better when I only have to teach three because I'm going to teach six again next

quarter and only three in the spring.” And so I have a lot of support from him on that. He's very much into being with families and friends. And, I think that's a lot because he's very Christian, spiritual, you know, takes note into this. Whereas other chairs and deans would like work you to death.

Administrators can (9) **provide challenge and vision**, especially that which includes greater collaboration among faculty, a focus on student learning, and recognition of external threats and opportunities that promote change, as a means of promoting the development of PLCs. We reviewed shared vision at length in the previous chapter (see page 155). In addition, in this chapter I have noted examples of this characteristic in documents such as the LTC Report. In one issue, VP Paula Galligan wrote to the college when construction of the building had just begun:

We do not have the luxury of delaying our training until the new LTC facility is complete. Fortunately, we have an excellent prototype that is up and running, with wonderful opportunities for experimentation and learning. In addition to a long-standing commitment to professional development through a variety of Professional Development and Innovation Team (PDIT) activities, Midwest recognizes the increasing need for more focused and specialized training for faculty and staff in the uses of technology. Training for the transformation is critically important as we move toward incorporating information technologies into the Learning College. If we don't actively engage one another now and plan for a rapidly changing world, the private sector will take over our work. Let me encourage your involvement in this process, both as a participant in training events and as an advocate for the changes necessary to prepare Midwest for the future.

In another issue, a writer described an interview with President Aaron Moeller:

Today, it's not only about training workers but also about educating students to be those workers of the future—to walk onto the job already having the advanced, high-tech skills they need to do the most productive job for the company and for the community: Midwest recognizes this new challenge, and that's what the LTC building is all about. It's about preparing students to thrive and grow in a high-tech business environment unlike anything most people ever imagined. It's about access to the incredible learning tools available now and a way of delivering the information those tools create to the "classrooms" future, whether they are at reason Midwest, at home, or on the job. Put in the simplest terms, the new building is about change.

Moeller adds that "the biggest mistake we could make as an institution is to think that all the things we've done in the past that created this magnificent institution to support our community are the things that will carry us to the future. The agenda that will carry us to the future involves a new kind of delivery, new ways of outreach. Not to be the pothole in the road, but to be the road itself—to create access for higher education." He reminds us of the reason community colleges were built: to create access so all people could attend college. Moeller explains further, "Now the access is different; the access isn't limited by geography or physical location. It's going to be everywhere." Anytime, anyplace—the definition of asynchronous learning, and the wave of the future.

Providing challenge and vision does not mean it is heard. To what extent these inform the actions and behaviors of faculty is a fundamental question. Part of the answer may be seen throughout this study (see page 155), but a clear causal connection is beyond my scope here, if it is indeed at all possible. Nonetheless, if administrators (10) **speak and**

act with consistency and provide continuity of leadership, then, regardless of agreement or disagreement with the official vision, faculty are more likely to give it respect and pay attention and not believe they are examples of the “flavor of the month.” As we shall see below (see below, page 288), when these initiatives are viewed as faddish, then they are greeted with skepticism and derision.

Similarly, administrators who may be said to move with (11) **patient persistence** are more likely to be viewed as consistent and respected for their vision and integrity. In fact, providing the challenge and vision at a more global and strategic level, and then empowering faculty to find their own local solutions, may be critical to helping to develop PLCs in a professional bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1991). As Julie Shea noted, speaking both as a faculty member and as a department chair:

If I pull back and look at the sort of the longitudinal view that we have over time, is that the change is organic. No matter how or to what degree we want to put on this change agent hat, change is still organic and you pull back and you see the impact of these collaborative efforts that were authentic. They weren't solely top-down. They weren't solely bottoms-up, although, you know, they had a heavy, heavy degree of team-based decision-making. And I can't say that in either case they were heavily influenced by anyone other than the team. Change is organic and you have to be content with seeing the influence as opposed to the control cause you don't control it.

Assistant Vice President Prange praised patience in administrators as a needed virtue:

I'm basically impatient anyway. So, I need to learn not only patience, but also the value of time as it relates to change. Especially this kind of change. It does not happen overnight.

The last way in which administrators may help to foster the development of PLCs can best be labeled as (12) **don't get in the way**. A number of faculty praised their deans or other administrators for "staying out of our way." This may be in part the jealousy with which some faculty may guard their prerogatives against administrative intrusion. But I heard more than that. There was a recognition that a faculty-led effort was not just a manifestation of the value faculty placed on their own autonomy, but also as a recognition that the leader leads best when people largely lead themselves. We saw this above in the quotation by Department Chair Julie Shea on change. Certainly, within the professional bureaucracy, an insider bringing something to members of the profession is more likely to receive a positive welcome, and administrators are, by definition, outsiders, even if they have been teachers. However, probably within any organization, if Senge and others are right, a shared vision means that much of the initiative comes from many people not in formal leadership roles. Jagiello described the Process Education™ initiative:

It's not that some administrator went out and said, "Hey it'd be nice for you guys to do this." It's that faculty members saw a need and went out and found something they thought would meet that need and brought it back to other faculty members who were then spreading it out to other faculty members.

Shea saw this with the Trailblazers and VP Galligan's administration of the Learning College Grant for Process Education™:

Paula Galligan would stay in touch with us during the Learning College Project because you propose a very explicit project and you turn in a very detailed report. Basically, they leave you alone. I mean, that's just what Learning College Grants are about.

She, too, valued that this was a faculty initiative. For her, what was important was that

...it was faculty-led, authentically, even if people didn't believe that. That it was and still is faculty-led. That it was not mandated or required of anyone. That it was always an open, you know, join us if you like system so that people were able to participate by their choice not by coercion.

Staying out of the way may mean just that, giving people a choice and avoiding coercion. This characteristic may seem in contradiction with others mentioned above. How does a leader both actively promote and yet stay in the background? Is it unreasonable for faculty to ask administrators to both lead and stay out of the way? Perhaps through the other leadership characteristics—championing a clear but general vision, providing support and rewards, and modeling behaviors—leaders find a way to navigate this paradox. As Shea eloquently suggested, because effective change is an “organic” process, “authentic collaborative efforts” may have a longer-term effectiveness than pronouncements and proclamations of the new organization. This may require leaders to be patient, persistent, and consistent if they are to see real cultural change.

Department Chair Behaviors and Characteristics

At Midwest, Department Chairs are quasi-administrators who have faculty status and teach about two sections a year. Here, I treat them as a subset of leadership. Faculty spoke of their department chair as both “my chair” and “my boss.” They did seem to clearly differentiate chairs from other administrators, those who did not have faculty status. I heard many skeptical and even disparaging comments addressed about administrators, but none about department chairs in my conversations and observations. Chairs do perform a leadership role, and provide many of the above-mentioned categories of support for the

development of the department as PLC. In this section, I will note those characteristics or sets of behaviors mentioned particularly with regard to department chairs, a total of six that may foster a PLC.

Chairs reinforce the PLC and participate in it by (1) **visiting the classes of new faculty and other departmental colleagues**. This is part of the evaluation of new, probationary faculty. However, it also serves to reinforce the notion that reciprocal classroom visits may be a new norm, one clearly a part of the PLC. Carol Bedard, chair of the Communications and Speech Department, a department we have already noted as being well on its way towards being a PLC, visited the classrooms of all of her faculty regularly. Furthermore, she encouraged other faculty to visit each other in their classrooms and have conversations about teaching and learning afterwards. Scott Therrien told me:

Once a year, Carol is supposed to come and watch us teach, or at least most of us teach. And she's come into my class now two or three times—no, Amanda's come in once when she was my mentor, and then Carol's come in twice now. And they both had all positive feedback for me, and said, you know, they thought I had good rapport.

Beverly Van Meter, too, in her first year visited a class of every other faculty member at least once, as well as having visits from some of the faculty in her own classroom.

Secondly, chairs were described as (2) **supporting innovation and the pioneers who innovate**. Stoppert believes that her department chair, Virginia Bentley, was “not really ready for” some of the innovations in classroom and collaborative activities among faculty. Even so, Bentley was “an embracer all the way around,” and encouraged faculty to share innovative practices and in turn embrace them as well.

Chairs (3) **encouraged community building** and teamwork among faculty in their departments. Through on- and off-campus meetings and retreats, fun activities, and promoting conversation about practice, chairs led their departments towards becoming PLCs. Likewise, they (4) **empowered and involved other faculty**, eschewing the traditional chair role of taking on all leadership and management tasks themselves. And chairs (5) **served as role models**, participating in activities that moved the department towards a PLC. As Pamela Jagiello said about her chair:

She makes it okay to do. You know that helps. I'm sure particularly for junior faculty that probably would be important, that I'm not going to get into trouble for doing this if he's doing it, too.

Finally, and less clearly a category in support of the development of the department as PLC, faculty mentioned how department chairs were important in (6) **protecting department faculty members** who were trying new things or from over commitment. Therrien noted that Bedard had protected him from administrators who wanted him to do more and more. When he said no to yet another committee membership, she backed him up. When students formally complained because Charlotte Stoppert was experimenting with new approaches in the classroom, her chair supported her. Protecting faculty members who try new things or from too many demands may only indirectly support the department as PLC, but it seems important nonetheless.

Academic Department Actions and Characteristics

Our discussion of department chair behaviors and characteristics leads naturally to viewing five actions and characteristics within the academic department that may promote PLCs at Midwest. The academic department has traditionally been the locus of most faculty

interchange, and of a commonality based on some similarity of training and background within an academic discipline. Yet even here, seldom has a community of learners come into being (Kraft, 2000; Shulman, 1993). We have already noted that, at Midwest, some academic departments appear to be moving towards becoming PLCs. This is especially true of the Communications and Speech Department. Therefore, while I will note examples from several departments (Nursing, Allied Health-Radiologic Technology, Engineering, Business Information Systems, Sociology), the Communications and Speech Department will serve as an extended example and case.

It may be that the kind of (1) **academic discipline(s)** within a department may determine to some degree the likelihood that the department members will move towards community. Bedard and Gamet both hinted at this as a possible explanation for why the faculty in their department, trained in communications and small group behaviors and techniques, seemed to become closer and more of a community in a shorter time than some other departments whose disciplines do not provide and/or reinforce those skills which improve human relationships. Bedard told me:

You know, the fact is we teach interviewing. The fact is we teach public speaking. We teach all of those things. We teach small group communication. So we tend to be better at facilitating groups or leading things or whatever than a lot of other disciplines would be because we've been trained in so much of that.

Likewise, Wendy Howard suggested that the training and worklife of nurses, heavy on cohort-experience and teamwork, might promote more community in that department. The stereotype of Engineering Department faculty is that they focus on idea, application and task, and not on human relations. Perhaps this would reduce the chances of community

developing there. However, Nesbitt described the dialogue in Engineering Department meetings over the modularization of the curriculum:

I enjoy being able to, you know, disagree with somebody in a meeting, and have my point be heard. I don't always get my way. But in industry that's one thing we learn very quickly is, even if you think you're right, that doesn't even get you half way [laughs]. There's a political aspect. There's a change aspect.

There's a salesmanship aspect that needs to be incorporated.

Previous training and experience in a given profession may color the department meetings of faculty in that field as much as the academic discipline does.

Departments which bring all faculty together in (2) **off-campus retreats** or other forms of shared experience seem more likely to move towards community. We have already seen the example of the Radiologic Technology Department's retreat to the island cabin of a now deceased chair. Stoppert believes that this three-day retreat "was, I think, the beginning of what a neat group we" have become.

Department meetings, which sometimes tend to focus more on the business of the department than on relationship or team building, seem less likely in and of themselves to promote community. Even so, several faculty spoke of the importance of (3) **regular and frequent department meetings**, including part-time faculty, as key in the department forming strong relationships. More than just having the meetings, however, there must be the development of trust and deep communication during and beyond the meetings. We have seen how the Communications and Speech Department faculty was able to deal with conflicts over the standardization of curriculum through relatively open communication and comfort with disagreement. If the full-time department members had been easily offended, or been condescending towards those who disagreed or those who were adjunct faculty, this

trust and openness would probably not have developed. Van Meter, the newest faculty member, found it easy to become a part of the department community. She would have liked more contact with her colleagues outside of formal meetings and intentionally planned lunches or appointments, but the locations of faculty offices across the campus and the differing teaching schedules made that more difficult. Nonetheless, she found the willingness to share practice high:

I enjoy working in my department. We have a unique blend of people. We work independently, but if you ever have questions or concerns or need help, you can always depend on the department members to come in and kind of help you. Your colleagues are always there for you. Although we don't really see each other often. Just during department meetings [laughs].

Interestingly, a common complaint I heard from faculty in that department was that there were not enough department meetings. On the other hand, Amanda Gamet put forward the interesting theory that you could have too many meetings and become too close:

GAMET: Although I think there's a lot to be said for [not] becoming too cohesive. There's that whole [theory where] your cohesiveness gets high then your productivity drops off and you get the groupthink happening and all that kind of stuff. And so I think a positive byproduct of us not being together is the fact that we can bring some objectivity in all the time.

SAM: So maybe even having to work at getting together is actually beneficial somehow?

GAMET: I think so. I think so. It's like anything. If you really want it [laughs] you really work for it. You appreciate it more.

Sufficient quality group interchange seems necessary for a department to develop community, whatever the quantity of time spent together. We have previously noted the example of the Business Information Systems Department meeting during which a faculty member was willing to expose his “failure” to communicate with a student due to their differing learning styles (see page 106). Julie Shea told me that. “And so, we're starting to see this. I mean it was meaningful dialogue. And again it wouldn't have happened two and a half years ago.” For whatever reason, sufficient trust had been built in this department so that this faculty member felt comfortable making such a revelation in a department meeting.

The (4) **mentoring system** for new faculty seemed a key ingredient in the development of community in the Communications and Speech Department. Two-thirds of the department members were hired within the last ten years, and half within the last five. As we have seen, the mentoring system required reciprocal classroom visits, sharing of practice and conversations about teaching and learning, and the providing of informal support to the new faculty member. The department went beyond just having a single formal mentor. The entire department acts as mentor to the new faculty member, as Therrien noted:

They don't just have to go to their mentor. They can go to any one of us and we can answer their questions. And we always protect the first-year people to make sure they only focus on teaching, and they don't get involved in anything else. Jim [Hogans, a recently hired faculty member] happens to be two doors down from me, and I always ask him how things are going even though I'm not his official mentor. I just want to make sure that he's okay so that he can focus just on what he needs to do. Let him get used to Urban City. Let him get used to the teaching, the load. Let him get his courses prepped with the textbooks. And then the second year we'll start gradually

putting you on committees and doing other things. We just don't want to throw you in there like some companies do.

This deep caring and support for each other may grow, in part, from the mentoring program.¹⁴

Midwest has a required mentoring system for all newly hired faculty. The mentoring manual lists a long series of objectives for the program, including “networking with colleagues” and “enhance integration/retention of new faculty.” Most of the rest focus on the informational and the procedural. Among the duties of the mentor which may promote participation in a PLC are:

- meet with mentee on regular basis throughout quarter
- serve as a resource on course content, departmental procedures, classroom management, etc.
- facilitate the entrance of the mentee into the Midwest community

Suggested activities include:

- role model for teaching strategies and classroom management
- frequent, casual contacts to lend an empathetic ear
- introduction to colleagues throughout the institution
- reminders of professional development opportunities
- invitation to professional organizations

¹⁴ It may be that the relative newness of all but one of the faculty in the Communications and Speech Department may have something to do with their strong community, but this is pure speculation on my part. Is it the case that because they are a kind of cohort, or of a different generation than more senior faculty, that they have bonded more together? I found no evidence in my study to suggest this, but it is an interesting speculation.

- invite your mentee to visit your classroom; offer to return the visit if your mentee seems interested or suggest that videotaping by Media Services might be helpful.

Again, most of the other suggested activities involve introduction to college facilities, procedures, policies, and resources. While these certainly are important, they do not seem likely to promote the development of a PLC. The Communications and Speech Department seems to go well beyond the letter of this system, carrying out mentoring to a fuller and deeper extent. This may promote the PLC in that department.

Facing a common challenge or problem (5) may be the “cauldron” (Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner, 1994) that can make or break community. The Communications and Speech Department faced and still faces a challenge of finding adequate numbers of sufficiently capable adjunct faculty. As we have seen, the full-time faculty further defined a related problem of maintaining consistent quality of teaching and of learning outcomes in the introductory speech course and the small group communications course. First, three full-time faculty worked together to produce the workbooks, standardized curriculum and assessments, and common course outcomes. Then, there were hard conversations among full- and part-time faculty over the necessity of such coordinated curriculum development, followed by a piloting of the new courses. Finally, all faculty had the opportunity to provide input into the redesign of the new courses before they went live, and have had such opportunity as each revision has been made. This shared experience may have helped produce what Gamet called “a very, very open line of communication.” Repeatedly in interviews, members of the department mentioned the department-wide effort to reshape these two courses and involve as many faculty as possible in their revision. It has become a part of the story of the department, an important event in the shared history.

A similar but less dramatic situation faces the Sociology Department, according to Susan Birdsall:

We are just [now] working out an assessment instrument in sociology. And as we began to try to play with it, we realized, “What are we trying [to accomplish]? Do we have any common goals?” We’ve got to step back and say, “What are we testing? What are we trying to assess? What do we think they should learn?” Before that [laughs] we sort of figured each [professor] was doing his or her own thing and basically lecture. And we have a good department. But there really wasn't any common understanding as [to] what we would really expect the student to learn or to be able to express after [the first two sociology courses]. So it's forcing us as a faculty, not happily sometimes, to realize we have to have common ground ourselves before we can really assess what's going on.

This department may be moving towards being a PLC, driven by a recognition that they share the responsibility for curriculum, defining student outcomes, and for student learning. It may be that the mutual problem of defining what those common outcomes will be, recognized because of the need to assess them, is fostering community.

Organization-wide Actions and Characteristics

Certain college-wide actions and characteristics may be fostering PLCs among Midwest's faculty, either within a department or across departments. Many of these may be within the control of administrators to produce or help produce, through human resources policy changes, changes to negotiated contracts, or other individual or collective administrative action. Some may be relatively quick to make, and others may have to evolve

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over a considerable length of time. It may be tempting for some administrators to focus at this level alone, but the literature on communities of practice and community building should warn us that much of the real work at developing community is at the individual and local level (Peck, 1987; Wenger, 1996, 1998).

Strategic-Level Actions and Characteristics

In this section, I will review five strategic level organization-wide actions or characteristics that may have helped foster PLCs at Midwest. First, an important college-wide process that may have both structural and symbolic value in promoting PLCs at Midwest Community College is its (1) **strategic plan**. The 1999-2000 strategic plan progress report, entitled “Journey Towards the Learning College,” describes the college’s vision of itself as a Learning College, and specific strategic initiatives in its attempt to fulfill its vision. The document describes certain environmental forces, similar to those mentioned earlier in this dissertation, which are driving it to change or “transform”:

The College has recently experienced three major milestones: presidential succession, North Central Association accreditation, and a successful levy referendum. Simultaneously, Midwest—along with every other college and university in the nation—is facing significant external forces: fast-paced technological and economic changes in society, new demands for access and accountability, and the increasing emergence of alternative providers of education. (College Publication: *Journey Towards the Learning College, 1999-2000*)

Because of this recognition, the administration made a conscious decision to shape the strategic plan as an intentional effort to better realize that vision of Midwest as a Learning College:

During the process of our North Central Self-Study, it became apparent that some very significant changes are underway at the College. We found new approaches to teaching and learning emerging throughout the College. These changes can best be described as focusing on Midwest as a learning college. What we learned through the self-study process suggests that if our vision is to be pursued productively and efficiently, we need to support the learning college concept in a thoughtful, organized, and strategic way. We cannot assume that the learning college will "just happen." (College Publication: *Journey Towards the Learning College, 1999-2000*)

O'Banion's Learning College Principles are then quoted in their entirety. Next are listed "Six Core Indicators of Success," one of which may also support the development of PLCs:

Quality Workplace: Midwest nurtures and supports a workforce and organizational Structure dedicated to continuous Improvement [capitals in original]. (College Publication: *Journey Towards the Learning College, 1999-2000*)

Some of the specific strategic initiatives listed in this document seem designed, at least in part, to promote the development of PLCs. This is important because budget and planning decisions and priorities, that is, where the college chooses to spend its time and money, are more reflective of its real values and theories-in-use than are values statements and expressions of belief. A strategic plan is both a symbolic expression of the latter and a practical statement of the former. Therefore, we find in the strategic plan the following statement of values and vision:

As a Learning College, the fact that Midwest values its people as its most important asset in pursuing the College's commitment to serve students and the community will be clear and focused. We will sustain and enhance

the innovative culture that has made Midwest a premier community college where faculty, staff, and students can live balanced, healthy professional lives while reaching their highest potential.

To promote this innovative culture, faculty and staff will themselves be continuous learners:

- Options for learning in terms of content and approach will be plentiful-for students, faculty and staff alike.

There is evidence of a conscious design to use new technologies to promote change in how faculty work together and with students:

- Information technology will be a transforming agent that will affect everything.

- Distance learning will serve as a catalyst for the adoption of learner-centered approaches to instruction. Faculty and counselors working as facilitators and often as part of a team will empower students to manage their own learning through a wide variety of alternatives to traditional teaching. Instruction will focus less on content and more on process—the process of acquiring and managing knowledge. Most importantly, we will accommodate individual learning styles and life situations as well as personal and career objectives. (College

Publication: *Journey Towards the Learning College, 1999-2000*)

This vision seems to promote more collaboration among faculty, a key element of the PLC.

In fact, the term “community of learners” is explicitly referenced:

At Midwest, access to learning will expand through a variety of individualized learning methodologies, interactive technologies, collaborative group learning

and team teaching that transcend the constraints of location, time, and individual capacity. We will grow as a *community of learners* [emphasis mine] in which everyone is supported by an infrastructure that promotes collaboration across the entire College. (College Publication: *Journey Towards the Learning College, 1999-2000*)

This is a vivid call to becoming a Professional Learning Community as a college. The document then makes a clear commitment to aligning the budget and resources to this vision, and providing professional development for faculty and staff to help them towards the vision as well. This kind of public commitment is important, both symbolically and practically. Obviously, however, the public commitment must be followed by real action.

The introduction ends with a description of planning as a device to promote the learning organization, echoing the work of Donald H. Michael (1997):

Strategic planning began at Midwest with the premise that planning is a learning process—one that is assessed based on performance. Eric Hoffer, the philosopher-dockworker, observed: "In times of change, the learners will inherit the earth while the learned will find themselves beautifully equipped to deal with a world that no longer exists." We are in the midst of change at Midwest, just as we are in the midst of opportunity. Creating a learning community where we are all workers and learners together will insure that we bring the best educational opportunities to the people of Urban City.

(College Publication: *Journey Towards the Learning College, 1999-2000*)

This description is also a vision for Midwest as a PLC. Then under the list of broad goals, we see two that might support the development of PLCs:

-The College organization and human resource processes will support and encourage transformation to the Learning College.

-The planning/budget process will support and encourage transformation to the Learning College to achieve optimal efficiency and effectiveness. (College Publication: *Journey Towards the Learning College, 1999-2000*)

There follows a list of what Midwest considered major accomplishments for 1999-2000 in achieving the goals of this plan. I quote those that seem relevant to this study. The first recognizes the importance of the modularized curriculum, which we have shown may have helped promote shared curriculum development:

-Competency-based curriculum

With funding from the National Science Foundation (NSF), the Center for Advanced Manufacturing Education (CAME) was established to develop a modular, competency-based curriculum. Another NSF grant for Institution-wide Reform provided seed money to disseminate the competency-based curriculum architecture across the curriculum, beginning with Business Information Systems and Automotive Technology. (College Publication: *Journey Towards the Learning College, 1999-2000*)

Next comes recognition of the importance of the Learning College Grants and the work of the Trailblazers:

-Trailblazers Team

The Trailblazers team has successfully applied the Learning College process to faculty professional development through the Learning College Grants for innovation.

The work of the Process Education™ Team is recognized as important:

-Process Education

Over 200 faculty have participated in this approach to teaching and learning that focuses on [Midwest's institutionally defined student learning] competencies, especially teamwork and critical thinking. (College Publication: *Journey Towards the Learning College, 1999-2000*)

Below we will identify professional development as one promoter of PLCs. The strategic planning report notes this area as an important accomplishment:

-Professional development opportunities

Professional development opportunities now account for 4.5% of the operating budget; college funding provides support for programs such as the Learning College Grants, which to date has allocated \$1.2 million to faculty/staff teams for innovation. Three professional development days were established and successfully implemented in FY 1999-2000 to support the institution's commitment to the transformation to the Learning College: the All-College Development Day, a faculty development day, and a staff development day. A college-wide team also completed work on a proposal to implement an Individualized Learning Plan for all employees; the proposal is currently under review. (College Publication: *Journey Towards the Learning College, 1999-2000*)

Again, I will note below the importance of rewards systems in encouraging the development of PLCs. This report links rewards and performance reviews with the college's vision:

-Faculty Performance Review (FPR)

The Learning Excellence Task Force revised the criteria related to the Faculty Performance Review, promotion, tenure, and merit to ensure

alignment with the core indicators of effectiveness and inclusion of continuous improvement targets that are consistent with department and division mission models and business plans. (College Publication: *Journey Towards the Learning College, 1999-2000*)

I argue here that these statements of vision and goals, and these highlights of college accomplishments are indicators of system-wide support for elements of the PLC. In the end, what is the real effect of the strategic plan in promoting a “community of learners” among faculty?

Certainly, VP Paula Galligan believes it is vital. She told me that “the principles of the Learning College are already integrated into our strategic plan” and that efforts to promote the LC were effective in promoting community among faculty. One would expect that a top executive would see things that way. What about faculty themselves? What is their experience and opinions?

Pamela Jagiello brought up the strategic plan on her own as evidence that Process Education™ and the work of the Team were firmly rooted in Midwest’s structure and systems.

I noticed when our new strategic planning initiative came out. Have you seen that document? It has our mission and philosophy and a lot of things that would tell you kind of what we feel like we're about. So it would be useful for you to see it. We have a section in there about process education. This is a 12 page document about what the college is about and there we are. So that's recognition that the college feels we're important.

Clearly, for Jagiello, the public recognition and the budgetary and administrative support represented by the strategic plan are important to promoting the work of the Process

Education™ Team. A 1999 year-end report by the Team connects its work with the strategic plan and larger institutional goals:

Why Process Education™ at Midwest?

To achieve our institutional goals, Midwest needs to transform into a more learning-centered organization. In support of Midwest's Core Indicators of Success, process education™ vigorously promotes the transformation to a learning college. (College Document: *Process Education™ Year-End Report, 1999*)

Like Jagiello, Julie Shea, as chair of the Trailblazers, saw the connection of the strategic plan with, in this case, the Trailblazers' goals as a vital and important way to institutionalize their work. She wanted me to see the place of the Trailblazers and Learning College Grants in that document. Both faculty members were eager that I see the plan and their committee's work in it. While there is often a great deal of cynicism among front-line employees about mission, vision, strategic planning and so on, it seems that for at least some faculty at Midwest who desired to see their work affect the larger organization over the longer time, the symbolic and budgetary support represented by having a place in the strategic plan was very important. So it may be that Midwest's strategic plan did promote elements of the PLC, directly or indirectly.

Closely related to strategic planning, (2) **providing budgetary support** may help to promote the development of PLCs. We have seen above how key initiatives in the strategic plan provide the budget to support efforts to promote the Learning College at Midwest. Faculty mentioned the importance of budgetary support both for practical reasons and for the symbolic endorsement demonstrated by having a line item associated with an initiative.

Thus, Fran Scullen and Julie Shea both celebrated the achievement of having Process Education™ as a standing budget item. Scullen told me:

One of the challenges is just getting accepted by the administration, and being made part of the institution. Once your grant is over, if you aren't accepted by the institution then you really don't have any funding. You don't have any place. I mean you still could carry on but it's just harder.

Recall that a Learning College Grant originally sponsored the Process Education™ effort.

This in itself is an example of budgetary support (see the next category, Grants, below).

Many initiatives die on the vine if not fertilized after a seed grant has expired. Julie Shea explained how she went about assuring that Process Education™ would have a longer life:

But at the point that we needed to have our own budget to continue it, then that was when I got more involved with [VP] Paula Galligan. And I said, "We need to continue this. I don't want it to die because there's no more Learning College money." And she said, "Well you could propose a budget and it will go through the Budget and Planning cycle, which is pretty rigorous." And I said, "Okay." So I pulled together a budget. I had to babble a little bit for resources, honestly, because administration wanted to give me less in terms of release time. They thought, "Well you've been working on this for two years. There's a team of six. Shouldn't a lot of this be ironed out? Shouldn't it be easier now?" I said, "No, now it's getting harder. Now we need to be sure we're building solid data to convince larger and larger populations. This was a project that impacted easily more than 300 people [as well as] quality in the classroom." So, Process Education™ became a little more broad [and received] its own budget and administrative support.

Without budgetary support, the Process Education™ team and effort would have had much less broad and continuing impact. And we have seen that this impact may have been a powerful promoter of PLCs at Midwest.

Other faculty mentioned the importance of budget in support of professional development, merit pay and rewards systems, and the Learning College Grants, all of which we have or will identify as factors which may have promoted PLCs at Midwest. I do not want to belabor what may seem an obvious point. Money talks loudly when we look at what an organization really values.

