

A CASE STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE  
IN A SMALL, PRIVATE JUNIOR COLLEGE

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by

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## Abstract

The purpose of this case study is to investigate how a small junior college fully transformed into a baccalaureate institution. The Burke-Litwin (1992) model of organizational change provided a theoretical framework for this study's design and analysis, as did an understanding of transformational leadership. This study's primary research question is: What has been the role of leadership in creating the organizational change required to transform Fisher College from a private two-year junior college to a four-year private baccalaureate institution? Sub-questions include: (1) How was the institution led through this transformational process?; and (2) How do stakeholders describe Fisher College's transformation and the role of leadership throughout the process? Multiple stakeholders were interviewed across departmental levels and roles, representing the various perspectives of the faculty, staff, the Board of Trustees, and the President. Senior level executives, middle managers, full time faculty and program directors contributed to a full understanding of the College's transformation. Analysis of the interview data led to the emergence of ten primary themes, and three major ideas. The President's role in driving organizational change was the single-most attributed factor to the success of the transformation; Alignment with the Board of Trustees was instrumental in facilitating change, as was Fisher's small, collaborative environment, which contributed greatly to its ability to undergo a rapid transformation; and organizational change needed to occur in parallel throughout the Burke-Litwin (1992) dimensions.

*Keywords:* transformational leadership, junior college, baccalaureate transformation.

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## Chapter One: Statement of the Problem

### The Topic

For several decades, the viability of the private junior college has been questionable, with a demonstrated decline in the number of private institutions offering a two-year associate's degree (Woodroof, 1990). The decline may be attributed to closings, mergers, and transformations as schools recognize the inability to maintain an enrollment model of less than 500 students, and demand for the private junior college degree continues to wane. Schools are further impacted by a lack of loyalty and alumni giving, and enrollment declines due to student transfers (Woodroof, 1990). Declining enrollments, small endowments and a decreasing demand for the credential all result in a nonviable business model, prompting the need for change (Kirby, 2011). There are fewer than 70 private junior colleges remaining, and their role continues to be scrutinized, particularly with community colleges offering affordable alternatives and more options than ever before (June, 2003). Even two-year community colleges have recognized the need for applied baccalaureate degrees, with eighteen states as of 2010 offering baccalaureate degrees through various models (Russell, 2010).

Junior colleges are considered small colleges, and are similarly at risk for changes in sustainability, as they are heavily tuition-dependent and rely on minimum enrollment thresholds for their annual operating budget (Fisher, 1983; Woodroof, 1990). Small private colleges are very susceptible to shifts in enrollment trends, and Cowan (1993) determined that successful turnaround was more contingent upon internal factors than upon external. Interestingly, many of the colleges reviewed in Cowan's (1993) study would have been positioned well for a positive outcome if the president had used data-driven decision making and put appropriate processes in

place to understand statistics and trends. With junior colleges so significantly at risk for a change in sustainability, there is a need for these organizations to continuously evolve.

### **Organizational Change in Private Junior Colleges**

According to Weick and Quinn (1999), organizational change can be viewed in one of two ways – “episodic, discontinuous, and intermittent,” or, “continuous, evolving, and incremental” (p. 362). Episodic change comes from organizations that are moving away from an equilibrium position, due to internal (e.g. loss of a leader) or external events (e.g. new technology or disruptive competition on the scene) (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Continuous change is a pattern of evolving adaptation and modification over time; it is cumulative and ongoing.

For the purposes of this study, an understanding of change is important, as institutional responsiveness during episodic change is very different from a pattern of response during continuous change. The role of leadership is to generate awareness and understanding, perform strategic decision-making and be a mobilizing force (Pettigrew, 1987). Organizational change requires transformational leadership to assist the institution in conceptualizing the change process, and overcoming cultural resistance to fundamental change (Burke & Litwin, 1992; Tichy & Ulrich, 1984; Woodroof, 1990).