A subset of budgets, (3) **internal and external grants** in some cases may help foster the development of PLCs. As an example of an external grant, National Science Foundation grants funded the modularized curriculum and their application beyond the manufacturing curriculum, which we have seen may have encouraged community. An example of an internal grant, Midwest's Learning College Grants have indirectly promoted PLCs by funding projects that in turn helped encourage community. Process Education™, the redesign of the introductory courses in the Communications and Speech Department, the shared curriculum development between Developmental Studies and other departments—all examples I have used here—were funded by a Learning College Grant. Learning College Grants directly promote the development of PLCs because grant criteria include innovation, collaboration, experimentation, and both cross-curricular and cross-functional teams—all elements of a PLC. Faculty may choose the exact project or manifestation of community they wish to work on, so administration is not viewed as mandating specific practices or projects. At the same time, the sharing of practice, action research, shared leadership, and many other elements of the PLC are promoted. Time after time in my conversations with faculty, the Learning College Grant was mentioned, usually positively. The only complaint I

heard voiced was that the reporting of data at the end of the pilot phase of a project seemed onerous to two faculty members. And they did not quibble over the need for good research data in helping the college decide if a project should be mainstreamed, only that the quantity seemed excessive. So, in all, the \$200,000 that Midwest invests per year, far less than 1% of its total budget, seems to have had a powerful effect on the college and in moving it towards developing PLCs with few, if any, disadvantages.

College (4) **buildings and infrastructure** may allow for or even promote PLCs. We have seen already that Midwest constructed a multi-million dollar Learning Technology Center, and that this center houses a learning laboratory for faculty to experiment with new approaches, a faculty professional development center, and technology-centered classrooms. Each of these bring faculty together to experiment with new curriculum and teaching approaches, and to share practices, all elements of the PLC. Such projects as those in the Communications and Speech Department were made possible in part because of the LTC. Such organization-wide supports as money, resources, space and infrastructure are important in any change effort, including the development of PLCs. In the post-PC era, the same may also be said of information technology.

Midwest's strategic plan calls for (5) **information technology** to "be a transforming agent that will affect everything. Distance learning will serve as a catalyst for the adoption of learner-centered approaches to instruction." I found some evidence that information technology may be helping to promote the development of PLCs in two paradoxical ways. Such technology gives faculty resources to work together in virtual as well as face-to-face learning communities and provides the resources to enable them to connect with colleagues around campus and at other institutions. At the same time, technology may be a facilitator of community among faculty perhaps because they do not have to be the expert, as they

sometimes feel they must in their disciplines and concerning teaching. In the latter case, technology failures and frustrations may be helping promote PLCs at Midwest as much as technological success may do so in the case of the former.

Andrea LaGest and Cathy Alexander from the Developmental Studies Department are working with an Engineering professor, Melissa McMain, to codesign the accounting course for engineering students. LaGest has written a reading strategies component for the first few weeks of that course, Alexander is helping with the written work, while McMain is the teacher of record and focuses on the content. McMain also teaches the in-class reading component which discusses reading strategies for the accounting textbook. This unit is embedded into the first two chapters of the course. During the class, both LaGest and Alexander are available to students via email to provide assistance in reading and writing respectively. A similar design had been piloted in Allied Health departments and was working well there. More to the point here, faculty have done much of the curriculum design and sharing via email rather than in person. In this way, information technology has promoted elements of the PLC at a distance as well as in real time.

LaGest is far from enamored by the technology, and is skeptical of its effectiveness ultimately in terms of producing more learning in students. She worried about:

...the amount of time we put into creating [this] cutesy little stuff that can be viewed in five minutes—in one [eyeball], out the other. Does it really change everything? I've heard rumors that there's some studies out there that are now saying that web, computer-enhanced stuff, is not changing diddley squat. I mean, they walk out entertained and they're impressed. But have they really learned anything more? I don't know. I just always think we're repackaging and [laughs] we want to call it something different. Where I

think we have to concentrate on is making people think. And not putting [computers] in front of them that act as crutches, not computerized programs that give students the idea that I'm sitting in front of something, I must be learning something.

Nonetheless, she believes the work is necessary to keep students of the media age attentive so that learning may occur.

We are getting a generation of people that have used the computer all of their life, and so they are more adept at receiving information through a computer screen. I mean, I think the web [is] adding interest.

In any case, she is glad that she has had the opportunity for learning the technology:

I [don't want] to be left back in the purple passion mimeograph sheet generation. So, I'm really pleased that the opportunity has forced me into this. I mean, I've bitched and complained a lot about this, but, you know, I'm glad I've done it. I'm pleased to have done it. I think I will be able to add to our developmental reading area in this way.

LaGest believes it was the steep learning curve, lack of available training, and difficulties with technology that encouraged her work with other faculty as much as the need to coordinate together in this project. In trying to create her portion of the online instruction in developmental reading, LaGest found herself spending most of her time attempting to learn the technology and deal with its idiosyncrasies and failures, rather than doing the actual work of course design. What she had thought would be relatively easy—uploading some technical articles as examples for engineering students to apply the reading strategies—became more ambitious and complex.

So my nice little idea of finding technical articles turned into [laughs] almost a living nightmare, if I can be blunt, because I came in with basically word processing. I don't think I'm computer illiterate in any way, shape, or form. Yeah, I can find my way. I understand the mechanics of the computer and all of that type of thing. But am I a web surfer? No way. It's too time consuming to sit there. So I didn't have a whole lot of expertise in just even knowing how the technology had developed and what was involved in designing for the web.

In her frustration, LaGest found help and support from Joan MacDiarmid, also a professor in Developmental Studies at Midwest, who helped her learn the new technology. They met regularly in informal training and problem-solving sessions over several years. In fact, later the same day of our interview they would be working together:

I've got an appointment with [Joan] at one [p.m.]. Her expertise in developing curriculum on the web is, I think, really phenomenal. Because of Joan's leadership we are so web oriented and computer-oriented that we are sort leaps and bounds ahead of everybody else. She took a sabbatical leave in somewhere around '92 '93 and learned multimedia, which was a very, very new field at that point in time. When I arrived in '93, the Developmental Reading area was working on getting a computer lab. Now our developmental reading department is almost totally online.

LaGest sees herself as an “independent learner” who learned and did “most of this on my own.” Nevertheless, she admits that her frustrations with learning the technology led her to seek the help of colleagues because there was inadequate support from trained technicians and staff:

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One of the things that has really slowed this project down is that Midwest looks like they're really into technology, and they've built this wonderful building that's sitting here [the LTC]. But they don't have the resources. They have not sunk their money into the people that know how to use this stuff. In order for me to do this kind of development, Joan and I have spent hours together. I [also] had to have official training. This is not just something that you absorb overnight. If you're not into that mode of thinking, it's a whole new ball game.

Likewise, she learned a great deal from formal training sessions taught by a faculty colleague from the Psychology Department:

I took all of [Barry Kota's] Summer Institute [workshops] and I'll have to say that that was kind of a key thing. He did Flash, Fireworks, and Dream Weaver. And it was when I learned that I could create my own graphics that things fell into place. So it was learning Fireworks that has really been essential for me to become, I won't even say a web designer, but Fireworks was key, 'cause I can do just about anything that I want in Fireworks.

Therefore, even though LaGest sees herself as very independent and working alone, the need to learn new technology quickly has moved her into closer community with other colleagues along the same learning path.

Recall also that when the Communications and Speech Department required a PowerPoint component in the redesigned Introductory Speech class, some reluctant adjunct faculty were led into deeper conversation and learning with full-time and adjunct colleagues. Other faculty in interviews mentioned the challenges of teaching on the web or using other

technologies and the support they received from colleagues, either formally in training sessions or, more often, through “over the shoulder” informal coaching.

At least for some faculty members, the learning community has extended beyond Midwest. Pamela Jagiello has been working on incorporating Process Education™ and active-learning strategies in her web courses. After attending a conference sponsored by Interactive Learning Systems, she became involved in forming a national consortium to promote and support that same goal:

The theory being, a prophet is not without honor save in his own land, that somehow we listen to people who come from somewhere else more than we might want to listen to somebody we had lunch with the day before. So this will form groups from the different colleges who travel around and involves colleges of all different levels from community colleges up through research universities. And I think that's a real strength too, because we have some important things to say to each other from those different viewpoints.

Jagiello then joined with colleagues from colleges and universities in the Urban City area to work collaboratively in a local learning community:

We had 14 colleges and universities represented from the Urban City Council of Higher Education [who] formed an ongoing team and there are now 6 colleges who are actively working on that. I'm representing Midwest in that group. Our goal—and we have some grant money from UCCHE to do it—is to form ongoing faculty development efforts in the area of improving quality in online education and we're going to do curriculum design and also software education and that kind of thing to be shared between these

colleges so that the colleges will contribute their areas of expertise. And then faculty from all of the colleges will be able to benefit.

Thus, it may be that the challenges of teaching online and with computer-mediation may lead faculty to greater collaboration, within departments, across disciplines, and with faculty from other colleges and universities. Perhaps the very failures of technology and technology support may allow faculty to join in community where they might not otherwise. There are indications that some faculty who see themselves as independent workers and learners may be forced into collaboration because of technology. It may also be that the need of some to be experts does not apply in the area of technology. If so, this may allow some the opportunity to be learners together. As we will mention in the final chapter, this may be a ripe area for further research.

Human Resource Policies and Practices

Organizations normally seek to foster certain behaviors through **human resource policies and practices**. I found indications that four sets of HR policies and practices may be helping foster PLCs at Midwest. During interviews discussed above, a number of faculty mentioned the importance of (1) **release time** from formal teaching loads as a key factor in their having the opportunity to work together. Just noted above was the example of release time for Joan MacDiarmid to help Andrea LaGest learn web design, as well as the release time LaGest and Cathy Alexander received to do the actual work together. We have seen how Beverly Van Meter received release time during her first year so that, among other things, she could visit the classrooms of colleagues. And faculty regularly receive release time to participate on certain teams, such as the Trailblazers, which require more intensive work together on projects and activities. The normal teaching load at Midwest is five classes a

term, with all the attendant preparation and evaluation of student work. Therefore, release time is both a symbolic and real investment in activities the college believes are important.

Closely related are (2) **sabbaticals**, which provide extended time off from all teaching duties. We have previously seen that Amanda Gamet was granted a sabbatical in the Fall of 2002 to research classroom practice, a key element of the PLC. Sabbaticals have also been used at Midwest to promote faculty learning and sharing of new practices.

Many scholars have noted the difficulty of transforming the culture of an organization, and moving towards the organization as PLC, or even to one that promotes the development of local PLCs, is clearly a cultural shift. Schein, for one, notes that the need for change may exist quite a while, with organization members ignoring or suppressing long-standing disconfirming data, because issues of “psychological safety” were dominant (Schein, 1992). One way to bring about fundamental change is to change the players. Thus (3) **hiring practices may be designed intentionally to bring in new blood**, that is, faculty members who have a predilection for working in a PLC. The Communications and Speech Department, which we have identified as likely a PLC in itself, is made up mostly of faculty hired in the last ten years. In fact, there is only one senior faculty member remaining from the cohort hired in the 1960s and 1970s. Department Chair Carol Bedard believes that hiring preferences have been key in producing the department culture:

I think it's just that by the nature of the people in this department, all of us are very positive, proactive, optimistic individuals. And I think like hires like. So when we go out and do a search, the people that we gravitate toward are positive, optimistic, proactive people.

In the same department, Amanda Gamet also mentioned the importance of hiring the right people. She told me that they take it very “seriously” and also noted the relative youth of the department.

In my meeting with members of the Process Education™ Team, Susan Birdsall in Sociology, too, noted the importance of hiring new faculty who were inclined to collaboration in the classroom and out. Wendy Howard in Nursing, Deborah Wild in English, and Fran Scullen in Legal Assisting all agreed that this was true now in their departments. Howard noted that the “huge percentage of faculty that are going to be leaving this institution” was both a challenge to be met and a great opportunity to hire people amenable to a new way of working. Wild agreed:

But what I'm hoping is the department search committees [look for] the skills that would make the person fluid, and flexible, and really concerned about learning, and not trapped in their mindset that this is the way a classroom has to be set up. Cause if you've got an open-minded faculty member and they're relatively young, they're receptive, then they don't close down right away. So, I would hope that's what we're trying to do in our departments when we bring these new people in.

Some departments have intentionally hired as faculty former employees of business and industry who have experience in and comfort with working in teams. Of those we have met here, Walter Nesbitt was hired from a major engineering firm, Charlotte Stoppert had worked in a hospital setting, and Julie Shea came from a Fortune 500 company. Fran Scullen specifically mentioned Shea’s leadership experience and skills gleaned, in part, from her experience in the private sector. Nesbitt noted that he was used to working in teams and that this helped in the implementation of modules.

Charlotte Stoppert believes that new blood is especially important when many of the senior faculty are no longer invigorated with a desire to change:

It's kind of like, "I'm just going to ride the rest of the road out," which tells me that they're not excited about teaching or having students around at all, because they would want the best that there is for their students. I also think that some of the faculty don't have a lot of spark [laughs]. But on the whole, a lot of the ones that are kind of sedentary, not too excited, are usually some of the older faculty that have been here a long time. Many of the ones who've been here that are relatively new, I would say within the last fifteen years, I think [have] just got so much excitement and [energy] and enthusiasm for everything that's going on.

Stoppert's thesis here is that faculty near the end of their careers may be more likely to coast, whereas those who are fresh to the profession may be more energetic and willing to work together while experimenting with practice. Stoppert herself may be evidence to the contrary, since she is within two years or so of retiring and is very energetic and innovative. However, like Nesbitt and Shea, she has been teaching only for about ten years and came from a professional career, in her case as a Radiologic Technologist.

Carol Bedard talks about the progression of the Communications and Speech Department over the last 30 years:

What's the story of the department? Well, our department, I think, has changed a lot since I first came as a student. When I was here as a student in the mid-seventies, it was very much a patriarchal, very heavily male-dominated department. And faculty retired, which is really how virtually all the attrition happened was through retirements. The department is now a

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much younger—the full-time tenure-track faculty are younger than the average age would have been say ten years ago. They are more actively involved in the discipline than they were, because there's been probably 90% turnover. Six of the seven tenure-track faculty members. I'm the eldest of the six that have [been hired as] tenure-track in the past ten years. So it's a relatively new faculty.

And a much more diverse department than it had been since the 1970s, with three of the seven female and one African-American.

Julie Shea, too, hears a different voice coming from her younger colleagues in the Business Information Systems Department:

And as I see new faculty coming in, I think it's going to be very different. I'm just hearing the language of my faculty members. I have three newcomers who are coming in. I mean, they catch the spirit. They get the connections. They see the need [to be] in a closer way to what business and industry is looking for and what collaboration takes place there to get good results. And so I think we'll see a big shift here as an institution. [We're] just starting now to say, "And how many people are we going to lose and by when"? Not that I want the people who are the mainstay of the institution to leave. But as it grows, you know, just the language of transformation that I'm hearing from my newcomers and their interest in doing things collaboratively and in thinking beyond their discipline, their department is real encouraging.

Clearly, the hiring of new blood, people who are comfortable with working in a PLC, is one of the swiftest ways to transform an organizational culture. This is especially true when a

large cohort of faculty may retire at relatively the same time, which is the case at Midwest and throughout higher education today.

The (4) **rewards system** can be structured to support elements of the PLC, and pay is one most obvious example of rewards. In my research, I heard from a number of faculty that they took a cut in pay in order to teach at Midwest. The theme of sacrificing higher pay to be a teacher appears regularly. I do not know if this is relevant to my question, but it is a striking theme. There might be some connection between people who want to teach badly enough to give up higher pay and people who want to continuously improve as teachers, and therefore are more willing to work in groups. That would be another area of exploration for a future researcher, as discussed in the final chapter of this study. I will also discuss in the next chapter how rewards and pay systems appear to be barriers to the development of PLCs; but, for now, let us look at how they may help to foster it.

Andrea LaGest told me that she began her collaborative work with other faculty and other departments in part because she was “up for Associate Professor and tenure next year” and that this would look good on her tenure application and annual report. In fact, the Midwest policy on **tenure, merit pay, promotion, and evaluation** of full-time faculty was changed in 1999-2000 to promote certain behaviors, some of which may encourage the development of PLCs. The faculty handbook describes this change. The following quotation is from the merit section, but the sections on promotion, evaluation and tenure have parallel language:

The Merit Committee will consider performance in any one or more of the following Critical Performance Areas (CPAs) or Other as related to the College Mission:

A. Scholarship and Professional Growth

- B. Teaching/Learning Facilitation
- C. Assessment and Evaluation
- D. Student Development
- E. Curriculum Design
- F. Workplace and/or Community Service
- G. Other

Assistant professors must do the first four, associate professors the first five, and full professors all six of the described areas. Nothing here specifically addresses the PLC except the requirement that there be a connection to the college mission. Indirectly, assessment of and a focus on student learning and development may foster elements of the PLC. The criteria details also reference teamwork: "If work on a team project is referenced, the applicant's contribution to the team's activities must be described in the narrative." "Peer evaluations" are required as part of the supporting documentation, possibly promoting reciprocal classroom visits.

Vice President Galligan was very proud of this change in the rewards system at Midwest made by the Learning Excellence Task Force. The latter redesigned criteria for tenure, merit pay, and faculty evaluation to more directly reflect the principles of the Learning College. Galligan was proud, not just because of the change in the rewards system, but also because of the accompanying change in culture:

We did it! But it was a five-year process. It involved a pilot, and then a post-pilot pilot [laughs]. And the fascinating thing is that by the time we got to 2000 with these new criteria, because we'd done such a good job with faculty development, the majority of the faculty at the College were saying, "Well this makes sense because the old faculty performance review isn't evaluating

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what we're doing any more." So it was, again, evolutionary, in its process and outcome. And by the time we implemented it—and this will be the first year starting this fall using the new criteria—the majority of faculty are very comfortable with it.

Galligan also celebrated the change in the merit pay system for all other employees at the college, a change that helped reinforce the Learning College:

And the new evaluation system for all [other] employees at Midwest is also linked with the principles of the Learning College. [pause] Okay? In fact, we measure [laughs] our success on all of these. And then we take the average and everybody in the college gets a bonus if we at least meet the target. So on the 15th of August, everyone at Midwest except the faculty—and they're going to begin to participate in this—but everyone will get a 4% bonus.

This change does not only reinforce the Learning College, but it also promotes teamwork and perhaps the development of the organization as a PLC since the college as a community is rewarded rather than separate individuals. When faculty are added to the process, which she expected within a year and after negotiations, then all members of the college would be rewarded as a team.

These changes are important, if the unsolicited comments of individual faculty are any guide. We have already seen how LaGest changed her behavior in part to receive tenure and rank. When I asked Pamela Jagiello why faculty were involving themselves in the Process Education™ initiative either as team members or through professional development, she said:

Well, of course, money. An important one is recognition in terms of faculty performance and merit pay applications. And those things I just told you are

certainly going on my merit application. And they get respect in those categories. So that's important.

Jagiello saw the rewards not just in terms of their face value, but also as public recognition by formal leadership and the college community.

Midwest officially recognized both of these major changes to the rewards system by highlighting them in the 1999-2000 strategic plan report:

-The Learning Excellence Task Force revised the criteria related to the Faculty Performance Review, promotion, tenure, and merit to ensure alignment with the core indicators of effectiveness and inclusion of continuous improvement targets that are consistent with department and division mission models and business plans.

-Compensation System for Non-Academic Personnel

The compensation system for support staff, professional/administrative staff incorporated incentive pay based on the measurement of the College's Key Performance Indicators.

It may be, then, that Midwest's efforts to align human resources policies and practices and the rewards system with institutional goals, mission, and vision may help to foster PLCs among faculty.

Professional Development Activities

Throughout this study, we have heard about the importance of **professional development activities** in the promotion of PLCs among Midwest's faculty. The effectiveness of organizational and professional development in transforming organizations is hard to assess. Again, we look to describe indications only that professional development

may have helped foster the development of PLCs at Midwest. Process Education™ is one dramatic example. In a typical Process Education™ workshop, faculty practice the collaborative techniques that they will teach students. This may promote collaboration outside the workshops among at least some of the faculty participants. Because these workshops involve faculty from many different departments and disciplines, this collaboration and communication may extend outside the single academic department, the traditional locus of most faculty sharing. Fran Scullen noted what she felt was impressive sharing among faculty from both occupational and liberal arts and science disciplines. She recalled two examples of faculty working together from several disciplines to assist an occupational faculty member with classroom activities. One was a construction faculty member with a drywall exercise, one a culinary arts instructor with an exercise on baking bread. In both cases, the cooperative effort spanned traditional divisions due to academic discipline.

We have seen a number of examples from among the 200 or so faculty who have been through at least one workshop on Process Education™. We have also seen that many who have participated have continued to share best practices, to visit each other's classrooms, to critique each other's classroom materials. It may be that faculty who participate in these workshops at Midwest are more likely to continue to participate in these elements of the PLC. Walter Nesbitt mentioned professional development activities to promote the modularized curriculum as one major impact on increased community among some faculty in the Industrial Engineering Department. He also described a college-wide conversation about teaching and learning that he has observed at Midwest, and which he believes is not the norm at other community colleges:

You mentioned you're going to talk to some process ed. people. I mean, that basically [is] the same dialogue. How do we make the learning situation better? Through my work with this grant [and] with the Trailblazer Team, we talk about that all the time. I have noticed in talking to other faculty who come here [from other colleges] for workshops, and when we go to conferences to present some of our material, that's not always the case at other colleges. Even though there's a lot of interest and there may be a lot of expertise there, they don't really have that college-wide dialogue.

Charlotte Stoppert mentioned how professional development activities have had a major impact on her career as a faculty member. As we heard in a previous quotation (see page 190), she decided, “Well, how am I going to find out how bad I am, or how good I could be” without testing herself in teaching workshops? She felt that both the Teaching Effectiveness and the Process Education™ workshops encouraged her to share materials and critiques of teaching with faculty colleagues both within and outside her department. To Stoppert, both of these programs, but especially the latter, seemed answers to a professional loneliness that she had felt as a teacher:

I've always got these neat ideas about what I want to do. But you know it's hard when you're doing it all by yourself, and that's why when process ed. was first introduced, it was really neat because, gosh I got so many neat ideas from the other departments. It tends to be kind of a relaxed atmosphere with Process Education™. And it was just, what a wonderful learning experience! That's why I think that, in a department, you can't be in isolation

Stoppert was not certain which came first, the professional development activity or the propensity to share with colleagues. She described herself as a lifelong learner, hungry for

learning the new. So perhaps she would have experimented with new practices anyway.

However, the opportunities to share with colleagues seem to have been greater because of professional development activities, both on campus and off.

For some, participating in professional development activities like Process Education™ led to becoming a facilitator to share with colleagues in a more systematic and ongoing way, and in order to give back. As Jagiello put it:

So certainly one of the benefits of it is you get to pick your colleagues' brains, and see what other people are doing and establish relationships with people you wouldn't necessarily even know because they're in this other department on the other side of campus. As a result of that, a lot of other things have happened that have led up to other avenues that also deal with other faculty members. One of them is, once you've filled up, it's time to give back, so I've done some actual work with offering basics of Process Education™ to other faculty members, where I become the mentor instead of the student.

She saw benefits to herself in terms of her own growth, her opportunity to share practices with colleagues, and in finding deeper relationships with those colleagues, both at Midwest and around the country. Finally, Jagiello joined the Process Education™ Steering Team.

In every interview I had with a faculty member who had been through a Process Education™ workshop, and in the year-end reports that I had access to, faculty member after faculty member described similar experiences. Clearly, these kinds of professional development experiences, which were facilitated by faculty and in which faculty had the opportunity to practice deep sharing about practice, may have served as catalysts for faculty to participate in and create PLCs at Midwest.

Assessment of Student Learning

One of the more controversial suggestions for an organizational initiative that positively influenced the development of PLCs at Midwest was the assessment movement. During my first visit to campus, Vice President Paula Galligan suggested to me that the work of the Assessment Steering Committee in the late 1980s began the process of encouraging faculty to work together more closely. She quoted President Moeller as tracing Midwest's growth towards a Learning College back before the term was used, beginning in 1987 with the Assessment Steering Committee as well as the later Quality initiative and institutional effectiveness measures in the 1990s. Certain unsolicited comments from a few faculty suggested that their work on assessment of student learning might have contributed to their working in community.

Fran Scullen, for one, mentioned student outcomes assessment as one factor leading her to Process Education™, which contains a major assessment component. This in turn led her to more collaboration with colleagues. We have also seen how Stoppert made an effort to visit the Nursing Department Assessment Committee, and share assessment practices with colleagues in her own Radiologic Technology discipline. We have also seen that the desire to have a common set of learning outcomes and common assessment tools led the Communications and Speech Department into their redesign of the two introductory courses. As we have seen, this led to increased collaboration, communication, and coordination among full- and part-time faculty in that department.

However, during my third visit to Midwest, when I met with members of the Process Education™ Team, I mentioned the suggestion that the assessment movement had helped foster PLCs. The response was great skepticism. Three members seemed not to believe that assessment was anything other than a “buzzword” and a long-dead buzzword at that. This

was interesting since this team coordinates Process Education™ at Midwest, and both the testimony of faculty at Midwest and the literature on Process Education™ all state that assessment of student learning is key to implementing the active learning classroom. Of the steering team members I met with as a group, only Susan Birdsall described the collaborative work on assessment in a manner that suggests the PLC. As we heard previously, members of the Sociology Department realized there were no commonly agreed upon outcomes nor common assessments of learning in the introductory courses. Here we can see a movement towards a PLC, perhaps encouraged by the need to establish common outcomes and common assessment, similar to what had happened in the Communications and Speech Department. At that time, none of the other members disputed Birdsall's point or the importance or effectiveness of assessment. One possible explanation is that my suggestion was misinterpreted, although I have reread the transcript several times and reviewed the tape and cannot conclude that. Another explanation is that I mentioned that the President and VP had suggested the assessment movement and other organization-wide efforts as powerful influences. I heard from many faculty the expression of an "us versus them" attitude towards administration, which we will review below under barriers. It is possible that some faculty reject any administrative effort as invalid and ineffective because it impinges on faculty autonomy, which clearly was a value at Midwest. Be that as it may, it seems possible that the faculty and college desire to design certain standard learning outcomes and to assess for those outcomes has led many faculty into closer collaboration within a PLC.

Intentional Efforts to Promote Innovation

As a last look at organization-wide actions and characteristics, we will review three intentional efforts to promote innovation at Midwest, and their possible influence on the

development of the organization as PLC: creation of a skunk works, other efforts to promote innovation, and efforts to reduce barriers and improve the transfer of innovative practices. My intent here is not to evaluate or describe these efforts in any detail, since what we are most interested in is their usefulness in promoting PLCs.

We have already noted Midwest's efforts to use the Trailblazers as a (1) **skunk works** to promote change. In fact, Skunk Works was its original designation. The idea was to create a "parallel college" which could work outside of many of the normal structures and policies that may, in theory, be hampering innovation. Many of the projects the Trailblazers promoted have been implicated already in this study as possibly encouraging faculty PLCs at the college. We have also seen how working together on the Trailblazers Team may have led to members participating in a PLC. It may be, then, that promoting innovation through teams working in a skunk works type shadow organization may help promote PLCs.

Midwest has consciously attempted to (2) **promote innovation**. This focus on innovation was described in the college strategic plan: "We will sustain and enhance the innovative culture that has made Midwest a premier community college where faculty, staff, and students can live balanced, healthy professional lives while reaching their highest potential." We have previously seen how the Learning Technology Center and its precursor in a computer lab have brought faculty together to try new innovations under the auspices of the Learning College Grants or otherwise as the case may be. The faculty development area also has been a means of fostering faculty teamwork in trying new technologies. We have also seen that the Learning College Grants moved from funding innovative individual faculty to requiring that a team manage every innovative project. Promoting innovation, not just from individual faculty but also from teams and departments, may in general be a way to foster PLCs.

One of the major challenges for any organization is how to (3) **consistently and systematically transfer best practices**, not just from other organizations, but also from one department, individual, or “silo” to another. Midwest’s strategic plan sets this as a major goal: “As we operate in an organizational learning mode, we will recognize that barriers to transformation must be overcome through reallocation, realignment, reorganization, and reengineering.” But, as for any organization, Midwest included, this is easier set as a goal than accomplished. Wayne Prange, Assistant VP, told me that:

One of [our] strengths, I think, has been lots of innovation in pockets all over the campus. But I think a lot of us are realizing that for the future, for us to be successful, we have to come up with a way to harness that, or to focus it, or to align it in a way that makes sense for the vision and the mission of the college.

For the Communication and Speech Department, the innovation in curriculum requiring the use of PowerPoint in all introductory speech classes seemed to demand that full-time faculty force the issue by requiring every instructor in every class to include it as a unit and an assignment. This innovation was mandated across all sections. We have seen that this effort may have helped promote a PLC in that department. However, it is hard to mandate change across organization systems and to tenured faculty.

Must any transfer of practices be forced rather than encouraged by organizational systems and structure? That is a question for another study. However, Midwest has answered it in part by the Trailblazers Team and the Learning College Grant. The requirements for the Grants clearly are intended to promote the transfer of best practices through teamwork:

- The institution recognizes that innovation arises from the ideas and energy of individuals - at all levels and in all functional units of the college; the selection process is designed to encourage widespread participation.
- Teamwork and collaboration have always been strongly encouraged by the policies and procedures governing the program.

Innovations under this grant must be “scaled up” or transferred to the larger institution, at least in theory. Prange and other members of the Trailblazers are not happy with how successful they have been in doing so. Ironically, however, the Trailblazers’ efforts in facing this challenge may have helped members become a PLC within that team. Even if efforts at transfer of practices have been less than satisfactory to Midwest’s administration and Trailblazers’ members, we have seen here that the promotion of team efforts through the grant may have helped foster the development of PLCs, even though this was not their primary purpose.

Throughout this section, we have noted efforts by the organization as a whole that may have helped promote PLCs. As with the example in the last paragraph, the purpose of the organizational effort may not have been developing Professional Learning Communities among faculty, or it may have been in part to encourage teamwork. Nonetheless, there are indications that some of these organizational efforts and characteristics may have helped foster elements of the PLC among some faculty.

Organizational Culture

While this is not an organizational culture study per se, I did note four aspects of Midwest’s culture that may have encouraged the development of PLCs there. One of the challenges or barriers, as we shall see below, is the cultural value of autonomy held by many

faculty members. Individual autonomy may be a barrier to faculty working together. Another related value, that major initiatives affecting faculty should be (1) **faculty-led**, may serve to ameliorate the effect of individual autonomy. That is, faculty members may be more willing to join other faculty if they do not believe the agenda is driven by administration. Repeatedly I heard faculty talk positively about faculty-led initiatives. Fran Scullen told me that bringing Process Education™ to Midwest was faculty-led. Pamela Jagiello agreed:

And this is one of the few change agent sort of faculty development efforts that started with faculty, and has always been faculty-led and faculty-driven. And I kind of like that about it. So, I see that as a real strength that it came from the faculty level originally.

In this quotation lies the possibility that the value of being faculty-led may promote collaboration. We have already noted how the Process Education™ effort may have helped foster the development of PLCs. This cultural value may have positively influenced the extent to which that was so. Julie Shea, too, proudly told me that both Process Education™ and the General Education revision were faculty-led. When we review possible barriers below, we will see why so many Process Education™ team members may have protested so much concerning this value. Some of their faculty colleagues believed the administration was behind this effort, subtly criticizing faculty and trying to force them towards a certain way of teaching.

Members of the Communications and Speech Department also proudly told me that their efforts at joint curriculum were both led by full-time faculty. It was notable that in nearly every interview I had with faculty members, the value of faculty-led arose and normally more than once. This is not at all surprising when we note that the community

college is a professional bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1991), as we have seen above. As

Mintzberg describes it,

...the Professional Bureaucracy is a highly decentralized structure, in both the vertical and horizontal dimensions. A great deal of the power over the operating work rests at the bottom of the structure, with the professionals of the operating core.... The professional's power derives from the fact that not only is his work too complex to be supervised by managers or standardized by analysts, but also that his services are typically in great demand. This gives the professional mobility, which enables him to insist on considerable autonomy in his work. The professional tends to identify more with his profession than with the organization where he practices. (58)

This value is also consistent with Bergquist's (1992) description of the "collegial culture" in American higher education: "The collegial culture also values the autonomy of faculty in their work as teachers, scholars, and researchers" (p. 42). As we have seen, the value of individual faculty autonomy may be a barrier to the development of PLCs. It is possible that the other value of being faculty-led may help to reduce these blocking effects of autonomy, enabling more community and collaboration at Midwest than may otherwise have occurred.

The (2) **myth of the founder** may have also helped foster PLCs at Midwest, although this is a tenuous connection. I did hear from several people about this myth, and it has a key place in the strategic plan. It may be that this element of culture is not just a characteristic of and organization as PLC but also an enabler of the development of local PLCs at Midwest. The motto, "If there's a need, we will meet it," may have encouraged some faculty to work together. Recall Amanda Gamet's comments about how cohesive, collaborative, and productive her department was (Communications and Speech). When

discussing this she volunteered, “What's the next project? [laughs] It's just part of how our group operates.” As with any analysis of culture, it is hard to tell to what extent this element of culture impacts daily behaviors. Here, at least, there is an indicator that one group's PLC may have been encouraged by the power of the myth.

A (3) **culture of risk-taking** may promote PLCs, at least among a certain segment of the faculty at Midwest. We have already quoted Wayne Prange's view that the college has made it very safe and easy. In fact, he believes that innovation and risk are, if anything, too well encouraged, given the limited resources and the vast demands on the community college. Some faculty I spoke with also believed that risk was part of the normal way of working at Midwest. As noted above, Walter Nesbitt's eagerness to implement the modularized curriculum, even though the later modules were incomplete, was an example of risk-taking. He told me that this was a norm that helped promote experimentation:

I think that campus-wide dialogue of how do we improve the learning situation helps a lot. It lets me know that I'm not in it by myself. There are other people taking chances, taking risks, making major changes to how they conduct their courses.

And Pamela Jagiello agreed:

I think the atmosphere [is] we're all here to work on this together. It's very open. It's a very risk-taking [campus]—risk is fine. If you fall on your face, so what?

The Process Education™ 1999 year-end report espouses the necessity of risk-taking as a practical means of improving student learning:

All teachers need to be in the student role from time to time, just to remember what it feels like to be unsure, to take risks of making mistakes,

and to work with others who have similar feelings. The empathy that results is surely a benefit for my students. (College document)

It is unlikely that this culture of risk-taking exists uniformly throughout Midwest. I am convinced that organizations, as is true of any moderate-sized social group, is made of cultures and subcultures. However, within the groups that are more likely to join in a PLC—a community of learners who are experimenting and sharing practices—the cultural value of risk-taking may be more likely. What we do not know is whether a culture of risk-taking promotes the development of PLCs or whether participation in a PLC promotes risk-taking.

A final apparent cultural value is also an example of the PLC in action. Many faculty expressed a sense of (4) **common responsibility for student learning**. It may be that among faculty who think more globally and see their responsibility for student learning as extending beyond their individual classroom, there may be more willingness to work in community and to share practice. Most of the faculty I interviewed seemed to exemplify this consciousness. The full-time faculty in the Communications and Speech Department seemed to view their responsibility for student learning this way. The redesign of the two introductory courses required that they, in effect, intervene in the classrooms of colleagues, especially part-time faculty. We have seen that this is antithetical to a core value of traditional “collegial culture” as Bergquist defined it: Any encroachment into the classroom by another faculty member would be a violation of this norm. Yet, the Communications and Speech faculty required common outcomes, certain common units and assignments, and certain common assessments and evaluations of student learning.

We have also seen a number of examples of faculty being willing to visit each other’s classrooms and share practice as a means of promoting student learning. Again, this goes against a norm of Bergquist’s (1992) collegial culture:

Many faculty members in the collegial culture would take great offense at being asked, let alone required, to accept an observing colleague in their classrooms. It would be considered an invasion of the essential privacy required by the teaching-learning act. Ironically, even though classroom teaching is certainly a public event, it is considered an intimate interchange between faculty member and student. This interchange might be profoundly disrupted if observed and judged by another faculty member. (p. 42)

Some faculty and administrators broadened this sense of common responsibility to extend beyond students qua students to students as members of the larger community and, in fact, to the larger community itself. Walter Nesbitt was one of the more eloquent in espousing this value:

To me, even on my worst day, I can go home knowing that I'm at least trying to make things better. May not have done a good job that day. But what it really means is that we are trying to help the Urban City community make their lives better. People come here to get a better job, to make more money, to break out of whatever pattern they're in to make new lives; and it's just very meaningful to me to be part of that and to be making that more effective. And not just for Urban City, but through the work of the NSF grant and even Trailblazers, that we can touch other colleges and other students. So that's what it means to me.

As this is not a study to determine first causes, I will not get into a chicken and egg discussion, that is, did faculty already have these values or did they develop them at Midwest? Did the values promote the development of PLCs or vice versa? I observed what

appeared to be cultural values among the subset of faculty who seemed to be participating in a PLC, and noted them here. It is for other researchers to explore them further.

Environmental Factors

In my visits to Midwest, I heard of three major sets of environmental factors that may have encouraged faculty to work in a PLC. These factors are obviously not within the control of the organization; nevertheless, any organization must take them into account, especially an open system like the community college. Furthermore, if Midwest wishes to continue to promote the development of PLCs, it may wish to use these factors as rationales and levers for that change.

The first, (1) **a change in students**, their skills, their behaviors, their past experiences, may be considered an internal or external factor. I chose to put it here because students come from the external environment, spend only a portion of their time and lives in the college, and in the community college move back and forth across the organizational boundary over time. Students bring most of who they are to the college, and faculty must begin with that background. There were three major changes.

Some faculty members described students as having changed dramatically over the years, especially in terms of (a) **having fewer of the basic skills** necessary for college success. These faculty may be more likely to want to change practices to meet the needs and changing expectations of students, and thus more likely to participate in a PLC. Andrea LaGest noted how students had fewer life skills as well as academic skills even as at the same time they faced many more challenges and competing demands on their time than traditional, residential college students:

I think our students are so overwhelmed with job, family obligations, and I think their lives are just, they're chaotic. They have never developed the skills. Maybe I'm speaking of the developmental students. The type of students we get in developmental classes are obviously there for a reason, and that reason is probably because they've never learned how to solve life problems. Their resources are very limited.

Many faculty members in these interviews spoke of the community college student as often fitting this description. These faculty members normally spoke also of their personal commitment to the community college and its students, expressing a desire to teach there rather than at a four-year or an elite institution. These same faculty members were eager to try new teaching techniques to accommodate the students.

Often, I heard from interviewees of a set of (b) **rising expectations of** increasing numbers of students who have experienced **a more active classroom**. Perhaps students who have discovered that they learn better when the lecture is not the sole or dominant mode are more demanding of varied methodologies. In turn, faculty who face these rising demands have the choice of ignoring it or of learning new techniques to accommodate both the learning needs of the students and the rising expectations that they do so.

Next, many faculty members I spoke with talked about the younger students (c) **comfort with new technology**. These students expected the classroom to make use of the same technologies they were using and playing with at home. As Scott Therrien said, "I mean, there's probably five-year old kids that can look over the Internet and know stuff better than I do." As we have seen, faculty members who experiment with new teaching/learning technologies like the internet and computer-based learning applications may feel more comfortable admitting ignorance about these things, which are separate from

their academic disciplines. This willingness may make them more comfortable with working in community and sharing practice in a PLC. Therefore, it may be that student expectations are one factor that encourages this progression. Likewise, facing the changing needs and demands of students may encourage some faculty members to seek out colleagues for help.

Other external factors may be forcing the college to change or are at least viewed by many members of the college community as doing so. Many faculty expressed concerns that Midwest had to be more accountable to legislators and state government, to voters, to the business community, to accrediting bodies, and to the students and their families. This rising tide of (2) **accountability to external stakeholders** seemed to be within the consciousness of faculty I interviewed, not just expressed by administrators. I asked Charlotte Stoppert why her departmental colleagues were more willing than they used to be to share practice and try her “wild and crazy ideas,” as she called them:

Because I think that they realize that they've got to change. They can't be business-as-usual. The community that we deal with is no longer business-as-usual, at all. And we have to be able to create or at least give the future employees the skills that they need to be productive and to be accepted in the workplace. And if you don't change with it, you know, you're not going to be able to produce that type of a student.

This leads directly to changes in the (3) **demands of the external world for new skills from students** especially called for an answer from faculty and curriculum. Susan Birdsall connected the demands of the external world with the fact that students had changed to meet it, or needed to learn new skills to survive in it. She described how this had been a change of consciousness for her, leading her into Process Education™.

But I think [the computer] really has changed [our world]. It's opened up so much. We can be exposed to so much that just wasn't available at that time that there's no pattern to fall back upon. And you have to realize that that's the world your students are going to be placed into. And if you prepare them just to repeat the patterns of the past, they are not going to be prepared. Or they will be sucked into Jonesville.

For Birdsall, the Information or Knowledge Age was very real, and it dramatically affected her students, and thus her classroom.

Walter Nesbitt explained that the redesign of the manufacturing curriculum into modules arose as a response to demands from the external business community to produce students with real-world skills.

One thing that our educational specialists tell us is that, through this active learning, a lot of times students will learn that competency but just within the context that they did it. They have a hard time transferring it to the workplace or other contexts. So one way we can help transfer that knowledge is have them apply it again in a different scenario. So that's what we do with the transfer activity. But we also use that as an integrating experience to try to help tie the entire manufacturing curriculum together.

The response was Robots, Inc., and the integrated modular curriculum.

In summary, it may be that faculty who are more connected with the external community may be more aware of its demands, and more likely to try to meet them. This requires a coordinated response, which may then lead to participation in a PLC.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described those behaviors, characteristics, and processes that may have been connected with the development of PLCs at Midwest. These descriptions are not intended to imply causality nor as a road map for other institutions, who must review the results and make their own estimates as to how valuable any of my observations are in their unique culture and context. Nonetheless, it seems of value to study real cases of what appear to be PLCs, and not merely a theoretical model. In the next chapter, I will review what may be barriers to the development of the PLC in parts of or across Midwest's campus.

CHAPTER SIX

Findings: What May be Barriers to the Development of PLCs at Midwest

Chapter Introduction

In this last chapter of research findings, I will review possible barriers to the development of PLCs at Midwest Community College or to their extension beyond those organization members who are already involved. A discussion of barriers may be useful to practitioners who wish to foster PLCs and may add further insights into how Midwest developed PLCs in the manner in which it did. This chapter addresses the last of the three research questions: *How may various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics be serving as barriers to the development of PLCs at Midwest?*

Organizing Scheme for the Chapter

I will use a similar structure to this discussion as in the previous chapter, making use of the same broad classifications based on where within the organization the behaviors, processes, or characteristics described would most likely be found, or within which arenas would lie most of the responsibility for those behaviors, processes, or characteristics. Again, the general progression is from the individual and particular out to the organization and general. As is described in my discussion of methodology (see Chapter Three), the findings in this chapter were organized by a scheme that I developed in conversation with the data during analysis. A seventh category, Environmental Factors, looks at what barriers to the development of PLCs may exist from outside the organization and thus beyond the direct influence of the college's leaders and members. These seven major categories form the major sections of this chapter:

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Walter Nesbitt

- Individual Actions, Behaviors and Characteristics
- Group/Team Behaviors and Characteristics
- Administrative Behaviors and Characteristics
- Academic Department Actions and Characteristics
- Organization-wide Actions and Characteristics
- Organizational Culture
- Environmental Factors

Possible Barriers to the PLC at Midwest

Individual Actions, Behaviors and Characteristics

Nine sets of actions, behaviors and characteristics of individuals may make them less willing to participate in a PLC at Midwest. Where there are a number of such individuals, there may be a lesser likelihood of that department or group participating in a PLC. Individual barriers may well interplay with larger systemic barriers, but this study makes no effort to determine which has predominance.

As is true for many institutions of higher education, Midwest has a preponderance of (1) **senior faculty who are near the end of their careers**. Many of these senior faculty, but certainly not all, are reluctant to dramatically change how they have been teaching and acting in their work lives. This may be a matter of simple economy: If you are within a few years of retirement, do you want to invest much time in changes that will not affect your practice much before you retire? Other senior faculty may be conservative and skeptical about change, or may not have or want to expend the energy necessary for dramatic changes. As Walter Nesbitt says below, this is not a characteristic solely of senior faculty:

We have a very veteran faculty here at Midwest. In the next five or so years we're going to lose a big chunk of our faculty to retirement. And so I was dealing with many faculty with fifteen, twenty, thirty years of experience and we had some new faculty coming in. And those are the easy ones. We also have faculty who are probably not going to do anything differently in their last years here. Just, you know, very set in their ways.

Fran Scullen described part of her experience as a senior faculty member:

Okay. I've been a full-timer, I think I said, since '78, and I think you get to get to a midpoint where you—I don't want to say stagnate—but you just sort of slow down and you're not quite as enthused about it.

As we have seen, for Scullen Process Education™ was a turning point. Not all senior faculty find something like this as a catalyst for reinvigoration. Charlotte Stoppert, herself nearing the end of her teaching career and very active, said of some of her colleagues:

But, on the whole, a lot of the ones that are kind of sedentary, not too excited, are usually some of the older faculty that have been here a long time. Many of the ones who've been here that are relatively new, I would say within the last fifteen years, I think just got so much excitement and [energy] and enthusiasm for everything that's going on.

Pamela Jagiello gave me one reason for the reluctance of senior faculty to become involved in innovations within a PLC:

You've got two years to go to retirement. You know, why should you [change what you do]? I understand that. Why should you go to a lot of trouble to redo your curriculum?

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Several faculty talked about the tremendous amount of time they spend with team projects, innovations, and active learning assignments using Process Education™. Many senior faculty may simply decide that they do not want to take the time and energy to become part of a PLC when they are near the end of a career.

Charlotte Stoppert was rather impatient with those colleagues who seem (2) **no longer interested in teaching**. As we heard in a previous quotation, she found them to be energy drainers and did not want to associate with them if she could avoid it. She connected this loss of enthusiasm with having taught a long time, and a corresponding desire to “ride the rest of the road out.” In some cases, some may never have been “excited about teaching or having students around at all.” She also believed there was some “inner spirit” that drove some faculty members, regardless of age or years of service. As we have seen, Susan Birdsall had a similar view when she differentiated between “instructors” and “real teachers,” the former more or less coasting.

Some faculty members may have the desire to participate in a PLC, but are (3) **caught up in the day-to-day**, the busy-ness and routines that keep them from having the time or energy for change. I asked Fran Scullen how much time she and her colleagues took in conversations about teaching and learning:

That's a good question. We do at our committee meeting sometimes, but you know I can't say that's the case. I mean when you're together sometimes you share your successes. But it always amazed me, for teaching at a college, that there isn't more discussion about your successes and your approaches.

People just get so caught up in the day-to-day. People outside the colleges are probably shocked that there's not a lot, that you don't just sit down and talk about teaching. But the times that you do it, I really enjoy it. But ordinarily

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you just don't think of it. And it's just you get so caught up in doing everything else you do that you don't think about, "Oh I don't sit around and talk about [teaching]."

Stoppert felt the same tug, telling me that "it's hard to have quality time when you're here 'cause there's too many distractions, too many things going on." Assistant VP Wayne Prange was sympathetic, experiencing the same time conflicts in his position and observing them among faculty:

You get into these routines and you think that everything that you do is important. In reality, it probably isn't as important as some other things. So you need help in aligning that, and dropping off the stuff that's not important so that you can do the other.

For some faculty, the (4) **isolation of teaching practice** itself may prevent them from finding an easy way into community with colleagues. Sherry Hudock, a counselor who became involved with Process Education™, wrote about when she first began to experiment with changing practice:

In the beginning I was challenged because I was one of the few non-faculty participants. So, I felt as though I were isolated and working alone, not really receiving much support. I didn't have other colleagues collaborating and empathizing with me.

It may be that some faculty members never find their way to community with colleagues, and remain in isolation. Related to this was the tradition of (5) **individualism** among faculty in higher education. A number of faculty talked about their own or their colleague's discomfort with letting others into their classrooms because they were used to working alone

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and were content with that. Some seemed to see the desire of colleagues to share practice as an intrusion into their individual realms.

A number of faculty talked about how little they were prepared as teachers before beginning their careers. Most experienced graduate degree programs that were entirely content and research based, with no mention of teaching methods or learning theory. Others had previous work experience in an occupational area but not in teaching. It may be that those (6) **without an educational background in teaching methodology** and without K-12 teaching experience may be less prepared to share practice within a PLC.

Craig Nelson, a professor of biology at Indiana State University and a speaker on critical thinking, said in a workshop I attended in January 1999 that (7) **many faculty saw the problem in teaching as “the students are broken.”** Some faculty may be reluctant to participate in a PLC because they identify the problem as being within the students, not in their teaching. No further change on the part of the teacher is justified. One faculty member told me:

You know, they're still kind of in the mode: Saw off top of head. I pour in [knowledge], close it up. And I send them home and it's all through osmosis. It doesn't work. That's why they're in my class. So until the student gets motivated to be an active learner...

She then compared her students unfavorably with herself and her brothers who were active and productive students from early on in life. This was not a “lazy teacher.” Nevertheless, she was profoundly skeptical that, as a teacher, she had much power to affect most of her community college students. She did not participate in Process Education™ workshops, make reciprocal classroom visits, have conversations about her teaching practice, or some of the other elements of the PLC. It is possible that a faculty member who locates the

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responsibility primarily on students is less likely to see a need for a fundamental shift in teaching practice, and then may be less likely to participate in a PLC.

Some faculty described how the (8) **self-image of a professor qua professor** could be a barrier to sharing practice, to exposing possible “weaknesses” or imperfections to colleagues in a PLC. I noticed three subthemes to this category, the first of which was the (a) **professor as star**. We have noted before that Walter Nesbitt believed some faculty needed to perform on the classroom stage more than he did:

I'm not the kind of person who likes an audience. You know, some people just like teaching because they have an audience there. They have a captive audience that they can talk to.

I was present at a conversation among some of the members of the Process Education™ Team when this subject came up:

WILD: Yeah, but where's the focus then? The focus is not on the student.

It's on the professor or the teacher.

SCULLEN: But some people probably like that.

WILD: Yeah, that's what I said earlier. I'm thinking some people are just like— [laughs].

SCULLEN: I mean, you know, it's kind of nice when you're the star.

WILD: That's not the pur...

SCULLEN: Um hmm.

WILD: Be the star then in your own arena somewhere else. If your purpose is to be in [the classroom] environment, to help people grow and learn how to think, you know—

SCULLEN: Maybe there should be a sociological study about...

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BIRDSALL: That would be fascinating.

SCULLEN: ...why people go into teaching and do people go in because they do want to be the star?

COX: Oh my!

WILD: Oh!

Related to this is the (b) **fear of not appearing competent** in front of students and especially colleagues. It may be that a fear of failure, a fear of not appearing to be the expert in front of students and colleagues, may increase the apprehension of trying a new method when one's performance will certainly not be perfect the first time. This fear may also reduce the willingness of some faculty members to share with other professors those failures and challenges of their daily practice. Nesbitt talked about the challenges of implementing the modularized curriculum and its effect on faculty who want to appear professionally competent in front of their students:

If we judge the success based on how it goes the first time with students, that's pretty tough because it's a rough draft. Some of the activities work very well. Some have problems, and that's part of the pilot testing procedure: What's working and what isn't? How can we change things? But that was also a challenge because, if I'm really trying to talk somebody into testing or implementing some of these curriculum materials and it doesn't work right the first time, that can be an easy reason for [some faculty] to just put it on the shelf and never touch it again.

He described how the effect of this imperfection on student evaluations might hamper participation in any activity that is new:

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That is an issue with some faculty and that's a good one to hide behind. If you don't want to do it you can just say, "Look, you want me to test something new. I'm going to take a hit on my evaluations. I'm not going to do that."

Even though Jagiello did participate in teaching workshops and reciprocal visits, she found it uncomfortable at first:

You do have to get over that hurdle because I think as university [sic] faculty we like to think we have all our acts together. And we don't want anybody to know we have weak spots. And to perform in front of colleagues means that somebody will see that you have a weak spot. You're not perfect. And I think that that's maybe the biggest hurdle for a lot of faculty to get over that. That's a real risk-taking behavior, especially the first time. At least it was for me. To put my ego out there to be bruised.

In her portion of the 1999 year-end report on the Learning College Grant, Scullen wrote with humor about her own recognition of this fear of not being the expert:

One of the tenets of Process Education™ is that students should empower themselves and take charge of their own learning. That is exactly what one class did when the students told me they did not like the way I was conducting the class. I was crushed! After all, I was the instructor, the sage on the stage, and knew what was best.

Scullen's career may also be used to illustrate another possible barrier related to self-image. Many of the faculty teaching at Midwest were college students in the late 1960s and early 1970s when there was a tradition of rebellion against authority.

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I was in college at the time Kent State happened and we went on strike and I just was real proud of myself for taking a stand and always liked to think I was going to make a difference, which is one of the reasons I teach in a college.

Many who joined the faculty ranks in the 1970s were themselves students rebelling against administrative authority shortly before. It is possible that this (c) **self-image of being a rebel** may discourage some faculty from participating in activities which administration supports or appears to support. Many Midwest faculty viewed administrative support for Process Education™ as an imposition of an “official” teaching methodology, thus usurping their academic freedom. It is possible that part of the reason for this attitude among some senior faculty is that they still see themselves as rebels against that administrative authority.

A last set of individual characteristics and behaviors involves a (9) **resistance to change** that may have been exhibited in five ways, as suggested to me through my observations and interviews. The first is a (a) **comfort in the status quo**. For many people, keeping things as they are and have been provides a deep level of comfort and security. For others, (b) **change requires effort** that they may not want to invest. Let us look at some examples of both of these manifestations.

We have seen that many part-time faculty in the Communications and Speech Department resisted the coordination of curriculum, assessment, and teaching required by the redesign of the two introductory courses. Chair Carol Bedard was sympathetic, to a point:

Mostly the people that were reluctant were the part-time faculty, and I can certainly understand. Some of the part-time faculty who have been here for ten, fifteen, twenty years were used to teaching the course the way they were

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used to teaching the course, and were quite resistant to not only changing it but also incorporating technology into the public speaking class.

As we have seen, in the end the department mandated the changes, forcing adjuncts to change or to at least comply.

In describing the changes Process Education™ would make in how faculty taught, Pamela Jagiello showed some empathy for colleagues who resisted the transformation in the classroom and the sharing of practice during professional development activities:

What comes with that is the acknowledgement that what you've been doing for twenty years might not be the best way to do something. And people don't always want to hear that either. And the next thing is there's a lot of work involved in changing things that you've been doing. You're adding to your own work load voluntarily. And at community colleges, we're never hurting for workload.

There is an investment of time and effort to any change, but especially to the fundamental changes the PLC may require.

The next manifestation, (c) **we have always done that, this is no real change**, appeared in phrases like “new wine in old bottles” and “nothing new here” from several faculty members when asked about the Learning College and about efforts to get faculty to work together more closely. This especially manifested itself when the topic of administrative influence on change arose. Walter Nesbitt described one meeting on the modular curriculum:

There were people on the leadership team who made a presentation at one point to our department chairs on this module architecture, and I as a department chair was in the audience. And the message did come across as,

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“We've got something new that we think you should think about.” And the way it was received was, “This is in no way new. How dare you take credit for this idea that in many cases we have embraced for a long time in one form or another.” So we need to be very careful about that message. You know, faculty in general are very proud of what they do, somewhat territorial and skeptical of somebody coming in saying, “I'm going to help you improve what you do.”

Andrea LaGest expressed her deep skepticism of the changes many were promoting:

I love educators [pause]. It seems like we are always coming up with something new. So, the comment throughout Midwest is, “Haven't we been doing this all the time? Haven't we always been [working in] learning communities? You learn something, I share. You hear about something, we'll try it. It doesn't work, we go back to square one.” Yeah, we add a little bit of this, we add a little bit of that, we create something which we might call new. So is this something new and wonderful? I don't think so. We are repackaging it into something that we've been doing all along. I mean, do educators ever really come up with something new that really works?

One faculty member told me:

Many of us feel that we were never doing anything that was far afield from the principles of the learning college. We understand the [the principles]. And I think there's a lot of people around campus that feel that way. There's a bit of cynicism about the whole push to be a learning college, because we're [already] there anyway.

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Response: Nothin' new there.

Cynicism as resistance can manifest itself in the attitude that the proposed changes are nothing more than a (d) **fad or gimmick**. One faculty member whom we had quoted at length previously (see page 161) epitomized this view, calling the Learning College and all other administrative initiatives as “flavors of the month” changing “every year” that people do not take as seriously “the Vice President or President hopes that they do.” I asked her how she would describe her department’s response to these initiatives:

[pause] I would say that we just play along. Just go along with it. Okay, this Learning College is what we're supposed to do. Not that we're committing it to memory in our heart and living it. It's just, okay, let's knock this out the next nine months.

I heard this attitude regularly, even from among the more innovative faculty I interviewed. It seemed to appear any time there was a belief that administrators were behind a proposed change. There was a deep fear among faculty leading change that their program would become “tainted” if people believed it was not faculty-led but really an administrative push.

Finally, resistance could appear as a (c) **fear of being changed by change**, the very human fear that the self would be harmed or lost if it was too exposed to the new. Deborah Wild talked about this with her colleagues on the Process Education™ Team:

Some people have a very difficult time with the openness that's required in Process [Education™]. You can't be defensive. I don't think everybody's comfortable doing that.

We have previously seen how Wild debated with Scullen about whether faculty should be expected to be risk-takers and take the same chances of exposing themselves that they were

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asking their students to take. This fear may be the deepest one of all, but a further discussion is beyond the scope of this study.