A strong president is one of the most significant elements at a small college undergoing transformation (Cowan, 1993; Woodroof, 1990). Cowan (1993) conducted an extensive analysis of five small colleges that had successfully achieved viability after hovering on the brink, and determined that leadership from a transformative president who could initiate comprehensive change successfully was critical in addition to acknowledgment of the decline, and implementation of a turnaround process that involved collaboration. (Cowan, 1993). The president or leader of a college is a key figure in all of these aspects of transformation. This is



also evident in the Burke-Litwin model of organizational change, which was created in 1989 and updated through 1992. The model was designed to explore the relationship between organizational change and organizational performance, with the model's inputs considered to be leadership style, and the model's outputs represented as individual employee and organizational performance (Burke & Litwin, 1992). The Burke-Litwin model (1992) focuses on twelve variables<sup>1</sup>:

- External environment
- Mission and strategy
- Leadership
- Organizational Culture
- Structure
- Management Practices
- Systems
- Work Unit Climate
- Task requirements and individual skills/abilities
- Individual needs and values
- Motivation
- Individual and organizational performance

All twelve variables impact one another and the organization, ultimately demonstrating the main drivers of organizational performance, and how to create organizational change.

Fisher College is an example of a junior college that needed to transform in order to continue attracting and serving students. Fisher College underwent a significant organizational

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed information on the Burke-Litwin variables, see pages 530-533 of *A Causal Model of Organizational Performance and Change* (1992).

change in order to transform from a private junior college to a four-year baccalaureate institution. Fisher College is a small not-for-profit institution located in Boston's Back Bay, and has been in existence since 1903. Fisher has a traditional day school population of approximately 800 students, and a continuing education population of approximately 2,300. The organizational change encompassed several milestones, including the approval of two new baccalaureate degrees in 2008, bringing the total baccalaureate offerings up to three (Management, Human Services, and Media and Communications). In 2011 and 2012, both Psychology and Criminal Justice were approved as four year offerings, and in 2013 a bachelor's of science in Nursing was approved. 2013 also marked an increase in applications to bachelor's programs over associate's programs, at a rate of over 50 percent with 2,747 applications received for the fall 2013 semester.

### **Research Problem**

Institutions of higher education, particularly small colleges and private junior colleges, are constantly evolving and changing in response to both internal and external factors. External forces include governmental regulations, market conditions and economic issues, and internal forces include the culture of an institution, which is shaped by internal governance, leadership, the role of faculty, and the overall sense of community that is felt about campus (Dickeson, 2010). It is in this context that junior colleges, which serve a high number of marginalized students, are facing the need for transformation. Many junior colleges, which require data-driven decision making and a keen awareness of their operating budget and tuition dependency, often require restructuring to remain competitive, and end up closing before a turnaround or transformation is possible (Fisher, 1983; Woodroof, 1990). Because Fisher College was able to transform from a junior college to a four-year institution, there are lessons to be learned (Kirby,

2011). The case study of Fisher College will examine how a junior college can undergo this type of change process.

### **Justification for the Research Problem**

While this research problem has evolved from personal experience and curiosity as to how private junior colleges have handled an elevation to the higher degree, the problem of small college closings due to an unsustainable business model is detailed throughout the literature (Roueche, McFarlane, & Herrscher, 1971; Fisher, 1983; Woodroof, 1990; Cowan, 1993; Hagovsky, 2004; Martin & Samels, 2009; Armacost, 2011; Brown, 2011; Hayford, 2011; Kirby, 2011; Levine, 2011). Many case studies describe an institution's individual story and reflect the difficulty of achieving a viable business model with enrollments under 500 (Cowan, 1993; Armacost, 2011; Brown, 2011; Hayford, 2011; Levine, 2011). What is similar in these cases is that they all describe the difficulty small, tuition-dependent colleges have in maintaining their existing resources and preparing for future growth, particularly when enrollment targets are not met. The literature addresses the critical role of a transformational leader in creating positive organizational change by influencing several key variables, describing the President as change agent (Woodroof, 1990; Martin & Samels, 2009; Brown, 2011). Small colleges, such as junior colleges, differ from larger colleges with respect to capacity and management, and this distinctiveness also comes into play when evaluating leadership style and organizational change (McNay, 2002; Shinn, 2004; Eaker & Kuk, 2011).

Organizational change was the focus of a study by Eaker and Kuk (2011) which evaluated 45 small, four-year private colleges that had been in a declining state of enrollment but had gone through a transformation. In this study, a model was created to assist other colleges in their revitalization efforts, with the catalysts of change identified as new president, strategic

planning, and a new or reexamined mission (Eaker & Kuk, 2011). Even though the researchers found a lack of consistency among declining schools in how they approached revitalization (as this process was haphazard and conducted in an emergency response mode), one common feature in many of the schools was the president as an essential driver of organizational change.