Group/Team Behaviors and Characteristics

Certain group behaviors and characteristics may also serve as barriers to Midwest's movement towards developing PLCs. I will review three here. We have seen that faculty autonomy and faculty-led initiatives were valued at Midwest. Conversely, change that was perceived as administrative-led could elicit resistance, which might manifest itself as a general expression of (1) **anti-administration feelings** or specifically a **resistance to initiatives perceived as led by administration**. Even faculty leaders of change were chary of administrative support, as we can see from the following comments of Fran Scullen, one of the founders of the Process Education™ Team:

President [Moeller] said, "Sure, we can fund [the Process Education™ initiative]." The down side of that is that when we were having workshops, some of the feedback we got was that people were tired of Process Education™ because the administration was trying to cram it down our throats. And the committee members were really hurt because it was a faculty-led initiative. And I'm a critic of administration. This is what got me. I said, you know, I am the first one to be critical of administration when something doesn't go right, or I don't think that they're supportive enough. But this was really a faculty-led initiative. And yet, because the administration supported it, there are a percentage of faculty who are opposed just because it has the administration's backing which is really frustrating. And that's an

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ongoing challenge and I don't know how you figure that out, how you ever say, "Try it. It's good," because there's that element of the faculty.

Another founder of the Team, Julie Shea, talked about the same phenomenon. The anger and resistance to Process Education™ troubled her:

So what happened early on is the faculty began to question Process Education™ as, "Oh my gosh, is this another thing that administration is forcing on us? Is this questioning my value as expert?" So that was a big resisting factor that we had to face. The perception of many was still that this was an administrator-led effort and it was anything but that, David. It was really disconcerting for our team because we were all faculty.

Shea also noted the same resentment to an activity that she had co-facilitated during the fall 1999 All-College Development Day. Midwest had received a list of fundamental skills students should learn from a focus group of business leaders. The plan was to use Process Education™ techniques in a cross-college conversation on what this meant for the curriculum.

There are a lot of complaints across the campus about [any] mandatory training because the faculty don't see that administrators fully have their best interest in mind. There were people who [took] part [in] that who said, "Man, it's just the administration forcing this stuff [Process Education™] on us." And I remember some very candid feedback that I received from one of my peers who said, "When will administration understand?" And I knew that it wasn't administration, 'cause I knew where the idea had come from, and it had come from the Fall All-College Day Team which was [an interdisciplinary group of faculty]. And, yes, I was one of the leaders and I

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[had] thought, “What a wonderful way to give people at least a taste of process.” And we talked about it in debrief in our team meetings—that it just seems like there are those who are suspicious [of administrative-led activities]. And we knew that we had designed the activities as a team.

We can conclude that any change initiative that has administrative support may be resisted by at least a subset of faculty at Midwest. Since most initiatives require some kind of administrative support in terms of budget, staffing, facilities, and so on, this seems a double-bind.

Every college has (2) **politics and territoriality** that can prevent the kind of sharing across organizational boundaries so necessary to a PLC. Nesbitt, in the quotation above, mentioned this territoriality, which shows up as one academic discipline against other disciplines, one preferred teaching method against other methods, and/or one academic department as a social unit against other social units. Members of the Process Education™ Team had seen a lessening of this territoriality over the last eight years or so at Midwest:

WILD: And the other thing is that on campus—and I think this is a residual effect of [the Process Education™] initiative—there's a huge thrust for collaboration among disciplines. And there wasn't when I first got here about eight years ago. That was not really the case. You sort of stayed in your little hole.

BIRDSALL: Turfdom was very evident. Yes. Um hmm.

While I was at Midwest, a set of faculty members were trying to unionize under the auspices of the American Association of University Professors. Since this was not a major focus of my study, I did not explore this effort but rather heard of it in a few interviews. As of this writing, those efforts had not born fruit. I do not believe nor will I advocate that the

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(3) **presence of a union or the desire to form one** must necessarily be a barrier to change, but such may be the case in many circumstances. One faculty member certainly saw it that way:

And, you know, I'll tell you what though, if a union does get in here sometime in the next five or ten years, the place will turn hostile. It'll be a definitely us and them. Instead of running the college for the students, we'll be all fighting over union versus nonunion and that's what we'll do all the time. They just got a union in at State, just up the block here. I know someone there, and he goes, the tension is thick.

Correspondingly, the desire to form a union may be a symptom of a breakdown in faculty/administrative relations and trust which, should it reach sufficient depth, would lead a majority of faculty to vote for unionization. This breakdown itself, as we have seen above, may be the barrier to PLCs.

Leadership Behaviors and Characteristics

Administrative Behaviors and Characteristics

The most efficient means of describing those administrative behaviors that may be barriers to the development of PLCs at Midwest is to look back to those that may foster it, and note the reverse. Therefore, I will repeat the list of those factors, and then offer a few examples at Midwest. Administrators may be barriers to the development of PLCs at Midwest by:

1. Fearing and or punishing risk-taking, or not adequately supporting it
2. Not encouraging participation in a PLC, giving it a low or no priority
3. Withholding or failing to provide adequate funding

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4. Not publicly supporting those activities which promote PLCs
5. Being impersonal, distant, and not showing personal concern
6. Not providing adequate space and time for PLCs to develop
7. Not providing adequate infrastructure
8. Not providing adequate training and professional development
9. Not providing a clear challenge and vision, or just going through the motions
10. Revealing a conflict between word and deed, not walking the talk
11. Getting in the way, micromanaging
12. Withholding credit/recognition or taking the credit him or herself
13. Discouraging or failing to encourage collaboration
14. Being inconsistent in message and action
15. Not being a systems thinker, tampering
16. Being impatient at the pace of change, or failing to be persistent in expecting it
17. **Failing to listen deeply**
18. **Failing to demonstrate understanding of or having recent (first-hand) experience in teaching**

(These last two bolded items are not the converse of what we found earlier, but appear in this analysis here for the first time.)

While I did not discover evidence of administrators (1) **fearing and or punishing risk-taking or not adequately supporting it**, more than one faculty member was concerned about possible retaliation to their honest and critical comments made to me. This is a common concern in any study where employees may be exposed because of their words. One faculty member also said the following:

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I know of one dean that evidently intimidates the hell out of the people that come in new until they get tenure, and makes them do extra work thinking that they won't get tenure if they don't do it. So he puts this pressure on them.

This may also be an example of (2) not supporting PLCs or of (6) not providing the time for PLCs to develop.

Other than the above, I found only one other possible example of (2) **administrators not encouraging participation in PLCs**: Supporting the involvement of part-time adjunct faculty in those activities that might promote PLCs. When the Process Education™ Team was just forming, administrators were reluctant to include part-time faculty in travel to learn more about it. As one member of the Process Education™ Team told me:

They [administrators] would say, “Well, part-timers can't come to this [professional development activity].” And we said, “Here is Rene Muldar who's one of our best people. Why are you saying part-timers can't come?” That wasn't a real big battle. I think we just kind of wore them down and they just let us do it. And also just because it makes sense. If you're having faculty training and you rely on part-timers, why wouldn't you want part-timers to come.

I heard several complaints about administrators (3) **withholding or failing to provide adequate funding**. However, given that every institution has limited resources, and given that Midwest has some innovative internal grants, in good conscience I cannot say that I found any real examples of this as a barrier. Likewise for (4) **not being publicly supportive** and (5) **being impersonal**. The only example I found of administrators (6) **not**

providing adequate space and time for PLCs to develop was a complaint by members of the Communications and Speech Department about the amount of after-the-fact measurements they were expected to provide in reporting results of the Learning College Grant project.

I did find a set of related examples of (7) **not providing adequate infrastructure** and of (8) **not providing adequate training and professional development**. Several faculty noted that the Learning Technology Center was a wonderful building, but that in its design and creation there was inadequate plan and funding for experienced technical staff to support the building and to train faculty. This led to some complaints that training was inadequate; but most of these complaints addressed technology, not the PLC directly.

There were many more complaints about administrators (9) **not providing a clear challenge and vision, or just going through the motions**. These complaints especially focused on the Learning College, what its clear definition was, what it meant for Midwest, and how it was different from what faculty were already doing. Two examples follow:

I would have to ask everybody to define that for me. What does that mean, really? And it's really weird because they'll say it, but they won't ever expand on it, which leads me to think, do they really know [Laughs] what a Learning College is all about?

From a second faculty member:

There's a bit of cynicism about the whole push to be a Learning College, because some of us don't feel that there needs to be a push because we're kind of there anyway. Nothin' new there.

Several faculty talked vaguely about administrators (10) **revealing a conflict between word and deed and not walking the talk** in the past, resulting in a cynicism and

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lack of trust. No specific examples were provided to me. There seemed to be a certain amount of fear or caution in these comments, which is understandable. After all, I was mostly a stranger. Nevertheless, the concern was real. As one faculty member told me:

There are people who are in administration or leadership positions at the college that most of our faculty don't have a whole lot of respect in their leadership abilities. I think there's hope for the new leadership, meaning the new Provost. I think [people are] hesitantly optimistic because we've been burned so much before [Laughs. Pause] Why I think that's probably about all I want to say on that issue [laughs].

I discovered no examples of administrators (11) **getting in the way or micromanaging**. There were, however, some examples of the (12) **withholding of credit/recognition or the taking of credit**. The clearest example we saw earlier from Walter Nesbitt (see page 286). When senior administrators appeared to be appropriating the credit for the modularized curriculum, many faculty members who had worked hard to develop it grew angry, saying, “This is in no way new. How dare you take credit for this idea that, in many cases, we have embraced for a long time”!

We shall see below how, through the rewards system, administration (13) **discourages or fails to encourage collaboration** in terms of team teaching. Another example we have seen above was the reluctance to include part-time faculty in many professional development activities.

I heard many complaints of administrators (14) **being inconsistent in message and action**, especially as this related to what faculty interpreted as the “fad of the month” or the “color of the month” in major organizational initiatives. Faculty mentioned strategic planning, assessment, TQM, the Learning College, and described them all as “fads.” It seems

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clear that formal leaders need to stand by a program for more than a few years else faculty at Midwest come to be skeptical about the depth of support. Vice President Galligan defended administration in this regard by telling me:

If you ask employees here at the College what happened to the Total Quality Management initiative at Midwest, they'd say, "Oh went on the shelf like everything else." I'm not saying everyone would say that, but a lot of people do. Because I think we do such a good job of integrating things into people's daily life that they forget it came from an initiative. So we have people all over this college using quality tools in their daily work, but they've forgotten that they got that training back when we had this Total Quality Management Program [laughs]. And the whole idea of return on investment and having key [performance indicators]—I mean, for heaven sakes, they're all getting a bonus based upon what came out of that initiative. But they don't make the connection, necessarily.

Galligan may indeed be correct. On the other hand, it may also be true that administrative leadership failed to communicate the connections among these various initiatives at Midwest.

I failed to note any examples of either (15) **not being a systems thinker, tampering** or of (16) **being impatient at the pace of change, or failing to be persistent in expecting it**. However, I did note examples of two possible barriers caused by administrative actions or characteristics that were not merely the converse of fostering behaviors mentioned in the previous chapter. We can illustrate the first of these, (17) **failing to listen deeply**, through the following comment by one faculty member:

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And so [when] the administration doesn't like [what they hear], I almost sometimes feel like it is falling on deaf ears. It's kind of like the old adage [sic]: If you have a boss [who] puts out a suggestion box, but the boss never reads any of it or looks at it, says, "Oh well; I'm not going to do this." They want to do what they want to do, but they don't listen to our feedback. It just seems like ever since I've got here it's always an us against them type of scenario. And I really do feel like sometimes they just don't care what we have to say. And we're the ones that know what to do with our students and everything. But, you know, that's my personal opinion.

The above comment may also illustrate the last (and second new) category of leadership actions and characteristics that may serve as a barrier to the development of PLCs at Midwest, (18) **failing to demonstrate understanding of or having recent (first-hand) experience in teaching**. Many faculty were skeptical that administrative leaders had sufficient and recent experience as teachers in order to be effective leaders of faculty. Obviously, this is an illustration of the professional bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1991). Leaders of the professional bureaucracy gain legitimacy in part through being one of the professionals themselves. Nonetheless, unless administrative leaders at Midwest demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of the challenges of teaching today's students, they may be less able to promote PLCs.

Department Chair Behaviors and Characteristics

Again, by taking the converse of what we have found earlier were actions and characteristics which may promote the development of PLCs, we can say that department chairs may be barriers to PLCs at Midwest by:

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1. Not visiting the classrooms of department colleagues, and/or not encouraging reciprocal visits
2. Not providing protection for department faculty members
3. Being afraid of or not providing support for innovation
4. Discouraging or failing to encourage community-building in the department
5. Not serving as a role model for participation in a PLC
6. Hoarding power, not involving others in decisions

In my analysis, I did not find clear examples of department chair characteristics and behaviors that fit these categories, which may be the result of my selecting those departments that were supposed to be learning communities. Other departments may have chairs who do exhibit more of these barrier characteristics. However, since my focus was on discovering how PLCs were promoted, my research necessarily did not look in that opposite direction.

As we have seen in the above section on what may have fostered PLCs at Midwest, apparently some administrators and department chairs have been role models and leaders in the development of these PLCs. PLCs may have developed at Midwest without the support and encouragement of formal leadership, but it seems unlikely that they would have developed to the extent that it has.

One last comment before we move to the next section: On my last visit to Midwest in March of 2001, I learned that Vice President Galligan had left Midwest for a position at another community college out of state. Members of the Process Education™ Team expressed real concerns about the continuity of support for their initiative and others like it, now that Galligan was gone. They talked at length about possible replacements and their level of support and understanding. This suggests that it may be critical that Midwest

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provide leadership succession and continuity of support for initiatives that promote the development of PLCs. The failure to do so could be another leadership action that serves as an important barrier.

Academic Department Actions and Characteristics

The first of two academic department actions and characteristics that may serve as barriers to the development of PLCs at Midwest is (1) **differences among academic disciplines**. It may be that the different disciplines themselves prevent translation of best practices from one academic discipline to another because of differences in worldviews, training in graduate schools, and content and delivery variations due to discipline. Some of the Communications and Speech faculty mentioned to me their belief that their academic discipline itself makes them more likely to participate in a PLC. Not only are they trained communicators, but they have studied communications and small group process and teach it. Other departments have not. Furthermore, for instance, a faculty member in engineering may see the world very differently from another faculty member in communications to such a degree that they have difficulty communicating with each other. Such fundamental differences may make a PLC across department and discipline boundaries more difficult than that caused by the normal organizational silo effect.

Secondly, many academic disciplines at Midwest are heavily content-driven, and there is a belief among faculty teaching in those departments that the content must be covered completely else the faculty member not be considered responsible. This may in turn lead to a belief that only the lecture mode is useful because only through that delivery method are we certain to cover all of the material. Faculty who come with these beliefs at

Midwest may be less likely to experiment with alternative delivery methods, and may then be less likely to seek out a PLC.

Issues of (2) **department turf and territoriality** may result in a parochialism that excludes those “outsiders” who seek to “interfere” with the department. This may limit collaboration with other departments. We saw earlier Charlotte Stoppert’s belief that Biology Department faculty limited the amount of collaboration with Radiology and other Allied Health faculty when the latter sought the revision in how the general biology course was taught. This course was a primary prerequisite for health career students, taught by Biology faculty in a very traditional lecture mode. Stoppert and other Allied Health faculty wanted it taught using active learning strategies, and with an applied focus, both of which were resisted by the Biology Department, who “owned” the course. As another example, Fran Scullen talked about an idea a group of faculty had to teach an interdisciplinary course on the Bible:

Years ago I was on a committee and we were talking about teaching a course on the Bible as literature. And none of us were in the humanities, but we thought we could put this course together. We were all interested. I said, you know, this is really great! It was really enjoyable. As it turned out the Humanities Department wouldn't let us teach it because we weren't Humanities instructors. And then the committee disbanded and we went our own ways.

Departmental boundaries and subcultures may thus limit how far collaboration, a key element of the PLC, may develop at Midwest.

Organization-wide Actions and Characteristics

The next major set of possible barriers to the development of PLCs at Midwest result from organization-wide actions and characteristics. I inferred eleven categories of such possible barriers, the first two being closely related: The challenge of (1) **having too much to do with limited resources** with which to do them and the (2) **lack of time** for individuals and groups to accomplish all that they are asked to do. Fran Scullen described the challenges of trying to share practice and have deep conversations about teaching and learning when faced with these two barriers:

There's so much going on—and I'm sure that's true everywhere—that you just say, “Well, you know, I'll [share with colleagues someday].” And in meetings, we talk some and we do share some of our experiences. The people in my department, if I'm not teaching a class with them or we're not working on something together, I can go days without seeing them. And so I think it's like you're in your own little world [for] long times. You get ready for your class. You go to class. You interact with the students. And maybe you go to meetings. But you're not as collegial. You know, when I was a student in college, I would think, “Oh wouldn't it be great. People just sit around and talk about these philosophical ideas [laughs].” And at least here it doesn't happen that much. It's just—you get so caught up in doing everything else you do that you don't think about, “Oh I don't sit around and talk about [teaching and learning].”

Stoppert made a plea: “We need time, need time to regroup, rethink, go to some seminars, do something [other than the normal daily work]. I'm married to Midwest right now” [laughs]. Andrea LaGest echoed this: “I mean, Midwest has my life right now. And I'm

very resentful. They [laughs] ain't getting' my life after January, I can tell you that much! And I think you will hear that people are so overburdened and so overworked." And Pamela Jagiello as well:

Course, the biggest challenge is always finding time to do more things. And it [the Process Education™ Team] happens to be a group of people that are involved in doing a lot of different things cause it's the people that [are] the change agent type people [who] tend to be there. So sometimes we have a hard time finding the time to get together. The meetings themselves are really fun because it's become a sort of a bonded group. We have some release time that we can use. I guess the biggest problem for that is finding somebody who has time to use it. So the biggest thing is to find the time. *You always have to balance out your priorities of what time do you use for your students now, and what time do you use to make yourself a better teacher to benefit your students down the road. And what time do you spend to help your colleague be a better teacher to benefit their students down the road?* So it's kind of a juggling act for all of those things, and I have quite a few things in general right now. [emphasis mine]

At least some administrators were well aware of these two related barriers. Vice President Galligan told me that she fears the faculty are so eager to adopt new practices and technology that the infrastructure cannot keep up with the demands. And Assistant Vice President Prange, as we heard earlier (see page 129), preached that the college could simply not afford to keep doing more and more. Therefore, there may not be sufficient time for faculty to participate fully in PLCs and there may be simply too many things for the college to do to be able to afford to give them that time.

Related to a lack of time, (3) **faculty work schedules** are a structural barrier to having the time and space to participate in a PLC, whether through experimentation, collaborative teaching, the collaborative design of curriculum and course materials, or simply having the time to have those deep conversations about practice. Even within the Communications and Speech department, which we have identified as probably a PLC, the varied times when faculty teach, the demands of preparation of materials, service on committees, office hours, and the hours spent on other obligations combine to be a likely barrier to the development of PLCs. First, there are the varied work hours. Scott Therrien told me:

We might eat lunch together, but other than that we're all on different schedules. I can't think of anything we've done lately where all seven of us have pulled together. And with our different schedules, sometimes I don't see people for a week. It's not uncommon. I think it was one quarter I never saw Carol [Bedard], my boss, like the entire quarter because [laughs] she had a totally different schedule.

Not only do the varied work schedules make informal communication difficult at best, they also make it difficult to have formal department meetings. According to Bedard:

And I think [faculty in the department] realize and appreciate the value of not taking their time at a dedicated time when [a meeting is] really not necessary. I think they value that. Now some would say, "Yeah but you lose something." And that's true. But with our faculty, we offer classes starting at 8 a.m. on Monday and ending at 4 p.m. Friday, and all hours in between. And there's no time that our faculty can take one hour and have everybody there,

even just the tenure-track people. Can't do it. [You'd get] some reluctance there on people driving in on Sunday [laughs] morning.

Ironically, the responsiveness of the department faculty to the demands of students plus the experimentation with different delivery systems and methodologies together result in more varied work schedules, according to Bedard:

Certainly changes workload. I mean in a lot of ways it would have been way easier to just continue doing what we were doing in any of these changes. So, yeah, certainly work load would be affected by any efforts to do things more systematically to improve student learning.

Pamela Jagiello echoed this conclusion, noting also another theme, which is that the more you experiment, collaborate, and innovate, the more time it all takes:

And the next thing is there's a lot of work involved in changing things that you've been doing. You're adding to your own work load voluntarily. And at community colleges, we're never hurting for work load. When I'm trying to teach 125 students in a term, and they're all taking writing classes, you know, just going through the papers is sometimes a really overwhelming task. So I'm going to pull time out of that? That doesn't go away because I'm pulling time in to redesign my curriculum to make it more effective. So that's a big barrier, finding the time to do it.

We heard from Andrea LaGest earlier that her development of online course materials using multimedia technologies combined with a large teaching load meant she too had little time for some other elements of the PLC:

I think you will hear that people are so overburdened and so overworked.

Technology in my estimation—Well, let me put it this way. I have looked at

what I have created and the number of hours that have gone into it and it can be viewed in ten minutes.

Teaching day and evening classes, preparation time when not teaching, and other obligations of the faculty role all may cause work/life conflicts, a theme we can only touch on here. Amanda Gamet told me, “I have a very finite amount of time. I have two young children, so I can't just decide I'm going to stay here and work really late one night. I have to be home when they get home from school.” Her department chair, Bedard, was sensitive to this issue, and believed that electronic communication helped to some degree:

I mean, I could say, we're going to meet at 3 o'clock on any day, and I have three faculty who like to be home with their kids by then. And I'm not willing to say that this meeting is so important that you've got to work something out with your kids. I just don't think that's fair to them. So the electronic means works pretty well for us. We have, I think, a pretty good informal system of communication.

In the modern community college, responsive faculty have a role that is much more complex than they did thirty or even fifteen years ago. The faculty I spoke with at Midwest recognized this as a fact, but also saw it as a challenge to implementing elements of the PLC. Gamet said:

GAMET: So I think either I'm working faster, or something's getting compressed somewhere. I don't know.

SAM: So it's not just a matter of showing up, teaching a class, sitting in an office for an hour, and going back home?

GAMET: Exactly. I'd love that. [laughs] I'd love that for about a quarter and a half. But yeah, no it's not like that.

SAM: Is that pretty much through the department that the workload has changed?

GAMET: I would think so. I would think so. There are a few people that are newer faculty that have not been really assimilated into that yet, still learning the ropes as it were, only been here for maybe a couple of years. And I think that's enough for them at this time. But for the folks who have been here, I would say that that's absolutely true.

Assistant Vice President, Wayne Prange, connected these increased demands with his view that the college could not keep doing everything that it has done and is being asked to do:

But time and workload are critical issues as we move into the future. I suspect that we could examine what we do and not do some of the things. But that's hard. These kind of problems are almost impossible to solve from the inside because you're into these routines and you perpetuate these things. You know that they can't all be necessary now.

Will the increasing demands on faculty time be a barrier to the development of PLCs at Midwest? There is some evidence that this may be the case.

The next possible barrier at Midwest is the sheer (4) **physical size of the institution**. Unlike some large community colleges that have multiple campuses—a possible barrier in itself—Midwest is a single campus institution with some extension centers. Nonetheless, the main campus spans a large portion of several city blocks and contains seventeen classroom buildings. It may be that physical proximity increases the likelihood of regular interactions and thus may promote the development of community among faculty. If

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so, then physical distance and spending significant time in different buildings and on different floors may serve as a barrier. Faculty in the Communications and Speech Department had offices in two different buildings at opposite ends of the campus. Further, not all faculty members within a building had offices on the same floor. Faculty members in that department saw this as disadvantageous to department cohesion. Scott Therrien mentioned this to me several times in our conversation. He felt somewhat isolated from his department colleagues, and felt that he did not always receive timely communication from them as a result. Amanda Gamet talked about this as a possible problem, but thought there might be some benefits to the distance as well:

I know Scott and Jim [Hogans] are over in [Building] 16. And I know Scott is always talking about how he feels isolated and that we never see him. But even with Bruce [Fackler] up on the third floor, you know, he can feel isolated, too. Carol [Bedard] and I, being in real close proximity and also being friends, we see each other a lot and talk to each other a lot. We can pop in and out of offices. But we really don't do that with the other guys and with Beverly [Van Meter]. So it's trying to rely on electronic communication and the lunches and stuff. And it's not as great as it could be, although I think there's a lot to be said for becoming too cohesive. [When] your cohesiveness gets high then your productivity drops off and you get the groupthink happening and all that kind of stuff. And so I think in a positive byproduct of us not being together is the fact that we can bring some objectivity in all the time.

Department Chair Bedard expressed a similar concern about the physical distance among the offices:

I think what would help is if we could get people in closer proximity to each other. I really think it hurts us as a department, that we are not all able to be within the same building, within some geographic [proximity]. I think that would help us more. Oh yeah. That'd be great! It would foster that informal communication that we have found to be very valuable.

Another possible organization-wide barrier I heard very briefly was that some of the activities that promote PLCs have no home, that is, (5) **no formal ownership** within the institution. This may reduce the institutional commitment of resources given that there is no one to regularly advocate for those activities. We have seen that Process Education™ gained a place in the budget and strategic plan, and that this may have helped institutionalize it. Other activities as of yet have no such formalized ownership.

This leads directly to the possible barrier of (6) **not having a budget**. Fran Scullen connected these two:

One of the challenges is just getting accepted by the administration, and being made, you know, sort of part of the institution. Once your grant is over, if you aren't accepted by the institution then you really don't have any funding.

The Learning College Grants have funded the start-up of many initiatives that could promote PLCs at Midwest. However, grants are by nature of limited duration, and any activity so begun must find a way to be self-sustaining, fighting for limited dollars with many other good initiatives and programs.

Another possible barrier, one common to all long-established organizations, is the (7) **difficulty in transferring best practices** within an organization across its internal boundaries, a problem in the Midwest parlance of “scale-up.” For Scullen this was both a

problem of recruiting participation beyond a “core” group of founders, but also of developing new leadership. A second example, The Learning Technology Center, was intended to be a rich place for the development of new practices, helped to foster some of the activities, experiments, and faculty professional development that we have reviewed. However, it tended to be an island where many of these practices were isolated from the rest of the college because technology, classroom design, and the spirit of experimentation were not duplicated across the college. In similar fashion, many of the projects supported by the Learning College Grants failed to transfer to places within the organization other than where they were invented.

Another structural barrier that may interfere with the development of PLCs at Midwest is (8) **red tape**. Rules, procedures, processes, and labor agreements all tend to be conservative in effect if not intent. These may even be positive in nature most of the time, but may interfere with new practices that do not fall within standard procedures. For instance, we have seen that teaching within the new modular curriculum is evaluated using the same student evaluations as other classes, and that students often “punish” the “imperfect” teacher who tries a new teaching strategy. Here, a procedure intended to improve teaching may actually hinder it for new methodologies. We have also seen that some faculty within the Communications and Speech Department viewed the measurement and reporting at the conclusion of their Learning College Grant as burdensome. Here again, a procedure intended to help determine the effectiveness of a new practice may hinder further experimentation.

There are other possible (9) **structural** barriers. The organizational structure of the college, the academic calendar, its assigning of faculty into specific and pre-designed academic departments, its need to get maximum student enrollment in every section to be as

productive with limited resources and thus its need to maximize faculty workloads, all may inhibit communication and community across organizational boundaries. Reporting lines go to differing deans who may have to agree and cooperate to enable faculty to collaborate. Trying new things within the naturally conservative structure of an organization adds to the challenge.

Rewards system conflicts (10) form another set of possible structural barriers to the development of PLCs at Midwest. We have already seen that faculty are not paid for a full section when team-teaching, but rather have to split the compensation in half or some other proportion. If professors are truly team teaching, that is, they are actively present throughout all classes, then they believe they should be compensated as if they were teaching it alone. Others have noted that team teaching in this sense can be more time-consuming to organize than teaching alone, since faculty must not only do all the preparation they would for another class, but also determine who does what, negotiate and compromise on approaches and methods, and work on the personal relationship with each other. Julie Shea notes this same conflict:

That kind of collaboration wasn't possible a few years ago. It still is not happening because of the system but rather in spite of it because there's no way to compensate the second teacher on it. We collaborated together on that [class, but] it was still challenging and in spite of the system rather than with the support of it, because interdisciplinary efforts, even team teaching kinds of efforts, have to be creatively financed. And the institution still looks at the FTE, you know how many students are you bringing to the institution and you're compensated with subsidy at the division, the department level.

So when we try to do collaborative—especially beyond the department, beyond the division—it gets very complicated.

Some in administration recognize this problem. According to Prange:

Our pay system here works against team-teaching. There isn't an incentive for faculty to team teach. We provide incentive for them to develop material on teams. But [they] have to split the [pay for the teaching] load. And that's not an incentive when sometimes it takes more work, certainly as much work, to work on a team, than it would be to work individually.

In this way the Midwest rewards system, both in terms of pay for individual faculty and credit for enrollment for the department or division, may be discouraging a key element of the PLC.

Since faculty are evaluated for merit pay based in part on student evaluations, the issue with evaluations just mentioned above also fits within this category. Nesbitt believes this may discourage those who are weakly committed to experimentation and change. If experimentation results in faculty members receiving a “hit” on student evaluations, then some may be discouraged from such experimentation. The 1998-99 year-end report on Process Education™ noted this as a potential barrier as well:

The existing course evaluation system supports traditional, teacher-centered experiences. Faculty may be reluctant to make the conversion without a different evaluation system.

Faculty evaluation may also serve as a reward-system conflict by not recognizing those behaviors that promote the development of PLCs. As Julie Shea, Chair of Business Information Systems, told me:

But I do think that the folks on the campus are frustrated because of the absence of systemic support to some of those cross-the-campus collaborative efforts. [A joint faculty-administration committee] worked for probably 3 to 5 years to get a new model of our faculty performance review, up through probably two or three pilots before it could be blessed by all the audiences that need to bless something like that. And then it still doesn't give me as a department leader the clean connection to the work of the department that I need to get the work of the department done.

A final possible organization-wide barrier to the development of PLCs at Midwest is the presence and reliance on a large number of (11) **adjunct and part-time faculty**. These faculty members teach a significant portion of the classes at Midwest, averaging at least fifty percent in a given semester, much as they do across the United States and in all sectors of higher education. We have seen that adjunct faculty may be a factor that fosters PLCs when they are less likely to be defensive about their status as experts, and more willing to reach out for help to their colleagues. On the other hand, the presence of a large number may serve as a barrier because they are part-time in most cases, and not permanent. Their commitment to the extra time needed for investing in PLCs at one institution may be less because of this, especially when they are teaching at multiple institutions to make ends meet. The turnover of adjunct faculty is significantly greater than that of full-time faculty as well, resulting in a loss of continuity. Moreover, when a program is taught entirely or mostly by adjunct faculty, the development of a PLC among them may be nearly impossible. Midwest does have a position called a “regular adjunct,” a full-time but temporary position. We have seen some evidence of people in these roles making a significant investment in the Process Education™ initiative. Rene Muldar and Susan Birdsall fall into this category. However, Muldar had left

for a tenure-track position at another institution by the time I arrived on campus, illustrating the problem once again. Meanwhile, Birdsall mentioned how poorly paid she was. Other than those part-time faculty who have professional careers elsewhere and teach primarily for the love of it, most are looking for a more permanent role and may leave the institution when they find it. Even should they not, their level of commitment must generally be less than that of their full-time colleagues, as they have other significant work obligations, either to their day jobs or to other colleges and universities.

Overall, there are several ways in which organization-wide actions and characteristics may serve as barriers to the development of PLCs at Midwest. We next look at a few aspects of organizational culture at Midwest that may do the same.

Organizational Culture

In reviewing how elements of the culture at Midwest may serve as barriers, I want to begin by remarking yet again that this must be a modest discussion. I did not have the time or the intent of doing a deep culture study. Still, it is as important to look for indicators where the culture at Midwest is a barrier to the development of PLCs, even as it was useful to see how the culture might be fostering PLCs. The first, the value of (1) **faculty autonomy**, we have already discussed to some extent in other contexts. However, it became clear to me that this value could be a barrier to the collaborative elements of the PLC to the extent that a faculty member felt a norm was violated when a colleague sought to visit another's classroom, or offered suggestions on practice, or sought to jointly develop class materials. Julie Shea offered this as a reason why Process Education™ would never be adopted by the entire faculty:

And we knew that not everyone will come on board, ever, because that's just not what faculty members value. Our faculty members had told us in a survey they value two things: Number one was student success. Also up there number one, autonomy.

Assistant VP Prange had come to a similar conclusion about any initiative requiring collaboration across classrooms. He described the cultural norms held by faculty, norms that would have to change for increased collaboration and community:

PRANGE: I think faculty are most concerned about two things: The success of the students they touch on a daily basis, and we have a dedicated faculty that I truly believe lives that out. And secondly, autonomy. I believe those are the two things that drive our faculty.

SAM: Autonomy for themselves?

PRANGE: Correct. As faculty members. In protecting the academic freedom of their classroom domains. So, I think—and I'm not faculty anymore, but you're asking me to give you my point of view—I think that faculty focus on individual projects and their classrooms in that regard. And groups like the Trailblazers and other groups, groups of faculty perhaps in learning communities, other communities and groups, hold each other accountable for the bigger picture. So it would call for a changing role of the faculty in the future and a more inclusive role for all of us as it relates to doing stuff that increases learning for our students.

As Prange hinted, a related cultural value at Midwest, and in higher education in general, is (2) **academic freedom** as it has come to be broadly interpreted. Nesbitt mentioned this as one cause for the “controversy” in going to a jointly-designed, modularized curriculum in manufacturing:

Another way we're getting folks to talk is [laughs] through some of these controversies. One complaint is that by imposing—and we aren't imposing— but if we were to impose the module architecture, that in some way's taking away some of the academic freedom of the faculty. And, in my mind, that's a good debate. You know, we have had and still have some faculty that have some very strong complaints about some of the implications of the architecture and what that means in terms of their academic freedom.

Also, we have previously seen that some of the resistance from adjunct faculty to implementing the two redesigned introductory speech courses came from a belief that this imposed on their academic freedom. Nesbitt's “good debate” may be a part of the larger dialectical conversation in American society over the two contrasting and sometimes contradictory values of individualism and community, as we discussed in some detail in the review of the literature on community.

There were hints that Midwest's very success and national reputation might breed a certain (3) **complacency** that might be a barrier to the development of PLCs or other significant change efforts. One faculty member believed that this complacency was most likely from the administrative leaders of the college. She feared that administrators would be seduced by Terry O'Banion's singling Midwest out for praise as a Learning College, and “start believing” that it was true. The college, she said, could not afford to “rest on it

laurels.” She herself expressed pride in what the college had accomplished. I also heard a just pride from many other interviewees, but a pride sometimes expressed as Midwest’s uniqueness among all community colleges. For instance, one faculty member said in a meeting:

If we can't do it given our talent and creativity, mediocre schools would have a terrible time changing faculty's minds. We have dynamic faculty overall. I mean really fluid, creative people.

This kind of pride could be seen as a certain self-satisfaction that could interfere with the honest evaluation necessary for change efforts, including the development of PLCs, to be productive.

Such self-satisfaction could also lead to the (4) **NIH (Not Invented Here) syndrome**. Ideas that are not homegrown or painted as to appear homegrown may be rejected as coming from “mediocre schools” out there, or as inappropriate because Midwest is unique. Julie Shea believed that internal measurement and evaluation of Process Education™ was necessary not just to add to the data but also to convince Midwest faculty that it worked locally:

And even though other institutions have done some remarkable studies that show how process [education™] improves student success across the board—and improves learning and improves quality of instruction through peer assessment and peer tutoring; even though we know that from other institutions and have seen it here, we're still trying to convince those who are the most resistant to it through our own successes so that we can really learn more from that. So the steering committee is looking at what's the data going

to tell us and how can we use that data to convince our peers who may be more reluctant that it really works.

Tradition (5), both at Midwest and in American higher education generally, may also be a barrier to PLCs, which does, after all, require that faculty give up time-honored strategies within solitary practice. In her part of the 1999 year-end report on Process Education™, Wendy Howard wrote that, for her, “the biggest [barrier to implementing Process Education™] was relinquishing the old ways of doing things.” Carol Bedard saw past practice as a barrier to getting part-time faculty to implement the jointly-created curriculum in the introductory speech classes. Some of the adjunct faculty who had taught at Midwest for up to 20 years “were quite resistant to not only changing it but also incorporating technology into the public speaking class.” They were comfortable with how the class had been traditionally taught. Scullen, too, saw tradition in higher education as a possible barrier, telling me that “this is how education has been for how many hundreds of years” and many faculty at Midwest believe that “if it ain't broke don't fix it.” A quotation from Assistant VP Prange connects the danger complacency with the barrier of tradition:

[The] challenge might be [pause] overcoming the traditional barriers within the institution so that innovation can occur. And what we've learned has been that we are our own worst enemies. We liked in the past to point fingers outside of the institution: [from] The Board of Regents to the accrediting agencies, to these people who lay all things on us so that we have to be the way we are. In truth, we have a lot more room to maneuver and to accommodate for innovation than we allow ourselves. Example: A lot of the traditional rules of Registrar and Admissions, and how that relates to your signing up for class and getting your grades and working your way through a

course. Well those rules are pretty sacred around here. Now you try to break one of those and you'll hit a barrier real fast. Now that has nothing to do in most cases with [the Board of Regents] or accrediting agencies or anything like that. It has to do with history of the institution. And tradition, and the way we've always done it. So that was, that was a challenge for us.

Environmental Factors

As with our analysis of what may foster the development of PLCs, so in looking at barriers we can conclude that there are at least two external environmental factors which may also be barriers to the development of PLCs. Prange hinted at one above, that Boards of Trustees as well as legislatures demand a certain ratio of student to faculty as one measure of productivity in higher education, albeit not a very useful one. Nonetheless, within the paradigm of education as a factory, number of parts produced per work hour is one measure. In this way, **Accountability** (1) to external bodies and publics may be a barrier to the development of PLCs. What may be necessary to the PLC—time to talk, to collaborate, to experiment—may be seen as a waste of taxpayer dollars by boards, legislatures, and publics. I heard from several interviewees concerns about how accountability to externally-designed measures may inhibit those vital changes that may enhance student learning.

Finally (2), **students may resist changes** to the traditional classroom. Those elements of the PLC such as team teaching and jointly-designed assessment and evaluation may fall into this category. Nesbitt's description of negative student evaluations of those faculty trying modules may suggest such resistance. Stoppert talked with me about how the **change** in faculty role which often results from the PLC requires a change in the role of the

student, which is resisted by many, at least until they begin to understand how it benefits them as learners.

Other external factors may also serve as barriers to the development of PLCs, but I found no other suggestions in the interviews and documents. These are beyond the scope of this study, as well as largely beyond the power of the institution to remove.

Chapter Conclusion

In this chapter, we have reviewed a number of possible barriers to the further development of PLCs at Midwest Community College. With that, I conclude my discussion of research findings. In the next chapter, I will link these findings together into answers to the subsidiary research questions, looking for broader themes. Then I present some reflections on my experience with one Learning College and its examples of Professional Learning Communities. I will conclude by discussing the implications of this research for both practitioners and for researchers.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Conclusions and Implications

Chapter Introduction

“What you see is a pretty traditional institution, a very successful institution, a college that has a very good reputation, and a quality institution. Do you realize that within the next 5 to 10 years, nothing you’re looking at will be the same?” — President Aaron Moeller

In this study, I have spent time with one community college and some of its people, the very real school I have labeled Midwest Community College. We have heard their words and stories. After a review of the research problem, brief summary of the literature, and description of methodology, I will summarize my conclusions. First, I will generalize from the findings to explore answers to the research questions. Second, I will note some general conclusions. Third, I will summarize the findings in relation to the literature we have previously reviewed. Next follows a discussion of implications for practitioners: general recommendations, recommendations for faculty, for department chairs, for administrators, and for organizational development consultants. The chapter, and this study, will conclude with a discussion of implications for further research, including what may be new.

The Problem and Purpose of this Research

This study has focused on individuals and groups within one Midwestern community college as they described efforts that may have helped them build Professional Learning Communities in their practice. The objective of the study was to assist in understanding how various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics may foster or obstruct the development of PLCs in community colleges.

Much of the literature on Learning Colleges, Learning Organizations, and Professional Learning Communities is prescriptive rather than descriptive, so I have sought to add to the literature by a descriptive analysis located within one site. Much of the literature has focused on what managers can do to and with subordinates. Instead, I have focused on faculty themselves, their perceptions and stories describing how they have worked and their own individual and collective journeys. More than to explore the effects of administrative actions and pronouncements, I have focused on the effects of faculty initiatives in building what I have termed Professional Learning Communities, and what fostered or hindered that building.

Brief Summary of the Literature

American Community Colleges face an uncertain future with increased competition, uncertain funding, and internally- and externally-driven demands that they become ever more responsive to the needs of their stakeholders. Leaders of and writers about community colleges have prescribed various solutions, including recommending that colleges become “learning colleges,” “learning organizations,” and/or “learning communities.” To do so, these colleges may have to make fundamental changes in how people work, including and especially faculty work.

Faculty members in higher education have largely taught in isolation and as “sole proprietors” of their classrooms. This has given them the benefit of independence, a kind of autonomy within their teaching practice that they do not have when they are researchers and part of a community of scholars. It has disadvantaged them, some writers have said, because this isolated practice has meant an existential loneliness among teaching professionals. It has disadvantaged them, their colleges, and their students because it may have reduced the

amount of teamwork, collective effort, and mutual conversation that would otherwise help promote the sharing of teaching practice.

In answer to these concerns or in answer to a felt need, some faculty within community colleges have begun the journey into community, which involves faculty increasing the amount of joint efforts that we have termed the Professional Learning Community. PLCs are a particular form of community of practice or knowledge community expressly dedicated to facilitating shared practice and mutual learning among faculty towards the larger end of improving how students learn. Elements of academic culture and the college as professional bureaucracy may encourage or hinder this development.

Summary of the Methodology Used in this Research

This research was located within one Midwestern community college that is attempting a set of organizational development activities intended to foster its advancement as a Learning College. The site was selected because it was likely to have teams of faculty working together to improve student learning, and thus contain examples of the PLC. The overall methodology was the Learning History, which is a *bricolage* of organizational ethnography that included the long interview, focus groups, observations by an “outsider,” and document analysis. Organization members were asked during long interviews to remember the activities they participated in, to describe current activities, and to reflect on both. Analysis of all data made use of N5 qualitative research software (QSR International) to group findings into categories shaped either by the literature or by a conversation of research with the data.

Summary in Relation to the Research Questions

“Just the language of transformation that I’m hearing from my newcomers and their interest in doing things collaboratively and in thinking beyond their discipline [and] their department is real encouraging. And I think we’re seeing it in little pockets, you know, we are definitely seeing that this is happening across campus.” — Julie Shea

In this section, I will briefly summarize the findings as they may help to answer the research questions. This study explored how a number of faculty members described their experiences as participants in Professional Learning Communities within one Midwestern community college. The objective of the study was to assist in understanding how various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics may foster or obstruct the development of PLCs in community colleges. The research questions were written to explore the development of PLCs at one community college using the experiences, memories, and meaning-making of participants in PLCs through interviews, observations, and document analysis.

A Professional Learning Community refers to a specific kind of knowledge community or community of practice that has learning or knowledge creation as a goal intimately connected to the organization’s purpose of teaching and learning. I defined the PLC (see page 13) as a group or team whose “members share individual learning on a regular basis, and create shared learning through their interactions, conversations, and common practice,” and, “whether announced or not, there is a clear focus on learning as a process and a product intended for community members individually and as a group, for the organization as a whole, and for clients of the organization.” I will take up the research questions one at a time.

Question One: *How are the elements of the Professional Learning Community (PLC) as described in the literature exhibited in the (a) individual faculty member actions and behaviors; (b) faculty group and team actions and behaviors; (c) administrator and formal leader actions and behaviors (d) academic departments actions and characteristics; (e) structures and systems of the larger organization; (f) organizational culture; and, (g) organizational community?* Chapter Four described in detail examples of the characteristics of PLCs as exhibited in individuals, groups, and across the wider organization. Here I will summarize some major themes.

A first major theme that seems to thread through the findings is that a number of faculty grew dissatisfied with relying mostly or entirely on the lecture method and/or with the results of outcomes data that indicated that students were not achieving comparable minimal learning goals. These faculty members then reached out to colleagues, informally or formally seeking joint solutions. Individuals such as Charlotte Stoppert approached colleagues in other departments. Whole departments such as the Communications and Speech Department jointly developed curriculum and instructional materials. Joint teams, such as the Process Education™ Steering Team, formed and became formalized within the college with a purpose of working and sharing together to improve teaching and learning. Nearly all teachers care that their teaching makes a difference. Some may be confident enough to face poor outcomes directly and seek joint solutions with colleagues in a PLC.

Second, there are no indications from the faculty and administrators I spoke with nor in the documents I reviewed that there was any intention to enact PLCs as such at Midwest. Neither were the concept and definition in common parlance. However, there did seem the intention on the part of many to enact key elements of what I call the PLC, such as teamwork and collaboration within, among, and across departments and disciplines in the development of curriculum and sharing of practice. Why and how did this come about?

Certainly, that I selected those faculty teams and departments that were more likely to be already working in community may be part of the explanation. In addition, however, Midwest has a long history of outcomes assessment and total quality management, both of which encourage teamwork and shared accountability. The language of assessment pervaded my conversations with faculty and administrators, and everyone I spoke with seemed conscious of the need to gather and share data on results. While faculty disparaged management's faddism, it may well be that after more than fifteen years of these initiatives the effect has been a culture more accepting of key elements of the PLC. Therefore, one way that PLCs came to be was through systematic change efforts. It remains to be seen whether the Learning College initiative will add to this effect over the longer term.

Some faculty members described this journey into community from a more instrumental and practical stance. Something in their classroom was not working or did not work as well as they would have liked. They read or heard about a possible solution. They talked with colleagues about the problem or solution, shared experiences, and attended workshops together. Others spoke of the felt need to talk more about what mattered to them in their practice, to get back to their more youthful and imagined picture of colleagues in a community striving together, sharing, just having great conversations about practice.

Third, in their search for improved teaching practice, many faculty helped begin, joined, or participated in workshops and training programs. The right professional development program, carried out systematically over a number of years, may then help to create a common language of practice and a habit of sharing. Some faculty members found Process Education™ so powerful a set of concepts and tools that they joined in their own planned change effort. It seems well enough established now that leadership of the Steering Team has passed to a second group who seem to champion Process Education™ as

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vigorously as the founders had. Perhaps because this was “faculty-led” and “faculty-driven,” perhaps because so many found useful tools they could immediately apply in their practice, most likely because of both, the faculty I interviewed spoke highly of Process Education™ even when they themselves had merely attended a session. As we have seen, the only severe disparagement came from those who were suspicious that Process Education™ was being “shoved down our throats” by administration.

Each PLC evolved individually, a unique manifestation to the group of people and their situation. Nonetheless, we may be able to learn something from each that may apply in other cases. In the case of extant groups like the Communications and Speech Department, faculty members moved towards community over several years working together. In this case, critical events were the retirement and replacement of a cohort of faculty, the joint recognition that learning outcomes were not consistently achieved by students, the decision to design a joint solution, the conflict over that joint solution, and the implementation and revision of that joint solution.

Cross-disciplinary efforts such as developmental reading within the introductory engineering and allied health courses seem to have begun when two faculty compared frustrations, and expanded the conversation to colleagues. Reading faculty were frustrated at the lack of effectiveness of reading instruction when it was taught in abstraction, not within the context of a student’s major or career interest. Occupational faculty were frustrated in the poor reading abilities of some of their students, resulting in difficulties learning the material and often a higher dropout rate. These parallel sets of frustrations often coexist with little productive communication among faculty from different disciplines, other than perhaps an occasional sniping or finger-pointing. Here, one faculty member contacted another,

explored the problem and a possible solution, and designed an experiment. The experiment became a program, the program a way of community.

The Process Education™ Steering Team and program began with the invitation by an administrator for every department to send one representative to an off-campus program. Three faculty members who attended found a set of possible solutions for the felt need to improve their teaching and student learning. These three came to be friends, worked well as a team, wrote a grant, recruited more team members, and championed the program. Critical events included: (1) the invitation to and the group's attending the off-campus program; (2) the coming together of the three in common cause; (3) the able recruitment of other members and participants; (4) the writing and approval of the Learning College Grant to support the program; (5) the hostile response of some faculty that administration was behind the effort and the defense by members of the team; (6) the incorporation of the program into the organizational mainstream through placement in the college budget and strategic plan; and, (7) the passing of the leadership on from the original founders.

The faculty within a given PLC made judgments about their colleagues in terms of readiness and dedication. There are "instructors" and there are "real teachers." There are those who want to be "stars" and those who do not. Once a judgment had been made, the level of one's willingness to reach out to, work with, or otherwise attempt to bring into community varied significantly. The stories of how they related to other faculty members thus diverged as well. With like-minded colleagues, they had lunch conversations, invited into committees, wrote grants together, shared practice, asked for advice. They were largely silent about relationships with the rest, perhaps indicating limited contact, or perhaps showing discretion. It would have been intriguing to have done parallel research with this "Other" set of faculty. I am sure I would have heard a different story.

While there was suspicion and even hostility towards “administration” expressed or described by many faculty I interviewed, these same faculty members mostly described one or two key administrators as performing actions that were important in the progress of their program or department. Among the administrative actions receiving praise and perhaps encouraging PLCs: (1) the invitation to participate, made personally or through the offering of grants; (2) providing public and symbolic support; (3) providing ongoing budgetary and resource support; (4) having a broad vision but staying in the background sufficiently to allow and encourage faculty to lead; and (5) encouraging, indeed expecting joint efforts.

Thus, an intersection of individuals, groups, and organizational systems helped to create the culture, the individual and group readiness, the programs, and the support systems that fostered the development of PLCs. It seems likely that these elements exist at most community colleges. It also seems likely that a more conscious effort to promote PLCs could take advantage of these elements.

Questions Two and Three: *How did various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics foster (question two) or hinder (question three) the work of the group in becoming a learning community?* Chapters Five and Six dealt at length with this question, and we will reiterate portions of the answer below under recommendations. Suffice to say that it appears individuals, administrators, and the college as a whole can choose to foster PLCs using the actions, behaviors, systems and processes described. However, given that developing PLCs per se was not the goal of those at Midwest, it will take further research in a setting where that conscious attempt is being tried to elucidate this further. In the next section, I will seek to answer this question further in relation to a theory of organizational change, as well as make some other general conclusions from this research project.

General Conclusions

“You always have to balance out your priorities of what time do you use for your students now, and what time do you use to make yourself a better teacher to benefit your students down the road. And what time do you spend to help your colleague be a better teacher to benefit their students down the road?” — Pamela Jagiello

In this section, I will derive some broad conclusions from this research project. These will have import to a variety of researchers and practitioners, and some will be developed in finer detail later in this chapter in the sections discussing implications. I begin with some ways that PLCs appeared at Midwest, in partial answer to the second research question: *How may various individual, group, and organizational actions and characteristics be fostering the development of PLCs at Midwest?* Next I make some conclusions regarding the “journey into community,” how PLCs developed more or less organically in different forms at Midwest. This leads naturally to some conclusions relative to organizational change and the PLC. I finish this section with some targeted conclusions about PLCs and educational technology, part-time adjunct faculty, and the Learning College effort.

Manifestations of the PLC

Throughout this study, I have referred to “the Professional Learning Community” as being manifested in various ways and locations at Midwest, the implication being that it may take somewhat different forms. As with any human invention, every manifestation of the PLC would most likely be unique to that group of people playing it out. In fact, we have here looked at several forms, each having enough common characteristics to fit our definition and description of the PLC, but each having an individual manifestation.

The Communications and Speech Department was as close to a formal PLC as occurred at Midwest, the faculty being official recognized members of the organizational unit. The Vice President recommended them as, to her, clearly the group of faculty who were working as a learning community. Although they did not meet together as regularly as they would have liked, they did jointly develop and implement a shared curriculum, shared teaching materials, common assessment instruments, and common assignments. They did exhibit high trust in each other and informally shared practice on a regular basis. They exhibited many of the characteristics of a PLC; however, a PLC does not have to be a formal academic department.

The Process Education™ Steering Team was itself a cross-functional PLC, and its work of bringing faculty together to learn a new conceptual framework for teaching and associated methodologies seems to have bred other more informal examples of PLCs among many of the faculty participants. The Trailblazers Team became a cross-functional PLC that also included administrators. The latter were not themselves teaching regularly while serving in their administrative roles; nonetheless, together they supported each other's learning with a goal to improving teaching and student learning. Again, their work and the Learning College Grants may have helped promote more or less formal PLCs within some of the project teams, such as the partnerships among faculty who were developing developmental reading and college writing assignments within the introductory engineering accounting course.

Given the voluntary nature of membership in a PLC as discussed above, I would expect that every PLC would be individual in its manifestation and uncontrollable by any mandate or directive. Administrators and faculty seeking to foster the development of PLCs may certainly influence the likelihood of those manifestations, and may certainly support

them in ways we have outlined in this study. I would also expect that any attempt to force every PLC to fit one narrowed conception would likely be counterproductive. Using some of the actions and creating some of the organizational characteristics we have discussed above, administrators and faculty proponents may be able to cast the seeds of the PLC in the garden of the college. Some seeds will germinate, some will wither, and some will remain dormant below the surface. All that grow will likely continue to be unique to that group of faculty in that particular circumstance. If each helps its members find a way into community and improves teaching and learning, we should not care what particular flower has bloomed.

The PLC: Journey into Community

We noted in the review of the literature that some writers believe there is a loneliness in America, a hunger for relationship in community even as we as a nation celebrate the individual. The literature described teaching as a lonely profession as it has been practiced—and some of the faculty participants in this study agreed. Although a teacher is in a room full of students and even if the teacher has fostered a community of learners in that classroom—of which the teacher is a member—it is still a lonely role. If where we began this research is true, then there likely is a hunger among many faculty members for community and for the rich relationships of the PLC. We have seen this hunger described in Bellah et al (1985), Putnam (1995, 2000), Shulman (1993), and Palmer (1993, 1998). That real hunger will probably bring people together. If they have the PLC as a concept, if they have institutional supports and the beginnings of a language of practice, it is likely that the hunger for community and the hunger for meaning will encourage many faculty to form PLCs. This is a journey of faculty into community, into the sharing of practice, the making of meaning. It is a community dedicated to the primary goal of helping students to learn. It is a community

also dedicated to a secondary goal—that of helping faculty learn more and better ways of fulfilling their collective responsibility for student learning. Perhaps another significant motivator, however, is the need for meaning and community in daily work.

At Midwest, it appears that no one planned the development of PLCs, *per se*, but that the desires of many faculty members to improve their practice led them to join together informally or formally. There were specific goals for some groups to work together, and there may have been a focus on teamwork; but no one there said, “We are going to develop a PLC” or a learning community among faculty. Therefore, it is likely that the elements of the PLC that I have observed in these committees and departments came about not accidentally, but organically. The right people at the right time, or just the right situation, catalyzed the development of PLCs, which we have described above in the findings.

Wenger (1996, 1998) argues that communities of practice develop in this way, organically, and that they cannot be mandated or prescribed. Communities of practice engage in regular and informal learning among the members. He also argues that “one difference between a true learning organization and one that gives lip service to the idea is the degree to which such informal learning activities are recognized, respected, and encouraged” (Wenger, 1996, p. 25) by the formal structure of the organization.

PLCs may develop organically in isolated spots within a college, or even in a more pervasive way throughout the whole organization. However, PLCs probably will not persist except in isolated pockets unless the organization becomes intentional in their development, that is, by providing support, making efforts to help them persist, or at least removing barriers to their development. There may be an apparent paradox here: PLCs develop organically but are maintained and expanded intentionally, by their members alone or with the help of the larger organization.

The PLC is a community and, as such, it is fundamentally relationships and shared culture. Consequently, there has to be a level of trust among its members, a certain knowledge of each other, a certain comfort with each other, a common language on key elements of practice, an agreement on goals and purpose, a reason to come together, and a “living together.” That is, there should be a certain amount of shared experience and common history. Participants in PLCs at Midwest spoke highly of each other. They were willing to expose their flaws to each other. They had some fun together. They faced some tough challenges together. Relationships are fundamental to the PLC. I am not suggesting that faculty who do not form into a PLC therefore have no relationships with each other. Their relationships are bounded, however, to a purely personal level or to a more formal, professional level. Furthermore, it is not a relationship based on mutual learning about practice. PLCs require a more intense and open relationship because people have to be able to disagree about practice, because it is a mutually challenging and creative relationship, because the community in a PLC is centered on the work, the purpose of the work, the making of the work meaningful.

Many of the participants in this research spoke of their personal meanings, their commitment to teaching in general and to teaching in the community college particularly. Along the way, they found other faculty with similar passion and similar commitment. The longing to join with those others similarly committed may have provided a strong impetus to forming or joining a PLC. What we have, then, are positive relationships, rich and deep relationships developed over some time in and through common work experiences, relationships centered around teaching practice, relationships that involve meaningful talk about and sharing of practice.

Organizational Change and the PLC at Midwest

When the work of the leader is done, the people say, "We did it ourselves." — Lao Tse

It's not that some administrator went out and said, "Hey, it'd be nice for you guys to do this. It's that faculty members saw a need and went out and found something they thought would meet that need and brought it back to other faculty members who were then spreading it out to other faculty members. I see that as a real strength that it came from the faculty level originally. — Pamela Jagiello

This research has dramatically shown that change in the form of the PLC did not come about through heroic leadership by administrators standing outside the process directing the action as if a military general or a stage director. Instead, the change agents have consistently been faculty, and it was faculty who also did the work of change. Some faculty groups, such as the Communications and Speech Department, created the impetus and carried the change through with very little administrative support or facilitation. Others, like the Process Education™ Steering Team, quickly grabbed the initiative away from administration and carried it with passion throughout the college. Finally, faculty leaders led the effort to institutionalize the change. The faculty of the Steering Team sought to have Process Education™ included in the college strategic plan, to which administrators then gave formal approval. In these cases, administrators supported the effort but stayed outside the process of change and did not attempt to control or mandate it.

Throughout the discussion of findings, we have heard faculty speak of the value of change being faculty-driven and faculty-led. We have shown how these values are part of the academic culture as described by Bergquist (1992, 2001), Newton (1992), and Austin (1990).

We have also shown these values to be manifestations of the professional bureaucracy (Mintzberg, 1991). While I believe there is much merit in these connections, it would be easy and perhaps reductive to end the conversation there. This study suggests that many faculty members are willing and able to do the authentic, hard work of both leading change and of being changed themselves.