The literature addresses the critical role of leadership in creating positive organizational change, and describes the president as a change agent (Woodroof, 1990; Martin & Samels, 2009; Armacost, 2011). For example, the case of Wilson College (Armacost, 2011) describes a full turnaround over a fifteen year period, driven by a new president. While many colleges suffer, fail, or convert to a new organization entirely, the success stories commonly recognize transformational presidents who are willing to make both innovative and difficult decisions (Woodroof, 1990; Armacost, 2011; Kirby, 2011). In this proposed study, Fisher College, a junior college turned four-year institution, will be examined to determine how organizational change was influenced by the institution's leadership.

### **Deficiencies in the Evidence**

Even though there are several narrative case studies on small colleges (Armacost, 2011; Brown, 2011; Gleazer, 1982; Hayford, 2011; Levine, 2011), there are few studies that analyze the closure of private junior colleges, and even fewer works that take a research-based approach to studying the private junior college. Medinger (1994) conducted a quantitative dissertation study on the closure and vertical expansion of private junior colleges from 1960 – 1990, and evaluated the relationship between junior college transformation to the baccalaureate, junior college closure and expansion of public two-year colleges within the same timeframe. Kelley (2007) evaluated the decline of the junior college and its link to the growth of two-year public institutions. These were the only studies found that analyzed the collapse of junior colleges as a

type of institution; single case exploration on individual junior colleges were much more common.

More recent articles focused on junior colleges have been published in journals such as the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (June, 2003; Kelderman, 2010; Strosnider, 1997; Van der Werf, 2000), all related to declining enrollment impacting the future of small colleges. These articles all describe the cycle of decline highlighted by Eaker and Kuk (2011). Eaker & Kuk's (2011) study describes the spiral of decline and transformation through their observation of small liberal arts colleges; while informative, it focused on small, non-selective, private four year institutions, and not junior colleges.

It is evident, from a review of junior college case studies of organizational change, that there are no examples of junior colleges in the literature that have been able to transform into baccalaureate institutions, and the case studies that are available are frequently written or largely informed by the president of the college (Armacost, 2011; Brown, 2011; Gleazer, 1982; Hayford, 2011; Levine, 2011). These articles, despite publication in peer reviewed journals, provide more of an anecdotal narrative based on data sources such as local press, letters from the president, the president's autobiography, a personal journal, alumni publications, and an interview or two. They do not take a research-based approach to data collection, reflecting the perspectives of multiple stakeholders.

Even though there is a focus on the president in the literature on junior college transformation, few articles analyze the role of leadership in influencing the transformation. Similar to the flaws mentioned previously with the narrative cases, the discussion of leadership and its direct linkage to organizational change is not grounded in the literature, and there are no detailed and specific references to how a leader strategically and tactically achieved positive

change. While leadership is frequently mentioned as a flaw or a cause for institutional demise, such as the case of Antioch (Hayford, 2011) that went through several changes in leadership leading to distrust for the position, the cases are not grounded in an analysis of leadership behavior or the study of organizational change.

Based upon the literature from small/junior colleges, there are gaps that inquiry could help address. There is a need for studies that demonstrate how junior colleges were able to transform and remain viable institutions of higher education, as success stories are lacking. Furthermore, there is a need for studies that utilize a variety of data sources and that interview multiple stakeholders. Finally, there is a need for research that addresses the role of leadership and organizational change in institutional transformation.

### **Relating the Discussion to Audiences**

A prime audience for this study is institutional administrators, governing boards, and the faculty, staff, and students who are a part of private junior colleges grappling with a declining business model. Fisher College was once challenged with this same problem. A study focused on the leadership that drove Fisher's transformation to a baccalaureate college informs others facing the same tensions.

### **Significance of the Research Problem**

Private junior colleges serve a large population of students who are unable to succeed or even gain acceptance to other private institutions. This population is characterized by many first generation students, non-traditional students balancing outside employment and families, and academically underprepared students who did not attain high grade point averages in high school. In many ways, community colleges mirror the population served, but tend to reflect even more diversity with respect to age range and part time status. The role of small private junior

colleges has been to provide a two year associate's degree, and prepare students for success through employment or transfer to the baccalaureate level.

Private junior colleges are appealing to this population of students for many reasons. Small class sizes, individualized attention, entry into a non-profit, private college with a good reputation (particularly when in an ideal city setting), and terminal-degreed faculty all support students in their success. Students are able to engage on a smaller campus in a different and more meaningful way, particularly when they have a residential option and student support services such as counseling and tutoring at their campus. Many students transfer from the community college setting in the second half of their freshman year, or beginning of their sophomore year, because they have failed in a larger and more intimidating setting with less support provided. Because private junior colleges are able to nurture this fragile group of students through higher education, it is important that this group of schools remain viable. The findings from this study will inform organizational change in junior colleges so they can continue to serve this population of students.

Many private junior colleges have transformed into four-year institutions to remain viable, but some have closed and some are still struggling to survive amidst rising costs and declining enrollment. Private junior colleges are significantly more expensive than community colleges, and must therefore offer a unique advantage. In the past, this has existed in the form of a niche program offering, a more personalized experience, or a particular religious affiliation. For instance, Dean College in Massachusetts was marketing the rarity of the two-year experience in 1997, hoping to attract enrollments. However, the two year model was not viable, and Dean now offers five bachelor's degrees in addition to its associate's degree offerings (June, 2003). There is a need for a deeper understanding of how private junior colleges can remain true to their

roots and continue to serve this important student population, but within a business model that has a sustainable future. These institutions can be transformed and strengthened through transformative leadership from within the school.

A study of organizational change and the leadership required for a junior college transformation provides insights and guidance for schools that are struggling, or schools that still require transformation to remain sustainable. Two-year private colleges cannot sustain enrollments of 500 or fewer long-term, have a difficult time with fundraising and development, and ultimately put their future at risk by not offering four-year degree options (Woodroof, 1990). Martin and Samels (1994, 2009) uncover this same phenomenon in their research and through their consultancy. As a business, it is not wise to rely heavily on uncontrollable external factors, such as acceptance of transfer credits at surrounding institutions (Martin & Samels, 2009). This study examines the organizational factors that private junior colleges need to consider, so they can continue to do the important work of providing differentiated education for their students.

Small schools want to provide individualized attention and support, particularly to at-risk student populations who are commonly attracted to two-year programs. This population is dependent upon smaller class sizes and increased support services for successful persistence. The question remains as to how a leader effects organizational change, transforming a two-year college to a baccalaureate-granting institution while maintaining all of the elements that attracted its student body in the first place. A detailed case study of Fisher College will describe the intricacies involved in a complicated transformation, ultimately revealing a success story that the academic community may turn to as they face their own institutional transformations. The study will be particularly relevant to college presidents and trustees working to understand how a school can transform to remain viable, at the same time retaining its original mission.



While a transformational leader is required for large-scale change, traditional leadership models do not and cannot fully describe the nature and complexity of organizational leadership (Uhl-Bien and Marion, 2009). A strong leader must adapt depending on the situation presented. Relationships and situations are not simple, and there are unpredictable variables that come into play with organizational change; it is important for the leader to maintain a profile that has the ability to respond to the unknown, to enable an organization that can weather impending storms of any magnitude (Mason, 2008; Uhl-Bien and Marion, 2009). An understanding of the impact of leadership upon variables that drive organizational change at a private junior college transformed to a baccalaureate granting institution will be useful for senior leadership at other colleges desiring change.

Currently, the faculty and staff of Fisher College, including myself, believe that our school was able to transform. We have documentation of the transformation process, and an understanding of what change was required within the institution to satisfy all accrediting bodies. The New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), for example, required significant change within its eleven standards. However, we do not have an understanding of which variables were specifically impacted, and how leadership contributed to the cultural and organizational changes that took place within Fisher College. This study assists our institution in understanding the process that transpired. An understanding of this process is particularly useful as Fisher College undergoes a new strategic planning cycle and considers its future. Fisher has recently gone through an accreditation approval process to offer its first master's degree in business administration, again with its primarily at-risk student population in mind. An understanding of the leadership required for transformation, and how key variables were

influenced to drive organizational change, is also useful to the Board of Trustees as they discuss succession planning.

### **Positionality Statement**

This positionality statement was constructed to understand and explore the ways in which experience and opinion may influence both perceptions of higher education and an approach to research. In order to maintain a neutral approach, the role of intuition, bias, and blind spots must be explored as they relate to topical interest, inclusion of sources, and methodological approach.

My relationship with Fisher College began in 2008, and was my first experience working in higher education, outside of my own educational experiences as a student. While initially hired to build the Center for Leadership in Public Service and secure grant funding, I was promoted after a year to the President's Chief of Staff. In 2013, I was appointed a Vice President, and work closely with the President daily to inform the strategic direction of the college and progress the institution toward achieving its strategic plan goals and serving students in a way that transforms their lives. Since 2008, I have been a participant observer in the college's transformation to a baccalaureate institution. I have conducted research, analyzed options, provided recommendations and have helped shape the direction of the college.