This has import for individual faculty. It is easy to work alone in the island classroom, shutting the door to the world's craziness and the organization's foibles and faults. It is equally easy to point fingers at administrators, to deny the validity of a change because it is an "administrative push" or to ignore change led by colleagues because they are from a different discipline or are "trying to be administrators" themselves. As many have shown, there are a hundred reasons to avoid changing. If faculty are passionately committed to their calling, to student learning, this stance will not do. They will gain by leading change or by following those who do. They will gain in at least two ways. First, they will find ways to improve their own practice. Second, they may find that the isolation and loneliness of that island classroom is assuaged.

It is easy to say to administrators that they have an ethical reason to be "servant leaders" and to take their hands off the rudder. We know that administrators are most publicly accountable to Presidents and Boards. Thus, it is hard for many administrators to practice this restraint. This study suggests that not only is the ethical role of servant leader possible, it may be necessary for formal leaders to stand back and trust those doing the work of change if the change is to be fundamental and real.

So much of the literature directed at private sector CEOs and managers, and that directed at college and school administrators as well, describes the role of the administrator to heroically transform the culture, the structure, the very work of the organization. As if a

god on a mountaintop, the formal leader directs the motions of the people below. Schein (1992) suggests that the CEO may form culture to some extent, and described techniques for doing so. Even Senge (1990) suggests that the leader may perform the important and “neglected” role of “designer” of the organizational change. That is not what I discovered in this case. Thus, one role for administrative leaders in this change process was to invite and a second was to support. A third role for administrators was to join in, but as a colleague, shedding their administrative role as much as possible.

I argue here that this organizational change came about through the accumulation of individual choices. I further argue that those individuals choosing, being of and in a social group, influenced each other’s choices. PLCs as they developed at Midwest were the result of those individual choices and mutual influencings, not the result of an administrative mandate, although administrators did provide important supports. As with any community, people joined or chose not to. You cannot coerce a community into being. As the quotations that began this section affirm, the power of the leader may be greatest in serving as a catalyst, not in manipulating members into the belief that they were their own change agents and actors, but actually inviting and supporting them as they make their own journey into community. In all truth, they did it themselves.

PLCs as Culture Change

The development of PLCs among faculty is a transformation of culture, as is any significant organizational change. Therefore, you do not get it by writing a plan, reorganizing, reengineering, and so on. Whether it is evolutionary or revolutionary, if it is to be lasting change, deep change, it has to be a change that also transforms the organizational culture. Rewards systems and HR procedures, the organizational structure of committees

and departments, all will have an effect on this process of change, certainly. We have seen that in this research. Organizational politics will have an effect. The issue of faculty-led versus administrative push is as much a political divide as it is a cultural one. Nonetheless, this is most profoundly a change in faculty and organizational culture.

The real power of participation in the PLC comes through meaning-making, through community meaning-making, community purpose, and the deep sharing of practice and meaningful work. When we talk about a common language, we are talking about a manifestation of culture. When we describe a common purpose, a common set of values and beliefs, we are definitely talking about culture. These things cannot be mandated. While participants in a PLC can express the meaning it has for them and members can expressly model the PLC in their actions, no one can control the meaning others will make of it.

Promoting the Development of PLCs

Those who wish to promote the development of PLCs, be they faculty or administrators, must recognize that success requires a long-term commitment, a long-term view, and long-term patience and persistence. Supporters should avoid becoming angry and impatient if some choose not to volunteer to join in a PLC. These leaders of the development of PLCs should also not assume that they will know in advance or control in any direct way the specific manifestations of PLCs as they develop. Administrators can mandate committee membership, can even try to require or reward team teaching. Faculty can preach by word and model by example. But to become part of a deep sharing of practice in a community of learners is, as we have said before, voluntary.

On the other hand, people are social beings who want to form meaningful relationships. Human beings seek meaning and want to find or make meaning in their work.

It is easier to make meaning in a social context through social interchange and through having that meaning reinforced by colleagues with similar beliefs, similar meaning-makings, similar language (Berger, 1966). Therefore, if those who want to promote PLCs systematically do the things suggested in this research—do them both intentionally and openly—many faculty will likely participate in a PLC.

As with any planned change effort, celebrating the results may encourage others. Participants at Midwest expressed many positive benefits and accomplishments from their sharing of practice within what we have identified as a PLC. They expressed much personal satisfaction on how this sharing has positively affected their classrooms. It has made their work lives richer. If they share these experiences with colleagues, either informally or through college organs, this may encourage others to join in.

It is also likely that the desired cultural change already exists in some form somewhere in the college. Some informal or formal groups, committees, teams, departments, and academic disciplines will probably have some of the characteristics and be fairly well along in developing PLCs among their members. As with any change effort, those who want to promote PLCs probably want to start here, support them, see what they need to develop more fully. The heroic few will do it no matter what. How to expand beyond just the heroic few? This study has suggested some possibilities.

Administrators who wish to promote PLCs can state that they believe in their value and encourage people to develop them in different forms appropriate to their department, discipline, committee, etc. They can provide shared professional development opportunities. They can create the circumstances, create or provide tools, and design the organizational and symbolic supports.

One powerful barrier to this intentional change is the perception that administrator-led efforts are invasive and undesirable, that all change should be faculty-led and faculty-driven in some kind of pure way. This is an interesting conundrum for administrators. Will the community be suspect? Will PLCs then be painted with the same brush as was used to paint other organizational efforts (e.g., the LC and TQM), that is, as an administrative push, a fad, or the flavor of the month? Will this in turn discourage faculty from participating? If you are an administrator, is it better to do these things without saying that you are promoting the development of PLCs, in other words, be somewhat deceitful? This certainly does not model the best of the PLC or of good leadership.

Instead, administrators may choose to be open about what they are doing. They may openly state their beliefs that PLCs among faculty are helpful, useful, healthy, and meaningful. They can say that they want to work with faculty to help foster PLCs, with the understanding that it is a voluntary choice to join one. As long as faculty are showing up, teaching students, doing their work well, administrators will not punish anyone who chooses not to join in a PLC. Administrators can formally and informally communicate and celebrate successful PLCs. Even so, some faculty will choose to condemn the PLC as an administrative push or intrusion and reject it out of hand. While those who wish to promote PLCs can recognize this and make every effort to avoid it, in the end, they cannot prevent an individual faculty member from choosing to make this negative meaning of PLCs. Leaders do not stop doing what is right because some will react against it. In terms of making the college more of a Learning Organization, in terms of changing the organization, this effort is worthwhile, and it seems likely to produce PLCs in various loci throughout the college.

If those who wish to promote PLCs do all of these things, does it guarantee that PLCs will develop? There is no such thing as a guarantee. It is likely that if all of these things

are done, some faculty in some groups and departments will become a PLC. To encourage PLCs to a more widespread development will depend to some extent on the political atmosphere of the organization, on the organizational cultures that exist when the change effort is begun, and ultimately on the individual choices of many faculty members. If leaders have faith in the PLC as a positive development, stick with it, and are true to its principles, then it is likely that PLCs will evolve over time.

Educational Technology as a Catalyst for Change

New technology can serve as a catalyst for change and the development of PLCs. Faculty members who may be unwilling to give up the expert role in terms of their discipline or even in pedagogy may be more willing to do so in an unrelated area of practice such as new technology. Here the threat to individual identity of exposing not knowing may be less. Thus, there may be greater willingness to admit ignorance, seek the support of colleagues, and to share practice. In attempting to translate classroom teaching into new media, faculty may find themselves in a dialogue over teaching and learning that they may not have experienced since their days as teaching assistants. New technology, insufficient technical support, and even the failures of technology may paradoxically encourage some faculty into seeking each other out for help, thus promoting the PLC. In the case of Midwest, these conditions existed for some faculty and appeared to foster the development of PLCs.

Part-time Faculty and the PLC

The role of part-time adjunct faculty is problematic for developing PLCs. Given that a significant portion of classes are taught by part-time faculty in community colleges across the nation, this has a profound impact on any collective effort to benefit student learning. Part-time faculty often teach at more than one college to make ends meet, or they have a

separate daytime career that takes up most of their time, energy, and commitment. They have less time on campus, seldom have office space, often teach at night when most of the full-time faculty are gone, and generally have less connection with the campus, with students, and with full-time and even adjunct colleagues. Sometimes they have a lower level of commitment to teaching, or less expertise or experience. Often they have little time to go to department meetings, take advantage of professional development workshops, or engage in informal contacts, all of which we have seen may promote the development of PLCs. The college that wants to develop the PLC in all of its richness will have to face the challenge of involving part-time faculty in that opportunity. One hopeful point, as we have seen in this research, the solitariness of part-time faculty may sometimes breed a hunger for community, which may make them less defensive and more willing to share practice.

The Learning College and the PLC

One overriding debate at Midwest had to do with the effects and effectiveness of official efforts to become a Learning College, adopted by the college as part of a formal vision statement, and thus an official organization development effort. Most of the faculty I spoke with described the Learning College as just another “fad,” “flavor of the month,” or “buzzword,” having little real significance in their work. Certainly, we could explain this as part of the common contention between faculty and administration, based in part on differing subcultural assumptions about how the world works and the organization’s place within that world. We can explain it as well as that common antipathy between labor and management, existing even in a highly professionalized organization like the professional bureaucracy. To some extent, this may even be healthy. I believe there is more to it than that.

That said, it was remarkable how much harmony I heard between what the official vision was and what the individuals and groups of faculty I spoke with and observed said and did. Even as they sometimes laughed at the language of the Learning College, to a person they espoused principles and described actions and behaviors that were in harmony with the principles of the Learning College. They may have explained this all away by saying that the Learning College was nothing new, “old wine in new bottles,” and so forth. However, they also made it clear that they had been doing this all along and that they did not believe they had changed their commitment to student learning as a result of this administrative initiative. All the same, the Learning College initiative may foster change even if individual faculty members are skeptical of its faddish aspects and jargon.

We cannot tell if the Learning College concepts have influenced significant change at Midwest and in its faculty, or if those concepts merely describe what already had come into existence there. The reality may be a little of both. Given the history and memory of participants, a learning-centered approach and a culture of assessment seemed to have existed at Midwest to some degree prior to any of the literature defining or describing them. At least among the faculty I talked with, these concepts were not controversial, but instead generally accepted. Certainly, many were skeptical of the administrative use of the “jargon” of the Learning College, and also of a complacency that could arise from believing that Midwest was “already there.”

Nonetheless, the language of the Learning College helped initiate conversations and debates at Midwest. In turn, these debates may continue to foster a college-wide dialogue, which may foster the development of PLCs, even when individuals do not “believe” in the Learning College as such. A sense of common purpose may promote the sense of community, even while the debate over means proceeds. When there is a commonly

accepted sense of service to students and colleagues, faculty may "join" the Learning College and/or participate in a PLC with their behaviors if not their words. The effect of a consistent message may pervade the college, if the message is continued for longer than a few years, especially if organizational systems, grants, and budgets are designed to promote and support the message and the concept of the Learning College. Otherwise, the impression of the "flavor of the month" will be reinforced.

Under the right circumstances, the Learning College and the PLC may be mutually reinforcing. One result of a learning-centered focus in language and vision may be an increase in the sense that all members of the college are part of a community of learners. In this way, the Learning College may promote the development of PLCs. And if faculty are encouraged to see themselves as learners because of participation in a PLC, then the latter may have a profound effect in encouraging a more learning-centered campus.

Participant Perspectives on Possible Effects of a PLC

In this section, I will summarize what participants say may be some of the effects of working within a PLC at Midwest on teaching practice and their relationships with colleagues. Throughout, I will be summarizing perceptions of participants, not establishing an actual cause-effect relationship. Furthermore, it is hard to separate their perceptions of changes to practice and relationship that were influenced by a project or program (such as Process Education™) from those changes that were influenced by working in community. Indeed, I do not know how you could establish an experiment that would be able to prevent this mutual influencing.

Faculty in this study described more collaboration, conversation, sharing, and joint efforts coming, at least in part, from their participation in a PLC. There is a campus-wide

dialogue on teaching and learning that apparently was not there a few years ago, several agreed. Many felt they now had more contact with—and some have formed closer relationships to—colleagues in other departments than to those in their own. They also described classrooms that are more active with students taking more responsibility for their own learning. No one described relationships with administrators as having changed for the better or worse during the development of PLCs. Generally, what we have heard from Midwest faculty who were working in what I termed the PLC are some of the following changes to faculty work:

1. Collaboration in the design of curriculum, classroom tools, and materials
2. Setting of common student learning outcomes and assessment of outcomes
3. Sharing of ideas, techniques, and strategies to improve the classroom
4. Sharing of experiences and informal conversations about teaching and learning over lunch, in hallways, in offices
5. Apparent willingness to openly discuss the effectiveness of college curriculum and teaching as a system across classrooms
6. Willingness to visit each other's classrooms and/or teach sample sessions before colleagues in "safe" laboratories during professional development workshops
7. Development of a common language to talk about teaching and learning

These changes seem likely to be encouraged and sustained when working in a PLC.

My observations of groups and the observations of participants suggest that the Trailblazers, the Communications and Speech Department, and the Process Education™ Steering Team have mostly positive team dynamics. Members exhibit the ability to disagree and to hold such disagreement for long periods of time without trying to convert each other.

This may be nothing more than the tendency among some academics to debate and not reach resolution, but my analysis suggests that is not the case. The groups exhibited a sense of humor and playfulness, honest and direct conversations, and apparently very positive relationships, including those between faculty and administrative members. However, the general view of the faculty participants towards administrators was skeptical if not cynical. This supports the notion from the literature that these two groups occupy different organizational subcultures, viewing the way the world works through different lenses, and often using the same words to mean different things.

When participants learned of my research question, and that I was looking into faculty professional learning communities, they generally responded with either an “of course” or “aha” attitude. Only Andrea LaGest saw herself as not a part of a PLC as I had defined it. I think we have shown that even she participated to some degree in a PLC. Faculty participants may not choose to frame what they have done in terms of the PLC; nevertheless, they recognized themselves to be working within one.

The Learning College Grants require the sharing of results across the college. Formal sharing occurred in college newsletters and reports, and in presentations to Midwest colleagues and at national conferences. Beyond that, participants described efforts to informally share what they had learned during lunchtime, hallway, and office conversations and using threaded electronic discussions. At least among the participants I interviewed, all but one (who preferred working alone) valued working with colleagues and sharing results. Nonetheless, many participants still expressed dissatisfaction with the college’s systems for transferring best practices.

Faculty members generally described their interactions with colleagues in a PLC as more open and trusting. They were more comfortable sharing teaching failures and

successes, visiting each other's classrooms, offering suggestions, and asking for feedback on strategies and classroom materials. Relationships with faculty who were outside the group were not described as having been affected one way or the other. It is likely that the bonds of community do not extend automatically and unthinkingly to any organization member.

Finally, I must reiterate that these changes in relationship and behavior may be encouraged by many other activities and programs at Midwest. Furthermore, these changes may be elements of the PLC or be encouraged by the development of PLCs, or both at the same time. I believe that for some faculty at Midwest, including those with whom I spent some time, teaching practice had changed in some fundamental ways. They felt themselves to be—and I observed that they were—less isolated independent contractors or sole proprietors and more members of a community working together toward a common goal.

Conclusions in Relation to the Literature

“And if we’re ever going to become this Learning College—and we’re on the road to that—all faculty have to know, all staff members need to know that [we are] ‘learners all,’ that we’re like our students.” — Julie Shea

In this section, I will briefly review how what I learned at Midwest may or may not be in harmony with what the literature has described, using the broad categories from the earlier literature review. Since the research framework I have chosen is based on a taxonomy derived from the literature, and given the nature of qualitative research, I do not intend to imply “proof” for or against any body of theory. Instead, I will summarize indications of how the theory may or may not inform what I observed and heard, and how what I observed and heard may inform the theory.

The Learning Organization

We begin with the concept of the Learning Organization (LO), focusing as before on the notion of workplace community. In the LO, learning has to be shared from person to person, organizational department to department, and system to system, else innovation and adaptation will not move usefully beyond their initiators. We have seen that participants at Midwest seem to believe that this is true, and are somewhat frustrated in their ability to make it regularly happen. Much of the conversation in interviews and meetings had to do with “scale up.” We also see among participants and in documents an apparent recognition that a flatter, more participative organization is required for Midwest to be resilient and adaptable—another characteristic of the learning organization. While I witnessed no “transformative learning” occurring, some participants’ stories described examples of this characteristic of the LO. A mutually supportive community was exemplified in my findings, while generative conversations were hinted at. Many participants acted as if they believed these elements of the Learning Organization were an intentional strategy for organizational change.

At no time did I hear the phrases “learning organization” or “organizational learning.” This is by no means a requirement. However, some of the concepts of the LO as described herein seemed to inform the choices, plans, and frames for discussion exhibited in the findings. I believe that several of the stories I heard and summarized herein can both describe how an organization may be moving toward becoming an LO, and may be usefully interpreted within that overarching concept.

The Learning College

"I think [Midwest is] an institution that has the student in mind, and that this is sometimes rare in a college." — Andrea LaGest

The literature on the Learning College did not help this research very much. Given that it is mostly prescriptive, not descriptive, that it mostly describes an ideal and not a pathway to getting there, this is not surprising. O'Banion's book, *A Learning College for the 21st Century* (1997), presented several "case studies" written by college presidents or other official spokespersons. These seemed more public relations documents than informative of how these colleges became more like the Learning College ideal. However, given that Midwest professed to be an LC, and that this functioned as an organization development intervention, the literature helped me focus on certain characteristics that were indicative of a successful change effort in this direction and better comprehend the conversation going on at Midwest among faculty and administrators.

My own research here may suggest that the members of the Midwest community whom I studied had a decided focus on student learning. That good teaching was intended to promote effective student learning did not seem a radical position to take. As we summarized O'Banion (1996, 1997b) in an earlier section, faculty members within the Learning College are supposed to have a focus on fundamental learning for students, a concept that learners are partners in learning and not passive vessels. In an LO, faculty believe that learning should be fostered by multiple methods and multiple pathways, that faculty roles are defined by the needs of learners, and that learning is assessed and documented. The faculty participating in this research believed and practiced the elements of this definition to a great degree. It remains unclear—and a topic for lively debate at Midwest

to the day I left—how much they were doing so before the concept of the Learning College was framed, and how much they are doing so now as a result of the college’s intentional effort.

Community Building and Organizational Community

The literature on community described an America where excessive individualism seems to result in diminished community and a sense of loneliness and isolation within individuals. Traditional faculty life, wherein individual faculty members largely continue a tradition of the single “sage on the stage” in the “island” classroom, seems to promote this kind of isolation. For me to have witnessed Peck’s process of community development would have required that I spend much more time within the organization than this project could afford, becoming more of an insider, less of the outside researcher. However, I was able to reconstruct some key events that suggested a partial movement through his four stages of Pseudocommunity, Chaos, Emptiness, and Community. For instance, the conversations within the Communications and Speech Department over the imposition of a standardized curriculum for the introductory courses seem to have exhibited some of this progression.

The work of Shulman (1993) and Palmer (1993, 1998) in describing “pedagogical isolation” in the teaching practice of higher education faculty was given concrete expression in the stories of some of the participants. Their wonder at how seldom talk about teaching and learning occurred, their seeming joy in closer connection with colleagues, lunch time conversations about practice, and the opportunities to exchange strategies and techniques all suggest that these two writers do speak for some of these participants. In the stories of these

participants, I believe we have heard some of what I summarized as defining Palmer's community of conversation about practice:

1. Honest talk not just about technique but about the human experience of teaching and the human experience of students
2. Expressions of faculty fears of failure, of rejection by our students, of criticism by colleagues
3. Stories about and discussions of "critical moments" when whether students will learn or not hangs in the balance and strategies used at those moments including successes and failures
4. Anecdotes about great teachers faculty have known themselves
5. Public examinations of the self in relation to the role and challenges of teaching

Only bullet number four seems to have been missing, although its converse in stories of bad teaching did occur in at least two transcripts. Since this research was centered on the Professional Learning Community, it is probably sufficient to say that I have found indications of the presence of PLCs at Midwest, and that descriptions of how an organization may foster the development of PLCs have been consonant with what was predicted in the literature.

Communities of Practice and the Knowledge Community

I observed or heard about communities of practice among the faculty participants at Midwest. That in itself is not surprising since as Lave and Wenger (1991) describe the concept, it naturally occurs among professionals in close daily proximity. Botkin's (1999) concept of the intentionally created "knowledge community" seems to describe the

Trailblazers and probably the Process Education™ Steering Team. Both created a social identity of membership and connection among participants. Evidently, the Trailblazers are a group “of people with a common passion to create, share, and use new knowledge for tangible business purposes” (Botkin, 1999, p. 30), and that seems to describe the Process Team as well. I witnessed in both groups the tendency of members “to trust one another and to open themselves up to creative brainstorming without fear of being ridiculed” (1999, p. 30) that Botkin describes.

This body of literature, therefore, seems useful in describing the PLC. Given that the community of practice is defined as a “natural” rather than intentionally-created community, and that Botkin’s “knowledge community” is intentionally created, the latter seems more useful for practitioners who seek to foster the development of PLCs.

Learning Networks and Professional Learning Communities

In the findings, we have seen evidence for the existence of the PLC in some parts of Midwest Community College. Present are the six characteristics DuFour (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) uses to describe a PLC:

1. Shared vision, mission and values
2. “Collective inquiry” into practice and method
3. A team structure and collaborative learning and action
4. An “action orientation” and a focus on experimentation and research into practice
5. A “persistent discomfort with the status quo” resulting in continuous improvement
6. A commitment to go beyond mere intention to achieving real results

Likewise, there seems to be some support for the belief of Louis et al (1996) that this kind of professional community can be fostered by actively seeking to create the kind of organizational culture that encourages risk taking and requires the reconception of leadership as more facilitative. The large body of work on developing community in public schools and the experiences of administrators and faculty there may well be instructive in the higher education setting.

I believe that the PLC is a distinctly different way of working from what has been the norm in higher education, and that this research has helped to describe that. Never in the real world is any ideal concept manifested in pure form, and that is probably a good thing for mere mortals. However, this research may be of value for those faculty and supporting administrators who want to move into closer professional contact, to engage in closer sharing of practice and experience, to promote improved transferring of best practices, all in support of improved student learning.

Academic Culture, Faculty Life, and the Professional Bureaucracy

The work of Austin (1990) seems valuable in the case of Midwest and the participants I have observed and heard from. Autonomy and academic freedom are strong values expressed by individual faculty members and noted in the survey of faculty conducted by Midwest itself. Many faculty members seem to have perceived institution-driven initiatives as a threat to these norms. That some faculty may have gone beyond these norms in their movement into community may say something about them as individuals, may say something about Midwest's journey, or may suggest a subcultural set of norms has formed. Then again, even some of these participants would agree with Andrea LaGest that "I've done most of this on my own."

We have also seen in Midwest a possible example of differences among the “cultures of disciplines” in terms of their willingness and ability to move into community. Austin describes how academic disciplines foster alternative ways of thinking. We have seen that some of the Communications and Speech faculty believe it has been easier for them because of their discipline in communications and small group theory. There may be some reverse example in the Industrial Engineering Department. And we may speculate that the differences in “cultures of institutional type” may reveal themselves if practitioners in research universities attempt to apply the example of this research from a community college. Austin speculated that faculty in community colleges may gain similar cultural values focused on student learning and the intrinsic value of serving that learning. This shared commitment may make it easier to create professional learning communities focused on student learning in community colleges than in other institutional types. Mintzberg’s (1991) description of the “professional bureaucracy” has proven useful in explaining and giving perspective to faculty responses to the Learning College and other administrative efforts to affect practice. The “organized anarchy” of Cohen and March (1974) seems instructive to the findings of this research as well. In both the professional bureaucracy and the organized anarchy, every individual is viewed as autonomous in making decisions about their practice, and “neither coordination...nor control [is] practiced” (Cohen & March, 1974 p. 33). In the organized anarchy, decision-making processes are “sets of procedures through which organizational participants arrive at an interpretation of what they are doing and what they have done while they are doing it” (Cohen & March, 1974, p. 81). Efforts to promote the development of PLCs are thus framed from within these assumptions by faculty participants, and by many administrators. Those faculty colleagues or administrators who push too hard

violate these tacit rules and receive negative feedback if not outright resistance to their efforts. Nothing in my research disconfirmed the work of these writers.

Bergquist's (1992, 2001) work on the four or six cultures of the academy found much support in my findings and proved helpful. Those living within the collegial culture framed the PLC and organizational development activities very differently than those within the managerial culture or the developmental culture. It may be that faculty who chair departments may gain some of the cultural assumptions of the managerial culture and have a more global and less individually autonomous perspective. Note that several of the participants were department chairs. Likewise, those faculty who had a developmental perspective may have been more willing to join in and support PLCs because of their belief in the value of personal development. I heard elements of the *negotiating culture* in the assumptions of at least one faculty member who viewed organizational development initiatives as an imposition of formal power to be resisted or bargained over. The conflict between those within the *virtual culture* and those of the *tangible* counterculture may help explain why some faculty eagerly participated in the threaded discussions about practice while many did not. Researchers and practitioners both may find this work on cultures within the academy important in studying or fostering PLCs.

We may see in these findings some support for framing Midwest as one of Rice and Austin's (1991) "exemplary colleges." Faculty morale was high. The participants and the documentation suggest they have a strong sense of community, practiced participatory leadership, had a strong commitment to students, and also a strong commitment to faculty development. We may then wonder if it takes an exemplary college to foster the development of PLCs, perhaps an area for future research (see page 376).

Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Practitioners

“So it's not a competitive environment at all. It's a very collaborative environment. And it's a very safe environment where failure is just as good.” — Pamela Jagiello

Within the context of Peter Senge's work on the Learning Organization, this study sought a localized and individualized answer to a number of related questions. The answers I infer here are evidenced by a small number of participants in one community college. Therefore, my answers have some validity only within that limited context. No generalizability is implied and applicability is left to the practitioner in his or her own local context. Nonetheless, what can we say about these rich findings, however local the context? I divide my recommendations into four parts: general recommendations of interest to all practitioners, recommendations for faculty and administrative leaders, recommendations for individual faculty members, and recommendations for organization development consultants.

General Recommendations

“I have no problem calling up, asking for help from my fellow faculty members. We all feel comfortable around each other. We work well as a group. We jump in whenever one of us needs help.” — Beverly Van Meter

This section will discuss recommendations that individual faculty members, groups, teams and departments, department chairs, administrators, and professional development staff may find useful should they wish more intentionally to promote PLCs.

Hiring and Mentoring Practices

Recommendation: When the opportunity arises to hire new faculty, search team members, leaders, and evaluation committees may want to look for and reward those personal characteristics that suggest a candidate is inclined to participate in a PLC.

With roughly half of all faculty members in higher education nearing retirement, there are more opportunities for wholesale turnover than there will be again for a generation. Search teams may hire for these characteristics and change job postings accordingly. These characteristics may include the following:

- A love for and dedication to teaching and helping students learn above the desire to do research or other parts of the job, expressed through actions and words that suggest love and passion;
- A personal mission and desire to give back, which may make the candidate more likely to still the ego and reach out to colleagues in order to manifest the mission;
- For those being hired at Midwest and other community colleges, a commitment to the mission of the community college and its focus on teaching;
- Personal experiences as a student which have led the candidate to be dissatisfied with one or two teaching methods and desirous of learning new techniques in order to help a diverse body of students succeed;
- Experiences as a teacher which catalyze this previous experience as a student into the desire to continuously improve as a teacher;
- Training and/or experience in teaching in the K-12 system or as a professional development trainer over and above mastery of the content, so

that there may be a predilection to sharing practice and understanding of learning and teaching theory;

- Words and experiences which suggest a dissatisfaction with traditional teaching methods and thus a familiarity with and willingness to explore alternatives with colleagues, and the expression of a fear of being outdated, and thus a willingness to keep seeking;
- A desire to avoid the solitariness of the profession and instead to reach out regularly to colleagues;
- A recognition of the changing student body, of the changing role of the teacher, and thus a willingness to keep advancing themselves;
- Previous and positive experiences with teams, team teaching, and other collaborative efforts;
- A more global sense of the role of the individual teacher, evidenced perhaps by leadership or other experience on cross-functional and cross-disciplinary teams;
- Evidence of volunteerism, the willing and eager participation in activities and programs beyond the role of classroom teacher as narrowly defined, including and perhaps especially previous experience with reciprocal classroom visits;
- If at all possible, evidence of being a champion of shared practice and participation in a learning community.

Recommendation: Well-designed mentoring programs may be critical in fostering the PLC among newly hired faculty, even and especially those with previous teaching experience. Beyond the close connection between a more senior and a

new faculty member, a mentoring program that promotes collaboration with many colleagues, both within and perhaps beyond the specific academic department, may encourage a new teacher to share practice over the whole career. Reciprocal classroom visits and ongoing conversations about practice may enrich the teaching lives of the more senior faculty as well as the newly hired. It may be that beginning a teaching career at a college with this kind of close community is more likely to promote the continuance of PLCs despite the distractions of a busy career.

Joint and Collaborative Activities

Recommendation: Colleges may want to support such professional development activities as the Process Education™ program and the Teaching Effectiveness program, whether as part of a system-wide professional and organizational development program, or as a grassroots initiative. Key to fostering the development of PLCs may be the collaborative sharing of practice and experience in a relatively safe laboratory setting, followed by some semi-structured follow-up whereby colleagues continue to share practice and talk about teaching as they visit each other's classrooms.

Recommendation: Those who wish to promote PLCs may want to take advantage of complaints about the failure of students to achieve certain learning outcomes as a way to encourage conversation and perhaps the joint ownership of the problem. As we have seen, facing a common challenge or problem may be the “cauldron” (Senge, Roberts, Ross, Smith, & Kleiner, 1994) that can make or break community. It may be that a common problem and a common responsibility for its solution foster community where “the blame game” discourages it. Driven by recognition that they share the responsibility for curriculum, defining student outcomes, and for student learning, faculty

may move towards the PLC. Not everyone who complains, of course, will want to step forward to take some ownership; but as long as some do, that may be enough to get started towards the PLC, and the view of teaching as “community property” (Schulman, 1993).

Recommendation: Colleges may want to promote cross-disciplinary solutions to problems and foster cross-disciplinary conversations about student learning, as a way of encouraging both a sense of joint responsibility and the development of PLCs.

Gathering faculty frustration over student learning outcomes and directing it as a positive force for change may be a powerful organizational development strategy. Such initiatives as writing across the curriculum, student outcomes assessment, and general education redesign may be ways of starting these conversations around legitimate problems.

Recommendation: Time has to be made for important joint activities such as off-campus retreats, professional development workshops, and collaborative curriculum design, because busy faculty schedules require that individuals teach at many different times and locations. It may also be that getting away from campus together breaks the patterns of normal interrelationship and allows for more openness to change.

Departments, teams, and committees may wish to make annual traditions out of planning retreats. The college should support and actively encourage these off-campus retreats and joint experiences.

New Technologies

Recommendation: Learning new teaching technologies such as web design, multimedia production, various forms of distance learning technology, and the development of computer-assisted learning may encourage the development of PLCs among faculty. Senior faculty members may take umbrage at anyone suggesting they do not

already have the expertise to teach their content, and thus turn away from the aspects of the PLC that call for exposing one's "weaknesses." However, no one expects faculty members to be experts in the use of new media and technology when they were hired, unless that hiring was relatively recent. Those who willingly collaborate may not need the excuse, and will love the opportunity to work together. Others, who do need a safe and supportive place to surrender—even temporarily—the role of "sage on the stage," may discover in technology the excuse or impetus to join a PLC. Paradoxically, even the failures of technology and technical support may promote collaboration and the PLC.

Organizational Structures and Systems

Recommendation: **Wherever possible, colleges may want to create departments with members who have some commonality of academic discipline, background, and/or experience.** When that is not possible, departments may need to take extra effort to foster community among members through both on-task activities such as projects and interdisciplinary efforts, and on-team efforts such as social events and team-building activities. Creating community from great diversity remains a challenge for our world, let alone our organizations. Perhaps a commonality of commitment to and experience within teaching practice may help here, but my study did not focus in that direction.

Recommendation: **Colleges may want to add or revise the criteria for tenure, merit pay, promotion, and evaluation so as to recognize and reward activities and projects in support of development of PLCs.** These may include team teaching, mentoring, reciprocal classroom visits (peer coaching) and other collaborative activities mentioned herein. Midwest, in particular, may want to incorporate these into the current agreement over working conditions and wages and benefits, or a new bargaining agreement

should the faculty succeed in unionizing. Along similar lines, if Midwest wishes to promote team teaching, it will have to revise its method of paying faculty rather than discourage this practice.

Organizational Change Initiatives

Recommendation: **Rather than developing an official intervention to promote the development of PLCs, colleges may want to provide philosophical and resource support for faculty as learners collaboratively seeking ways to improve student learning.** If the college actively promotes the PLC, it may be perceived as yet another “fad” or “buzzword” in the minds of many faculty members. If the PLC were presented as a descriptive set of characteristics with possible strategies for its development, not as a mandatory program, some faculty members may choose to view it less negatively. Especially if faculty members themselves take the impetus and leadership, asking for the support to work together in PLCs of their own making, the skepticism may be less.

Recommendation: **Midwest may want to continue (and other colleges to sponsor) the public dialogue about the college as a Learning College, perhaps expanding the discussion to include how working in a PLC helps in that journey.** Midwest may want to hold public visioning sessions on what the Learning College means and what comes next. As Senge (1990) advocated, when an organizational community develops that vision together, there is greater ownership and advocacy across the organization. Celebrating those faculty who work in a PLC may further enhance the vision of the college as “learners all.”

Recommendation: **Many others before me have recommended that organizations stick to a theme, a message, a method, and an initiative for a long**

while. At Midwest, they have heard assessment, strategic planning, TQM, and the Learning College trumpeted by a changing guard of administrators. Leaders, both formal and informal, may want to describe the connections among those seemingly discrete programs, showing the historical context of each separately and together, and making clear how all are still present in organizational systems and processes. Saying is important, but doing more so. The current strategic plan, web site, Learning College Grants and other programs have clear connections with the Learning College and its six descriptors. These connections too should be made manifest and regularly explained. If Midwest wishes the Learning College, the PLC, and associated initiatives to “stick,” then they should sing the same song together for a number of years.

Budget and Resources

Recommendation: Midwest should continue (and other colleges to create) the Learning College Grants, and especially the criterion requiring collaborative teams. To promote more consciously the development of PLCs, those projects and strategic initiatives that may foster elements of the PLC as described in this study may be given funding preference. Perhaps most important, the use of grants to promote shared responsibility, innovation, collaboration, and cross-disciplinary experimentation surfaced as a powerful tool in promoting PLCs. Clearly, Midwest should continue these supports.

Recommendation: Midwest should continue support in the strategic plan, the college budget, and the infrastructure for collaborative professional development experiences among faculty. Professional development activities, especially the Process Education™ workshops, seem to have been a critical catalyst for developing PLCs. It is doubtful that the Process Education™ program would have had the impact that it had if it

had been short-lived. It became a permanent part of the college through being given a prominent place in the college budget and strategic plan. In turn, this initiative fostered elements of the PLC such as shared practice, conversations about teaching and learning, and reciprocal classroom visits or the equivalent in sample teaching before peers.

Recommendation: Colleges should provide release time as well as formal and informal spaces in the workweek for faculty to collaborate, mentor, and develop themselves and their colleagues. Time, the only nonrenewable resource, can be used to support many of the activities we have discussed above.

Organizational Culture

Recommendation: Those who wish to promote PLCs should capitalize on such faculty values as the preference for “faculty-led” and “faculty-driven” initiatives over “administrative pushes.” The PLC is at essence a local production. At least among the faculty who think more globally and see their responsibility for student learning as extending beyond their individual classrooms, there may be more willingness to work in community and to share practice as long as these efforts are faculty-led. Correspondingly, it may also be that working in community encourages that belief in the shared responsibility for student learning.

External Environment

Recommendation: Colleges may want to use external forces as a rationale for and an opportunity to foster shared conversations among faculty, staff and administrators. Colleges have little control and only some influence over the environmental factors that may promote or inhibit the development of PLCs. Changes in students,

accreditation criteria, policies enacted by the Board of Regents, and demands for accountability from external stakeholders will likely only increase throughout the nation. How should colleges respond? What impacts on student learning and on teaching are likely to result? How can we act together to meet this threat or opportunity? These kinds of questions may foster a shared sense of responsibility for student learning and for organizational success, and thus promote the development of PLCs.

Recommendations for Faculty

“All teachers need to be in the student role from time to time, just to remember what it feels like to be unsure, to take risks of making mistakes, and to work with others who have similar feelings. The empathy that results is surely a benefit for my students.” — Pamela Jagiello

Next, we review implications for teaching faculty who wish to join, support, or promote PLCs in their practice with their colleagues.

Recommendation to Faculty: Individual faculty members who wish to promote PLCs may choose to develop some of the personal characteristics and take some of the individual actions mentioned above (see page 357), and to associate themselves with those who do likewise.

Recommendation to Faculty: Those who seek to promote real change may want to find productive ways of aligning together with administrators in ways which benefit the college, moving the college towards an organization as PLC. Regardless of generation, individual faculty members may want to ask themselves, “Do I stick with my anti-administrative stance even if I want to foster fundamental change in my own and others practice? Do we turn away from something only because administration supports it?”

Recommendation to Faculty: **Individual faculty members may choose to surrender some of their individual prerogatives to work within a PLC to reduce their professional isolation and loneliness.** Joining an organization means enrolling in a common venture, being subject to some social controls and group decisions, and thus giving away some individual choice, at least while at the workplace. Teaching faculty in higher education have largely been free agents, and have felt very little of this loss of individual choice. The island classroom has certain benefits for those whom individual prerogative is as or even more valuable than connection with colleagues in community. But it also results in an existential loneliness of practice, a loneliness that may be assuaged by working within a PLC.

Recommendation to Faculty: **Individual faculty may wish to join with colleagues in accepting collective responsibility for teaching, and that part of the student learning process under their influence.** Faculty will feel increasing pressure from internal and external stakeholders to be accountable for student learning. This is not effective or fair accountability when it focuses solely on the individual instructor, whether through student or administrative evaluation, or classroom assessment techniques. Systems thinking and our real experience as students and teachers tells us that this accountability is a rich and complex one, involving all the faculty who touch a given student plus all of the organizational support systems. The PLC may be a richer and more satisfying way of accepting collective responsibility for teaching and student learning than by being subject to external testing and administrative oversight, both of which may come if we cannot demonstrate collective ownership of the teaching of our students.

Recommendation to Faculty: **Involvement in an active PLC may be used to help reduce burnout and career fatigue.** Without some pause for reflective practice, the daily

responsibilities of teaching and managing both the classroom and the larger faculty role may lead to burnout or reduced career satisfaction as the years pass. Faculty may wish to manage their careers and daily work in such a way as to schedule time and opportunities to work with colleagues within a PLC. These could include formal and informal activities. Formal activities include cross-functional teams and curriculum development, professional development programs that encourage peer-to-peer sharing, serving as a mentor, and teaching circles. Informal activities include inviting colleagues into reciprocal classroom visits, conversations about practice, sharing materials and classroom strategies, and asking colleagues to review and critique classroom materials and activities. As a further benefit, being in the student role again, as Pamela Jagiello suggests in the above quotation, may reinforce an increased sensitivity to what our students face every day. It may be that belonging to a PLC enriches the faculty career in ways that make the risks worth taking.

Recommendations for Chairs and Faculty Leaders

Recommendation: Chairs/Faculty leaders should promote and foster the development of PLCs both by serving as role models and by actions they may take in their role as leader. At Midwest, as is true at many colleges and universities, department chairs are faculty positions with quasi-administrative powers and responsibilities. They can be the lynch pin in many faculty change initiatives. By visiting classes and encouraging colleagues to reciprocate, by supporting the development of the group as a PLC both emotionally and with department resources, and by encouraging teamwork in the department and collaborative efforts and projects, these leaders may foster the development of PLCs. Chairs also help by giving power and responsibility to department colleagues and

by protecting them, when appropriate, from external forces and administrative actions that might hamper their work and development.

Recommendation: Faculty members may also choose periodically to take on a leadership role that helps give them a more global perspective. Such roles also bring faculty into contact with colleagues from across the college and promote collaboration. Leadership development programs may be designed, in part, to help candidates learn the skills and behaviors that support participation in a PLC.

Recommendations for Administrators

“I’d like to see more results. But I’m basically impatient anyway. So, I need to learn not only patience, but also the value of time as it relates to change. Especially this kind of change. It does not happen overnight. So I hope we can make a difference before we die.” — Assistant VP Wayne Prange

Support for the Faculty making the Change

Recommendation to Administrators: Administrators, individually and collectively, should provide support for faculty risk-taking and clear parameters for the kinds of initiatives that they will regard as positive risks. Support for risk-taking may be logistical, verbal, and/or symbolic. This may entail protecting nascent efforts like the PLC from the “immune system” of the organization for several years until those efforts become part of the “way we do things.”

Recommendation to Administrators: Administrators should provide time and space for PLCs to develop, recognizing this an investment in longer-term success. They can support faculty as they experiment, celebrating victories and not punishing

“failures.” Faculty must take time away from their role as teacher to be learners themselves in community. Administrators can be patient with this slow investment.

Support for the PLC

Recommendation to Administrators: **Administrators can continue to encourage participation in activities that promote collaboration and the development of PLCs, and in other ways provide public and private support.** Ironically, this very support can poison a new effort if it seems to many faculty members that the whole thing is nothing but an “administrative push.” Administrators cannot allow this to paralyze them. It is best if they work in response to faculty-initiated and faculty-led efforts, and that they are seen as supporting what many faculty want and need. Probably regular communication, which for those in power means much listening, combined with the willingness to stay in the background and let others take the full credit, will help ameliorate the worst of this negative effect of their support. It will take great organizational skills to know when the reaction from a few faculty is a symptom of real concern and a sign that the administrator should back off and work with and through others, and when this is a sign of the very effectiveness of the initiative and nothing more than the regular complaints of a few outliers.

Recommendation to Administrators: **Administrators can use budgeting and planning to foster the development of PLCs.** Many participants have mentioned funding as an important way by which administrators can publicly signal their backing and provide real support for initiatives that promote PLCs. Budgets can directly fund activities and indirectly allow for them by supplying the necessary infrastructure and supporting release time for faculty to do other work. In this study, we have seen how administrators at Midwest

provided release time and other opportunities for faculty to work on key initiatives in support of PLCs.

Vision and Direction

Recommendation to Administrators: **Administrators and other leaders should attempt to provide consistency and continuity of direction and support over time and through leadership succession.** It may be tempting for the new administrators to “make their mark” by starting new initiatives. However, support for ongoing successful efforts should be clear and steady, otherwise feeding the notion that all organization development programs are “flavors of the month.” It takes many years for organizations to change. Turnover of administrators is common. If that turnover leads to an overturning of all the work that has come before, most likely there is organizational churn, not change.

Recommendation to Administrators: **Administrators can show the long historical development of the Learning College and PLC, providing a long-term context and helping people make connections between various organization development programs.** Barr and Tagg (1995), in their article, “From Teaching to Learning—A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education,” which in some ways began the discourse on the Learning College, wrote that the shift to a learning focus from a focus on teaching was more about transforming organizational systems and structures than it was about convincing faculty. Administrators can demonstrate a focus on transforming these larger systems in aid of the faculty work.

Modeling the Role

Recommendation to Administrators: **To be effective, leaders should “walk the talk” and be true to their espoused principles.** Subordinates watch leaders very carefully, and are harsh critics of what appears to be hypocritical behaviors. In the professional bureaucracy, those administrators who have “come up through the ranks” as teachers have a higher credibility. Obviously, an administrator who does not have a teaching background cannot get one overnight. Teaching a few classes at the home institution or for another nearby may help. Maybe most importantly, if an administrator wants to promote PLCs, then she or he should model that participation, serving on cross-functional teams such as the Trailblazers at Midwest, or in PLCs of administrators.

Recommendation to Administrators: **To promote the development of PLCs, administrators should exhibit the best traits of real community:** genuine human concern for colleagues, listening deeply with eye (body language) as well as the ear (reflective listening); withholding judgments in dialogue while not ignoring or denying real conflict; not trying to fix or “heal” people while supervising behaviors; de-emphasizing command and control in favor of other forms of leadership. Above all, being a facilitator in the background while giving public credit to others often builds a sense of respect and trust. Modeling what is expected and desired may be the administrator’s most powerful tool.

Recommendation to Administrators: **Sometimes the primary role of administration is to do no harm, to not get in the way.** That is a more modest and humble role, but critical if the college is to be a true community of responsible adults, not of children. There is formal power in the role of administrator, certainly. Nevertheless, it is the informal power of influence and of service that makes the role at once a more humble and a

richer one. Or, to paraphrase *Tao te Ching*, when the work of the leader is done, the people say, “We did it ourselves.”

Recommendations for Consultants and OD Facilitators

“What did you learn today? What are the two things that could have been improved? And how can you apply it in what you do?” — Charlotte Stoppert quoting Dan Apple from Pacific Crest

Consultants and facilitators who work in higher education and especially with community colleges may have an interest in aspects of this research as they illustrate some manifestations and outcomes of planned change and organization development programs and activities.

Recommendation to Consultants: **Consultants should design interventions that bring faculty together in safe laboratories for shared experimentation in practice.** The fear some faculty may feel needs to be honored and mitigated with a well-designed set of activities. The resulting opportunity to teach before colleagues, receive feedback and coaching, and develop a shared language of practice may leave a lasting effect on the organization and the individuals who chose to be touched.

Recommendation to Consultants: **OD consultants may want to help colleges develop integrated programs that promote the development of PLCs,** using many of the activities that have been suggested in this study and in the literature. Consultants may want to explore how they can promote the development of the college as a PLC itself.

Recommendation to Consultants: **Consultants may want to apply the PLC in their own practice.** After all, they are teachers, too. Their isolation from other practitioners may be even more profound. This study did not explore the PLC in any other arena;

however, OD practitioners may wish to experiment with aspects of the PLC in their profession to discover if it may have similar benefits.

Recommendations for Further Research

"So it means to me happiness because I'm doing exactly what I want to do. The money doesn't mean a thing. I took a pay cut to come here. I'm doing it because I want to be here. I want to help people. That's what I want to do and I'm doing it. And I'm very proud to be here. So that's pride, happiness, just sheer glee, glad that I found my career, my niche, this early in life." — Beverly Van Meter

Given the nature of qualitative research, what I have gathered are inferences of how PLCs may be fostered or developed. Therefore, I do not suggest causal connection or generalizability. **Some other researchers may try to explore to what extent any of these possible processes, actions, and behaviors may indeed be causal and to what extent. Others may seek to describe other examples in some detail from a research stance similar to that taken here.**

Organizational Change

My research questions were a subset of a larger "burning" question: **How does an intentional organizational change effort result in real change in that organization?** A number of more focused research questions follow, some relevant to any organization, and some particular to educational institutions.

Is there harmony between what the formal leaders of an organization say is the vision for change and what local groups think it is, say it is, and act upon? Peter

Senge described the organization as a kind of holographic community, with the larger change efforts promoted at the top being harmonically reflected at the local level. Most of the faculty I spoke with described the Learning College as just another “fad,” “flavor of the month,” or “buzzword,” having little real significance in their work. Is Senge correct in his assumptions that the organization is a kind of holographic community, with the larger change driven at the top being harmonically reflected at the local level? How much in harmony is the vision at the top of the organization with the views, actions, and perceptions of this group of faculty?

Faculty Choice and the PLC

What are the differences between those faculty who choose to join a PLC and those who do not? It would have been interesting to do parallel research with faculty declining to participate in a PLC alongside those faculty in this study who were active in PLCs. Another researcher may want to return to Midwest and listen to the former group, or a research team may want to do such parallel interviewing at Midwest or another similar institution.

Did faculty already hold the value of shared responsibility for student learning before being hired, or did they develop it while at Midwest? This would be a question for a more causally-oriented researcher. I observed what appeared to be cultural values among the subset of faculty who seemed to be participating in a PLC, and noted them here. Perhaps following new faculty for several years as they begin their careers at Midwest would help answer this question.

Do those faculty who show a high commitment to teaching over research or other aspects of the role of professor exhibit more willingness to work together in

mutual learning groups within a PLC? We have seen some indication that faculty members who want to teach badly enough to give up higher pay may be more likely to continuously improve as teachers. Similarly, there is the question of whether the values common among community college faculty, values of teaching and student learning over values for original research for instance, may promote the development of PLCs or whether participation in a PLC may promote a change in these values.

Support for and Development of the PLC

Further research might follow faculty over an extended period of time as faculty participate in professional development activities such as the Teaching Effectiveness workshops or Process Education™ training to observe changes in the rate and kind of reciprocal classroom visits and other elements of the PLC. We have seen that those faculty members at Midwest who participated in these activities seemed more likely to continue to visit each other's classroom. It is not clear how much the action is fostering the development of PLCs and how much itself is a symptom of an already extant community.

Further research might focus exclusively on observing and interviewing faculty who are learning new technology to see if this experience encourages the development of PLCs. This may be a new area for study. There are indications that some Midwest faculty who see themselves as independent workers and learners may be forced into collaboration because of technology. We have speculated that there is less threat to one's identity as an expert outside of the acknowledged area of competence, especially in something new such as technology. If so, this may allow some to become part of a PLC, to be learners together outside the academic discipline.

It may also be useful to observe Midwest as it tries to bring its rewards and pay systems into harmony with its vision as a Learning College, and observe the interactions and processes for how these changes may foster the development of PLCs.

Is the development of PLCs that I observed at Midwest temporary, or long lasting? So many planned change efforts, so many local pockets of innovation dry up long before they are institutionalized to become the new “way we do things.” A periodic return to Midwest for follow-up research would help to answer this question.

Institutional Type and the PLC

Does it take an exemplary college to foster the development of PLCs, or can it be more universally developed? I intentionally focused on a single site and on the processes that occurred there to explore how PLCs may develop in a real rather than a theoretical context. Another researcher may want to study faculty from several institutions, perhaps those using the Process Education™ system from Pacific Crest, or perhaps those involved in mentoring programs, and seek to discover patterns across institutions.

Is the PLC developing at other community colleges? At other types of institutions of higher education? Is it more likely at one type than another? Some may wish to replicate my research into the PLC at these other institutions, perhaps comparing faculty at a community college, a four-year liberal arts college, and a research university.

Effects of Participation in a PLC

Do students of those taught by faculty participants in a PLC experience greater learning and/or satisfaction from their classes? The effect of a PLC on students

and student learning is difficult to assess, and needs further research. It would be fascinating to follow longitudinally the effects on student learning over a number of years, comparing results from classes taught by those involved in a PLC with those who prefer a traditional relationship with colleagues. Teachers who are more active in their own learning may encourage students to be more active in theirs. The anecdotal experience of faculty in this study suggests that participation in a PLC may promote more active classrooms and students taking more responsibility for their own learning.

Does the development of the PLC help make it more likely that best practices may be shared among faculty? Midwest's efforts at developing a "skunk works" and at encouraging the transfer of best practices seem to have had equivocal results. The Trailblazers as a team have moved towards becoming a PLC, and their efforts through the Learning College Grants have fostered that development in other teams across the college. However, faculty and administrative participants in this research have both complained that, too often, best practices are not "scaled up" throughout the organization. As is true in every mature organization, most likely the systems, structures and even organizational culture block the transfer of best practices. Does participation in a PLC help to bridge these organizational barriers?

One area of interest that this study merely hinted at includes the question of **what was the effect of participating in a PLC on faculty teaching practice, on their relationships with colleagues both inside and outside the teams and on their relationships with administrators? That is, what is different now because of the PLC?** Again, another researcher may wish to spend some time at Midwest or other colleges with PLCs and explore whether the participation in a PLC makes a real difference.

Organizational Change from the Individual Perspective

What I discovered through this research was a rich fund of experience of organizational change from the perspective of faculty. Surely, other researchers may want to focus a lens on other organizational members as they go through planned change or locally generated transformation of work. As I said at the beginning of this study, too much of the literature on the learning organization and other strategies for organizational change is from the perspective of or directed at organizational executives and consultants. One implication of this study is that **there is much more to be studied of the individual employee's experience of change and change efforts.**

Chapter Conclusion

"So I think just the whole experience of being part of a group and accomplishing something with your [colleagues], and the fact that you did something that became a part of the college, I mean, I'm proud of the part I played in that. And I know there's a ways to go but I think there's a lot of satisfaction out of doing that." — Fran Scullen

In this chapter, I have sought to summarize this research into the Professional Learning Community as it may exist at one community college. After a discussion of general themes, I have summarized the research in terms of the research questions and in terms of the literature. A number of recommendations for practitioners seemed appropriate, especially if they seek to foster the development of PLCs. Given the nature of qualitative research, that application rightly belongs to those readers, located within their own unique organizational and cultural setting, and not to me as researcher. I attempted to locate my research within the literature and then suggested some opportunities for further research. So

that neither the reader nor I will forget those who took time from their busy lives to help me with this research, I have begun each major section with some of the words and thoughts of research participants.

General Conclusion

The journey into community is like any journey. The faculty member who makes the journey takes risks, loses some individual prerogative and freedom, and pays a price of time and effort. The community college that invests in the development of PLCs loses some short-term faculty productivity as measured in time in the classroom, has to expend limited institutional resources, may have to alter leadership philosophies and practice. What do they each gain? This study has been an illustration of one local answer to that question. Amanda Gamet may have summarized it well for the individual:

While I really love teaching, what keeps me here and positive and being willing to put up with everything else is the fact that I work with a great team! And I think I would be hard pressed to find a team anywhere else in the United States of America that is as wonderful as this team of people is. And they bring so much to me because they see my potential before I see it. They support me. They'll show me direction, and yet they'll also tell me when I'm being an idiot. And there's not too many places where you can find that kind of mix. So I'm very fortunate. Wouldn't trade it. Wouldn't trade it.

If many faculty members felt this way because of belonging to a PLC, the college would gain what management can never mandate: A thriving culture of experimentation and sharing of practice, an invigorated and self-renewing culture, a body of faculty energized and challenged by each other, and a richer learning environment for everyone including and especially the

students. The journey may be worth it. It remains only for me to conclude this study with a brief rendition of the tale of the researcher himself, his own journey through the process of discovery.

Endings: The Researcher's Tale

I began this process in 1993 on the advice of Dan Jaksen, who at the time was Vice Chancellor at Oakland Community College, and mentored me, for which I thank him deeply. At the time, I was more equivocal. Did I really want to move up the ladder of administration in community colleges? Moreover, I only guessed at the challenges of the dissertation journey, especially while working full time. I added to those challenges by marrying the love of my life, Linda, selling a house, buying a house, moving, changing positions three times and then moving to a new college for yet another position. My advisor, Dr. Kathryn Moore, had clearly told me that any life changes would be barriers to completing the dissertation. She spoke the truth. Nonetheless, I have always possessed what I agree now is the prime requisite for succeeding on this journey: I am stubborn.

Doug Campbell at Michigan State University preached that to succeed you also needed to have a "burning question." My burning question had to do with how to change complex organizations. Having been a member of several such organizations, I had witnessed how difficult it was for members, myself included, to see the need for change, to face change, to make change, and to survive change. Some leaders I have experienced decided that ordering change was necessary. Others sought to foster it through organizational learning. In most cases, not much happened. The organizational immune system consumed both the change and the leader. And the damage done to individual human beings subjected to some of the change tactics was neither ethically correct nor productive.

Over the course of my classes, the development of my research proposal, and the wonderful interplay of this with my daily work, I discovered the notion of the learning community. I acknowledge the people mentioned in the literature review for having such tall

shoulders on which I could stand. Dan Jaksen advised me several times to find these connections between work on my Ph.D. and my daily work. My class work would help me survive the frustrations and trials of my labor. My work would help inform my research with living examples. He did not lie.

While writing the proposal was a challenge, it came more easily than the doing of research. My experiences had been with marketing and survey research at work, and with textual research in my masters program in literature. I decided that for my burning question I must do qualitative research. I also knew from the beginning that this was not the most efficient way for me to accomplish my short-term goal of finishing my dissertation before I turned fifty. I plunged ahead anyway (and did not complete before my fiftieth birthday, alas).

During my research, I repeatedly found myself remembering a hitchhiking and backpacking trip I took in 1972. On that trip, I learned how generous strangers could be, and I learned how much more there was in me than I had feared. This research journey worked similarly on me. At the real college that I have named Midwest, I discovered much about people and about myself in this process. I found faculty members, staff members, and administrators who were most generous with their time, their thoughts, their life stories. I discovered that I was a better listener than I had believed, and that my lifelong love of hearing the stories of others stood me in good stead.

The process of research has been a discovery of others and of myself, of others in myself and myself in others. That has been true also about the process of my life. This research has been a process of love: Love for thinking. Love for discovery. Love for other people. Love for living. It has been about moving, and about learning patience when I must be still. And, as with so many other journeys I have taken, I have found a coda in the words of T. S. Eliot:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

from Little Gidding

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW OUTLINE, PROTOCOL FORM, AND LETTERS

INTERVIEW OUTLINE

The specific questions for each participant will vary and evolve with the conversation, with my increasing familiarity with the organization and with the overall context as it becomes clearer. Appendix E contains the basic interview protocol. Below I describe an outline of topic areas to be used during the interview to make certain that they are covered in the open long interviews:

For the CEO or other executive

1. Personal history related to the learning organization initiative and the college itself
 1. Personal Career history
 2. Perceived organizational needs which suggested change strategy
 3. Personal involvement in change effort
 4. Official vision for learning organization
2. Specifics of the change effort
 1. History of change effort
 2. Challenges and problems
 3. Future goals for effort
3. Faculty group exemplars
 1. Why they are perceived as exemplary
 2. Description of their work and progress
 3. Access to group

For each faculty member and academic administrator:

- I. Personal history with project or process
- II. Concrete details of participant's experiences with project
- III. Participants reflection on the meaning of the experiences
 - A. Intellectual
 - B. Emotional
- IV. Individual behaviors
 - A. Collaborative efforts
 1. Course design
 2. Teaching
 3. Course assessment and evaluation
 - B. Conversation
 1. Content
 2. Character
 - C. Conflict
 1. How expressed
 2. How resolved
- V. Group and Team Behaviors
 - A. Use of faculty teams
 1. Purpose
 2. Training

- 3. Process
 - 4. Character
 - 5. Results and outcomes
- B. Teaching practice
 - 1. How shared
 - 2. Who is responsible for student learning
 - 3. Characteristics of the role of teacher
 - 4. Characteristics of the of role of learner
- VI. Leadership Behaviors
 - A. Who performs role
 - B. How defined
 - C. How does conflict get resolved
 - D. Who decides
- VII. Academic Department Structures
 - A. How organized
 - B. How does work get done
 - C. How are decisions reached
- VIII. Organizational Structure
 - A. How organized
 - B. Who decides
 - C. How are decisions reached
 - D. Definition and role of mission, vision, values
- IX. Culture
 - A. Stories or sagas that are commonly told
 - B. Symbols and heroes
 - C. What is expected
 - D. What gets rewarded
 - E. What gets punished
 - F. What terms are used to describe the organization (e.g., family)
- X. Community
 - A. How is conflict handled
 - B. History of organization
 - C. College events
 - 1. Who attends
 - 2. What happens

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Grand Tour Questions:

1. Tell me how you came to this department/team/college/team/college.
2. What is the story of the department/team/college while you have been here?

Focused Questions:

1. Describe some of the challenges the department/team/college has faced and how it responded as a team or in teams. Describe how were you involved.
2. To what administrative actions or statements has the department/team/college responded and how?
3. How is student learning improved as a result of the department/team/college working together?
4. How has work in the department/team/college changed? More team? How has it affected individual faculty?
5. What other results have come from the department/team/college's work together?
6. How do you share what you learn with department/team/college members?
7. How do you share what you learn with others beyond the department/team/college?

Reflective questions:

1. Looking back, what is important about the effort this department/team/college has made?
2. What meaning does it all have for you?

INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

“The Journey into Community: The Professional Learning Community in one Community College”

You are being asked to participate in a study which will examine how faculty work together in formal and informal teams to improve student learning. This qualitative study will attempt to describe how such teams come to be, how they operate, and how they may connect to larger organizational initiatives.

Data will be collected in the summer of 2000 through winter 2001. Data collection will involve group and individual interviews, observation of group meetings and other activities, and document analysis. The researcher will collect all data.

The following information is provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in this study: You are free to decide to participate in this study, or any part of the study, and free to withdraw from the study without any penalty. Your participation could entail any or all of the following: participation in interviews of about 90 minutes (which will be audio-recorded and transcribed), observation of your participation in informal and formal group meetings and other activities, and analysis of documents you may have written or contributed to. You may ask questions or request clarification about the study or your participation in it at any time by contacting David Sam at (248) 887-0999 or samdavid@pilot.msu.edu, or Dr. Kathryn Moore at (919) 515-5900 or kmmoor2@gw.fis.ncsu.edu.

Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. Although your identity will be known to the researcher, you will remain anonymous in any respect of the findings of this study. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way. Pseudonyms will be used to protect your identity, or the identity of any individual who is named or identified by you or in any documents used in the course of the research. Research findings will be shared with you upon your request after the study is completed, and preliminary findings may also be shared with you as part of the research itself.

The expected benefits of this research are a better understanding about how faculty may work together to improve student learning, and a better understanding of organizational learning. The risks you may incur in this study are minimal. You will receive no monetary compensation for participating in this study.

If you wish to participate in this study, please sign this form and return it to the researcher. A copy of this form will be given to you upon request. If you have questions about your rights as a study participant, please contact:

Dr. Kathryn M. Moore, Lead Investigator
Dean of the College of Education & Psychology
North Carolina State University
208D Poe Hall
Box 7801
Raleigh, NC 27695
(919) 515-5900

Dr. David E. Wright, Ph.D.
Univ. Committee on Research
Involving Human Subjects
247 Administration Bldg.
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824
(517) 355-2180

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study, and understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time, without penalty. I also understand that only the researcher will know my identity as a participant.

Please print your name: _____

Signature of participant

Date

Dear:

As we discussed in our telephone conversation of April 12, 2000. I am writing to request access to Midwest Community College for purposes of research leading to my doctoral dissertation. The purpose of this study is to explore how a subset(s) of faculty have attempted to become a Professional Learning Community under the overall umbrella of the college's effort to become a learning college. In other words, how have small groups or teams of faculty worked and learned together in order to improve student learning, and how have they shared best practices? In order to complete this research, I will collect data from direct observations, individual and group interviews, and documents using ethnographic research methods.

My first visit to campus will involve collecting appropriate documentation, including a history of Midwest's efforts to become a learning college, and materials on faculty teams. I would also like to interview a college executive who is familiar with this history and effort. Thank you for suggesting that I also include an initial meeting with you as Vice President for Instruction. During this meeting I will explore how the internal grant process works, what teams have had some successes, and which ones have involved some sustained work together and may still be working as informal or formal learning communities. I will also collect documents regarding some of those teams.

After analysis of this initial data, I will return for extended interviews with faculty members of teams that I have selected, observations of teams in action where possible and agreeable, and with an academic leader such as a dean or chair. In all cases I will obtain informed consent before any interviews or observations of meeting which are not generally public. At the conclusion of the research analysis, I will prepare a written report for Midwest Community College, sharing some conclusions which I hope may be of some value to you.

Within a few days, I will be calling to begin to arrange the initial visit. If you agree to my having access to Midwest as described herein, I ask that you sign below and return a copy of this letter to me as soon as possible. Thank you for your kind assistance and cooperation.

Sincerely,

David A. Sam

I agree to allow David Sam access to Midwest Community College for purposes of research leading to a doctoral dissertation.

Dear:

I am a doctoral student at Michigan State University, working on dissertation research into the Learning College. This research study will examine how faculty work together in formal and informal teams to improve student learning, and will attempt to describe how such teams come to be, how they operate, and how they may connect to larger organizational initiatives.

You have been identified as a possible participant in this research because of your work on the [project/team]. If you agree, your participation could entail any or all of the following: participation in one long interview of about 90 minutes (which will be audio-recorded and transcribed), observation of your participation in informal and formal group meetings and other activities, and analysis of documents you may have written or contributed to. Not all participants will be interviewed.

If you are selected for an interview, I will contact you by telephone and/or electronic mail as early as within a few days of your receipt of this communication. If you have any questions then, or at any time during the study, please feel free to ask them of me in person or at the above telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. Should you give your consent, we will arrange an interview appointment at your convenience and during the fall term.

This study is done with the knowledge and consent of the administration of Midwest Community College, but is not sponsored or associated in any way with the administration. A brief report will be presented to Midwest at the conclusion of the research. Thank you for your kind consideration. I realize how precious your time is, and will do my utmost to respect the many demands upon you.

Sincerely,

David A. Sam
Doctoral student, Michigan State University

Dear:

Thank you again for taking the time to talk with me. I realize you have many demands on your time, and truly appreciate your generosity in sharing your thoughts with me.

Attached is a copy of the transcript from our discussion. When I publish, I will remove the vocal interrupters like "um" and make it plain English. If you have anything you would like to add, please let me know.

Would you mind a follow up question or email or by phone, should I have any after I have done more analysis?

Thank you.

David

APPENDIX B
SCHEMA: Behaviors and Characteristics of
the Learning Community & Traditional Organization —
Comparison from the Literature

SCHEMA: Behaviors and Characteristics of the Learning Community & Traditional Organization — Comparison from the Literature

<p><i>Learning Org./Community</i> Individual Behaviors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Systems thinking. Other departments, individuals, processes considered (Gozdz, 1995c; Senge, 1990a; Senge, 1995) - Volunteerism. Personal choice to join and participate in learning. Learning a shared desire (Brown & Isaacs, 1994; Ryan, 1995a) - Patience with not-knowing. (Peck, 1987; Ryan, 1995a) Faculty able to exhibit not-knowing to students, other faculty, administrators. Continuous learner role. Social construction of knowledge about teaching/learning recognized and practiced through regular dialogue about practice (Resnick & Hall, 1998) - Mutual cooperation, emotional support (Resnick & Hall, 1998) - Team teaching = same time and place, interactive, mutually challenging, teaching as learning - Teaching circles (Hutchings, 1996) - teaching documented and evaluated by peers (Palmer, 1992) - Truth seeking (Ryan, 1995a) - Speaking without fear of reprisal or judgment (Argyris, 1992b) - Curiosity publicly expressed. Experimentation welcome. Capacity to live with not knowing. (Argyris, 1992b) - Publicly reflective, public inferences and conclusions (Argyris, 1992b). Mutual sharing of assumptions and ability to challenge each other's assumptions while reflecting in public (Kofman & Senge, 1995) - Love, wonder, compassion, humility publicly expressed (Kofman & Senge, 1995) - Collaborative activities [DuFour, 1998 #2249]: - "reflective dialogue" - "observe and react to each other's teaching" - joint development of curriculum and assessment - jointly create and implement new programs and strategies - shared lesson plans and class materials - collective problem-solving and continuous improvement - collective action research of own practice 	<p><i>"Traditional" Organization</i> Individual Behaviors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fragmented thinking. Decisions made in isolation of others, other systems and departments (Senge, 1990a; Senge, 1995) - Learning/ professional development viewed as obligation (Ryan, 1995a) - Need to exhibit confidence, certainty in knowledge and expertise. "Sage" role. Expert, isolated. (Resnick & Hall, 1998) - Little conversation about teaching practice, successes, failures. Complaints about students and administrators. (Resnick & Hall, 1998) - Practice in isolation. Little cooperation, little sharing about practice. - "Pedagogical solitude" = solitary teaching, divided by discipline and department (Shulman, 1993) - Silent with other faculty on challenges and possibilities of teaching (Palmer, 1992) - Defensive routines and skilled incompetence (Argyris, 1986b; Argyris, 1992b) - Blaming students and administrators - Use of soft data, tacit conclusions remain untested, private inferences and conclusions (Argyris, 1986b; Argyris, 1992b) - Sage or expert role. Little or no experimentation. Those who experiment are isolated or ostracized. - Assumptions, inferences, conclusions not publicly challenged, perhaps remaining unchallenged at all - Emotions generally publicly held in check, and/or unexpressed, except perhaps anger and cynicism - Little or no conversation about practice. - Few or no visits to other faculty classrooms - Curriculum done in departments by one or a few faculty - Assessment done within individual classrooms - Programs and strategies left to administration to develop, or developed by individual champions - Lesson plans and materials "owned" and privatized by individuals - Continuous improvement seen as something "business does" - No research into practice, or done by individual faculty alone
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<p><i>Learning Org./Community</i> Group/Team Behaviors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Systems thinking. Other departments, individuals, processes considered (Gozdz, 1995c; Senge, 1990a; Senge, 1995) - Mutual trust - can be creative publicly with no fear of ridicule (Botkin, 1999; Lieberman, 1996; Van der Krogt, 1998) - Participants freely share experiences - Learning is synchronous and just-in-time (Lieberman, 1996) - Generative conversations and sharing about practice (Kofman & Senge, 1995) - Shared teaching/ Practice - Shared expertise/collaboration (Louis et al., 1996) - Community of discourse on teaching and learning (Palmer, 1992) - Collaborative action - Shared information - People make contributions beyond narrow job descriptions (Brown & Isaacs, 1994) Sharing of practice goes beyond other faculty to include staff, students, administrators. Faculty eagerly perform work beyond classroom. 	<p><i>"Traditional" Organization</i> Group/Team Behaviors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Fragmented thinking. Decisions made in isolation of others, other systems and departments (Senge, 1990a; Senge, 1995) - Formal and informal networks (Gozdz, 1998) - Debates over technique. Faculty attack each other's experiences and positions (Palmer, 1992) - Fear of failure not expressed. Attack others. Deny data. (Argyris, 1992b) - Faculty learning is denied as a violation of expert role, or is not discussed - Practice is "privatized" - Committees (not teams) function as collections of individuals - Decisions made largely by vote after debate - Information on practice is protected, hoarded, or the very at least remains unshared - Faculty role is defined by job description or even less than job description. Nonfaculty considered irrelevant to teaching role except as servants or outsiders and unknowing supervisors
<p><i>Learning Org./Community</i> Academic Department Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Team structures - Collaborative learning and collaborative action - Action-orientation to achieve real results - Focus on experimentation and research into practice - Discomfort with the status quo (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) - Shared vision/mission/values - Collective inquiry into practice 	<p><i>"Traditional" Organization</i> Academic Department Characteristics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lack of time to reflect together and to learn (Louis et al., 1996; Zederayko & Ward, 1999) - Failure to take systems approach to professional development (Zederayko & Ward, 1999) - Departments function as loose collections of individuals - No department mission statement or strategic plan - Practice of individual faculty considered NOT the business of the department
<p><i>Learning Org./Community</i> Organizational Structures/Systems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Team structures - Collaborative learning and collaborative action - Action-orientation to achieve real results - Focus on experimentation and research into practice - Discomfort with the status quo (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) - Shared vision/mission/values - Collective inquiry into practice - Opportunities to integrate learning into work - Work processes altered to promote team learning (Lieberman, 1996) 	<p><i>"Traditional" Organization</i> Organizational Structures/Systems:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Committees, hierarchies, individual structures - Learning is individual and private with no public accountability or sharing - Results are assumed, not tested - Failures are punished or ignored - Risk-averse - Mission, vision, values perceived as "just words," belonging to management, or unknown - Practice is privatized - Work and professional development (learning) are kept separate - Work processes designed purely to be "efficient"

<p><i>Learning Org./Community</i> Leadership Behaviors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shared leadership. Managers facilitate, integrate and guide (Lieberman, 1996; Ryan, 1995a) - Managers foster trust - Managers patient with allowing others to solve problems and do not jump in to fix (Kofman & Senge, 1995; Ryan, 1995a; Senge, 1995) - Encourages risk-taking (Louis et al., 1996) - Systems thinking. Other departments, individuals, processes considered (Gozdz, 1995c; Senge, 1990a; Senge, 1995) - Shared vision/mission/values - Collective inquiry into practice - Encourages culture that supports deep sharing about practice (Lieberman, 1996) - Creating learning spaces - Invite and expect conversation about practice (Palmer, 1992) - Supports culture that is warm and accepting community (Lieberman, 1996) - Characteristics needed for instructional leaders in learning community (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour, 1999) - urgent about need for change but patient over long run - focused on future but clear on current reality - able to see big picture as well as details - fosters autonomy unless it violates shared mission/vision/values - celebrates successes - abhors status quo - empowers others by giving power away 	<p><i>“Traditional” Organization</i> Leadership Behaviors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Aggressive decision-making and action-taking by individual managers (Ryan, 1995a) - Heroic leadership: creating dependency, crisis management (Gozdz, 1998) - Agent of control (Lieberman, 1996) - Punishes failure (Louis et al., 1996) - Fragmented thinking. Decisions made in isolation of others, other systems and departments (Senge, 1990a; Senge, 1995) - Mission, vision, values of organization ignored or not known - Leadership tries to “drive down” mission, vision, values, planning, decisions - Leadership does not see it has a role in teaching learning or sees its role as one of control and evaluation - Leadership does not support time or space for faculty conversations about practice - Leaders do not aspire to role described for them in the Professional Learning Community (DuFour & Eaker, 1998; DuFour, 1999)
<p><i>Learning Org./Community</i> Organizational Culture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Shared vision/mission/values - Collective inquiry into practice (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) - “Collective knowledge” (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999) - “Culture of learning” (Bielaczyc & Collins, 1999) - diversity of members and contribution - goal of advancing collective knowledge - focus on learning how to learn - “mechanisms” in place to share learning - Collaborative teams - Action orientation and focus on results (DuFour & Eaker, 1998) 	<p><i>“Traditional” Organization</i> Organizational Culture:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Schools which failed as LO due to barriers - lack of effective leadership - learned helplessness - tunnel vision - incomplete, truncated learning - destructive forms of individualism prevent community and collaboration - culture of fear and disrespect (Kerka, 1995) - Dependent organization (Block, 1991) - patriarchal, top-down decision-making - bottom-up dependency - low expectation of employees by leadership - lack of responsibility for decisions and plans by any except top leadership

<p><i>Learning Org./Community</i></p> <p>Real Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - People empty themselves of assumptions and motives - Differences are visible and publicly explored. Struggle is open. Disagreement allowed. - Real listening demonstrated by active listening of content and affect - People do not try to convert or control each other - Individual pain and incompleteness as well as joy publicly expressed - Dialogue: people publicly explore and exhibit their own assumptions and seek understanding; search for common meaning - Shared history - Mutual dependence not seen as threatening (Bellah et al., 1985; Bohm, 1996; Bohm et al., 1991; Peck, 1987; Peck, 1993) 	<p><i>“Traditional” Organization</i></p> <p>False or Incomplete Community:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Avoidance of disagreement - Courtesy preferred over honesty - Differences ignored or dealt with uncomfortably and briefly - People try to heal, fix, convert each other - Debate - Individuals abandon group effort (Bohm, 1996; Bohm et al., 1991; Peck, 1987; Peck, 1993; Tannen, 1998) - Individual and/or divided histories - Defensive individualism
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APPENDIX C
DOCUMENT SUMMARY

Document Summary

Document Name	Description
Midwest Community College catalog	Description of college, history, academic programs, courses, etc.
Midwest: Campus Map	Flyer describing campus
Photographs	35mm photographs taken by the researcher of the Midwest campus
Journeying toward the Learning College	Strategic Plan initiatives and critical performance indicators for 1998-2003
Journey to the Learning College	1999-2000 summary of accomplishments related to the college strategic plan
Program brochures	Brochures describing each academic program
Division brochures	Brochures describing all programs in an academic division
Leadership Talks	2 articles, one written by President Aaron Moeller, on by VP Paula Galligan
Class Schedule	Fall 2000 and Winter 2001 schedules of classes offered
How to Begin	Description of application process for students seeking admission to the college
College Newspaper	Multiple copies of student newspaper
LTC Pilot Projects	Eight flyers describing approved Learning College Grant projects taking place in the Learning Technology Center
The Learning Technology Center	Brochure describing the LTC building, features, and map
LTC Newsletter	Four copies of biannual newsletter describing activities in the LTC and Learning Grant Projects
Professional Development Center	1999 Newsletter for the faculty Professional Development Center located in the LTC
The LTC Building and its Technologies	Flyer describing the LTC and its features and services
Midwest College web site	Official College site
Midwest Community College Faculty Handbook	Descriptions of merit, promotion, tenure, and evaluation processes for full-time faculty
Learning College Challenge	Flyer promoting Learning College Grants
Midwest Process Education™ web site	Web site created by Process Education™ Team describing project results and method of Process Education™
Process Education: A Handbook	Training manual for faculty participating in Process Education™ Workshop
Full-Time Faculty Mentoring Handbook	Training manual of mentoring program for newly hired tenure-track faculty
Learning College Grants: 1995-6 Annual Report	Year-end description of progress of all active Learning College Grant projects
Learning College Grants: 1996-7 Annual Report	Year-end description of progress of all active Learning College Grant projects
Learning College Grants: 1997-8 Annual Report	Year-end description of progress of all active Learning College Grant projects
Learning College Grants Proposal Summary - 2000	Description of approved grant projects for 2000-01
Math Lab: Learning College Grant proposal	Sample of Learning College grant proposal
Document Name	Description

APPENDIX D
PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Demographic Group	Early Career (Under 40)	Mid-Career (40-55)	Nearing Retirement (55 and older)
Black Females	Beverly van Meter	Deborah Wild	None
Black Males	None	None	None
White Females	Amanda Gamet	<i>Fran Scullen</i> Andrea LaGest <u>Michele Roelant</u> <u>Kim McCarthy</u> <u>Cathy Alexander</u> Julia Shea Pamela Jagiello Carol Bedard	Wendy Howard Charlotte Stoppert Susan Birdsall Paula Galligan
White Males	Walter Nesbitt Scott Therrien	<u>Steven Wendel</u>	Wayne Prange

Department/Discipline	Chair	Faculty
Business Info Systems	Julia Shea	
Communication Arts	Carol Bedard	Amanda Gamet Beverly van Meter Scott Therrien
Developmental Studies		Andrea LaGest Cathy Alexander
Engineering Technology	<u>Walter Nesbitt</u> (Former)	
English		Deborah Wild Pamela Jagiello
Industrial Design & Graphics Tech.		<u>Steven Wendel</u>
Nursing	<u>Michele Roelant</u>	Wendy Howard
Legal Assisting		<i>Fran Scullen</i>
Radiological Technology	Charlotte Stoppert (Acting)	
Sociology		<i>Susan Birdsall</i> (Adjunct)

Bold - Individual Interview
Italics — Group Interview
Underline — Team Observation

Committee or Project	Participants
Process Education™ Team (Individual and group interviews)	Fran Scullen Deborah Wild (Chair) Wendy Howard Pamela Jagiello Julia Shea (Former Chair) Susan Birdsall Charlotte Stoppert
Trailblazers (Meeting Observation & Individual interviews)	Walter Nesbitt Steven Wendel Michele Roelant Kim McCarthy Cathy Alexander Wayne Prange Julia Shea (Chair)
Read/Write Connection (Individual interview)	Andrea LaGest
CyberCOM (Individual interviews)	Amanda Gamet Beverly van Meter Scott Therrien Carol Bedard
COM Workbooks (Individual interviews)	Amanda Gamet (Lead) Carol Bedard
Modularization of Curriculum (Individual interview)	Walter Nesbitt (Chair)

APPENDIX E
THE RESEARCHER

THE RESEARCHER **from (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994)**

Phase 1: The Researcher as a Multicultural Subject

- white male, native-born, American of mixed European and Arab descent
- research background in literary textual analysis and applied institutional research
- employed as an administrator in a community college
- conceptions of self and other as interconnected, the web of life (Capra, 1996; Wheatley, 1992)
- ethics and politics: humanist, advocate of the democratic workplace, contextualized-consequentialist ethical model

Phase 2: Theoretical Paradigms and Perspectives

- social constructivism, interpretive

Phase 3: Research Strategies

- learning history, long interview, organizational ethnography

Phase 4: Methods of Collection and Analysis

Case Study:

- interviewing, the long interview
- observing
- artifacts, documents, and records

Phase 5: The Art of Interpretation and Presentation

- applied research
- writing as social act

APPENDIX F
THE LEARNING HISTORY

THE LEARNING HISTORY

Roth and Kleiner (Roth & Kleiner, 1995a; Roth & Kleiner, 1995b) suggest that one way to research whether organizational learning has occurred is through the use of the “learning history.” Most “businesses assessment systems. . . tend to institutionalize a destructive process where bosses propagate the same measures and assessments of which they are also the victims” (Roth & Kleiner, 1995b). These are positivist and objective attempts to know the truth from outside the participants. The learning history is grown by an “insider-outsider” team and involves key participants in the organizational learning. They define the learning history as follows:

A learning history is a written document or series of documents that is disseminated to help an organization become better aware of a learning efforts. The history includes not just reports of action and results, but also the underlying assumptions and reactions of a variety of people (including .people who did not support the learning effort). No one individual view, not even that of senior managers, can encompass more than a fraction of what actually goes on in a complex project—and this reality is reflected in the learning history. (Roth & Kleiner, 1995b)

The learning history is itself an intervention and a furthering of organizational learning, assisting participants in learning what they have learned. It seeks to surface underlying assumptions which may then be altered, shifting mental models in the process. Roth and his associates at the MIT Center for Organizational Learning have drawn on research methods from cultural ethnography (the long interview and participant observation, archival research), action research (e.g., insider-outsider teams), and oral history (long interview) in their formulation of learning history methodology. All of this data is gathered and then written as a version of the learning history, which is then fed back into the learning process (see Figure 2.1 on the next page) for participants to reflect on, these reflections and accompanying feedback becoming data for the next iteration of learning history (Roth & Kleiner, 1995a).

A learning history process

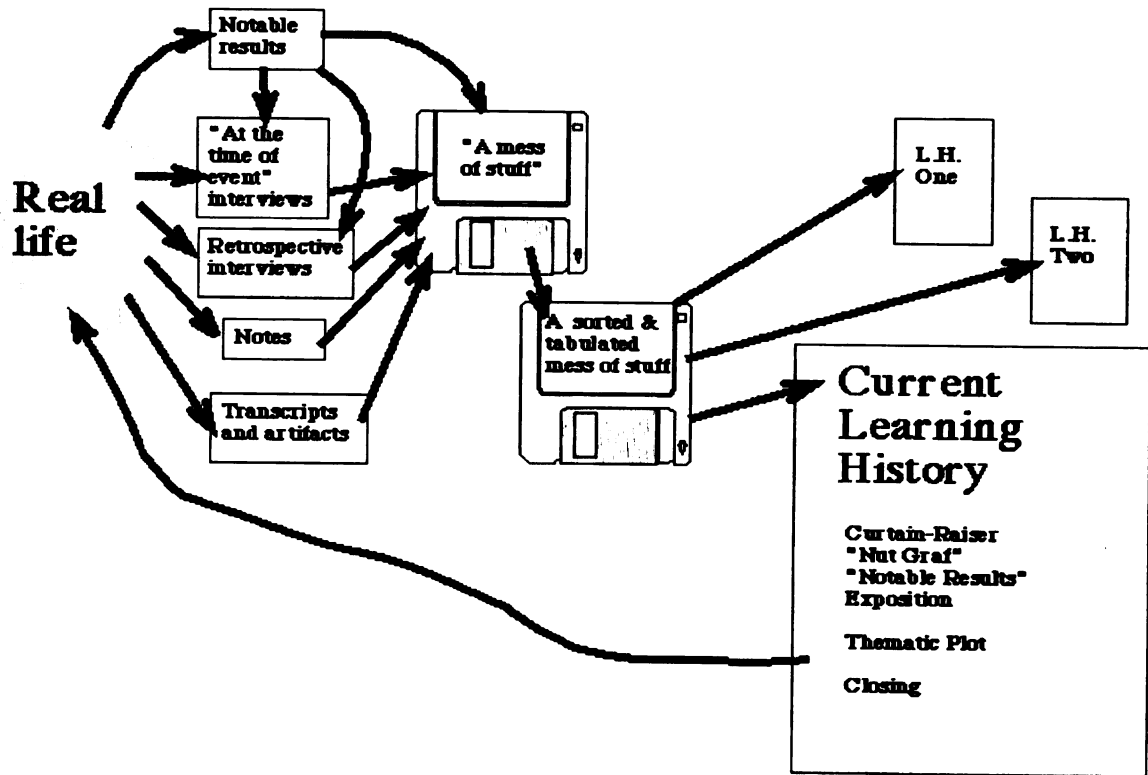


Figure 1: A Learning History Process (Roth & Kleiner, 1995a)

APPENDIX G
MIDWEST COLLEGE VISION, MISSION, AND SUCCESS MEASURES

MIDWEST COLLEGE VISION, MISSION, AND SUCCESS MEASURES

“If there is a need, we will meet it.”

We help individuals turn dreams into achievable goals through accessible, high quality, affordable, learning opportunities.

Midwest ...Bridge to the Future

Before us lie uncharted worlds of opportunity.

Midwest will be the bridge into that future, giving open access to opportunity, intellectual challenge, and self-discovery for students with diverse needs.

- With Midwest, people will pursue their quests for lifelong learning through affordable, high quality education.
- At Midwest, people will benefit from a caring approach to teaching and learning that provides personal attention and encourages individual growth.
- Through Midwest, people will be empowered with knowledge and skills for their journeys tomorrow.

This vision is expressed through Midwest's Mission Statement

Our mission is guided by our commitment to:

- Offer transfer and technical associate degree programs, certificate programs, and continuing education opportunities through a system of diverse resources and delivery alternatives accessible to the citizens of Montgomery County and the larger learning community.
- Provide quality instruction, educational activities, counseling, support services, and assessment tools to facilitate the growth and development of lifelong learners and to assist individuals to achieve personal and professional goals.
- Prepare today's workforce to meet the needs of a rapidly changing, technologically advanced, global economy through traditional and non-traditional alternatives.
- Challenge individuals to broaden their concepts of self, expand their views of the world and recognize their roles in a global society by fostering values that respect and celebrate diversity while promoting social responsibility, critical thinking, communication, and innovation.
- Promote the development and implementation of new ideas, provide leadership for collaborative activities, and serve as a resource center for community-based and regional partnerships
- Manage our human, physical, and financial resources in a caring, ethical, and prudent way that facilitates a working and learning environment focused on continuous improvement.

Core Indicators of Effectiveness

Institutional Key Performance Indicators

- Access to Success
- Community Focus
- Lifelong Learning
- Quality Workplace
- Student Development
- Stewardship

Division/Department Mission Models

Key Performance Indicators

Critical Performance Areas

Strategic Initiatives

Continuous Improvement Targets

Institutional/Division/Department/Team/Individual

The Six Core Indicators are:

- Access to Success: Midwest facilitates Access to Success for students to cannot achieve their educational goals through participation in meaningful learning opportunities.
- Lifelong Learning: Midwest facilitates Lifelong Learning through learning opportunities that promote personal and professional growth throughout one's lifetime.
- Student Development: Midwest facilitates Student Development inside and outside the classroom and supports development of the whole person.
- Community Focus: Midwest serves as a catalyst for regional cooperation and leadership.
- Quality Workplace: Midwest nurtures and supports a workforce and organizational Structure dedicated to continuous Improvement.
- Stewardship: Midwest ensures institutional effectiveness through prudent. use of College resources and dedication to continuous improvement.

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