Since my first role in higher education was at Fisher College, it is all that I have known. While I have had exposure to other institutions over the years through education and partnerships, my perspective is limited. I believe that the transformation of Fisher from a private junior college to a baccalaureate-granting institution was essential for its survival. Working with the president and participating in making the necessary, but often difficult, decisions required to move Fisher to the next level has given me an appreciation for transformational leadership, and has certainly impacted my perspective. While co-workers view me in a decision-making role,

they also understand my passion for supporting the college and desire for the truth. As a researcher, conveying this will be a top priority.

Prior to employment in 2008 at Fisher College, my exposure to the experience of at-risk, low-income, and first generation students was limited. Today, however, the perspective of these students, their success and access to quality education is a daily consideration. Many Fisher College students require support and direction, as missed appointments and academic probation are common. Many students do not have the luxury of familial involvement and support, and are very much on their own to navigate territory that is new and foreign to them. Many students arrive with a lack of college-readiness and do not have the foundational skills required to succeed, but programs that Fisher has implemented over the last several years to support and address these issues are beginning to positively impact their success, and readiness levels and retention rates are improving.

Seeing success through targeted retention initiatives has led me to believe that these students do have the capacity – and can build the motivation – to excel and graduate. I personally believe that no student should have to settle for a degree that will not result in gainful employment. Many students come to Fisher thinking a two-year degree is all they are capable of achieving. However, the opportunity for a baccalaureate degree is within their reach, and a personalized education can help them achieve their goals. Where they would get lost or ignored at a larger school, the staff, faculty and support services at Fisher, along with small class sizes, have enabled success. This research study explores how the leadership at Fisher College inspired a small, private junior college to transform to a baccalaureate institution, without losing its initial student base and resulting in more options for student success and increased access.

Some biases that could have impacted the study include my position as an administrator at Fisher College, and my belief in the importance of education and its business role, requiring innovation within the business model to maintain stability. Higher education is heading to a place where baccalaureates must be offered to create a viable business model, as reflected in career requirements. Institutions must increase offerings and access to baccalaureate education for all student populations, and position students for success in obtaining advanced degrees and jobs. I fully recognize that I do not view a two-year degree as an appropriate terminal credential for someone who is interested in a career beyond a vocational pursuit. Since I have never attended a two-year institution, I am limited in my ability to relate to the student perspective of what drives initial preference for choosing a two-year over a four-year college. However, I have observed many of our students with competing priorities, such as the need to balance a job or family while in school. This is something I can relate to, as my graduate coursework was completed while raising four children and working full-time.

There is always a risk that personal beliefs may influence case study conclusions and interviews with co-workers. As a part of Fisher's leadership team, there is the acknowledgment that perspective is limited; being an active participant in the decision-making process makes it difficult to evaluate the quality of communication and the impact of decision-making. It also introduces the possibility that participant responses take into consideration the working relationship. I work closely with all members of the senior leadership team, as well as the faculty and Board of Trustees. However, participants were put at ease immediately and reassured that no information that was shared would have repercussions or be attributed to them in the study. I also remained cautious about "reactivity" as described by Maxwell (2005), which results from controlling too much.

Several readings on positionality in education research have revealed that scientific research requires taking the individual's full context into consideration (Carlton Parsons, 2008). It is important to present the authentic viewpoints of research subjects, which can be a challenge when you hear things in an interview and assign meaning to a statement (Briscoe, 2005). However, the ability to maintain multiple perspectives and come to evidence-based conclusions is possible for a scholar-practitioner, who has been trained to understand bias and look to multiple external sources for clarity on an issue.

Briscoe (2005) describes the issue of recording data and translating findings. It's simply impossible to view the world completely through another's perspective, let alone several other perspectives of differing socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. As a scholar-practitioner, my job was to remain aware of these issues, and take steps to ensure an inadvertent subordination did not occur. I worked diligently to ensure my bias as an administrator did not interfere with interviewing or analysis, and participants confirmed the interview transcripts through the process of member-checking.

### **Research Questions**

The primary research question for this study was: What has been the role of leadership in creating the organizational change required to transform Fisher College from a private two-year junior college to a four-year private baccalaureate institution?

Sub-questions include:

- How was the institution led through this transformational process?
- How do stakeholders describe Fisher College's transformation and the role of leadership throughout the process?

## Theoretical Framework

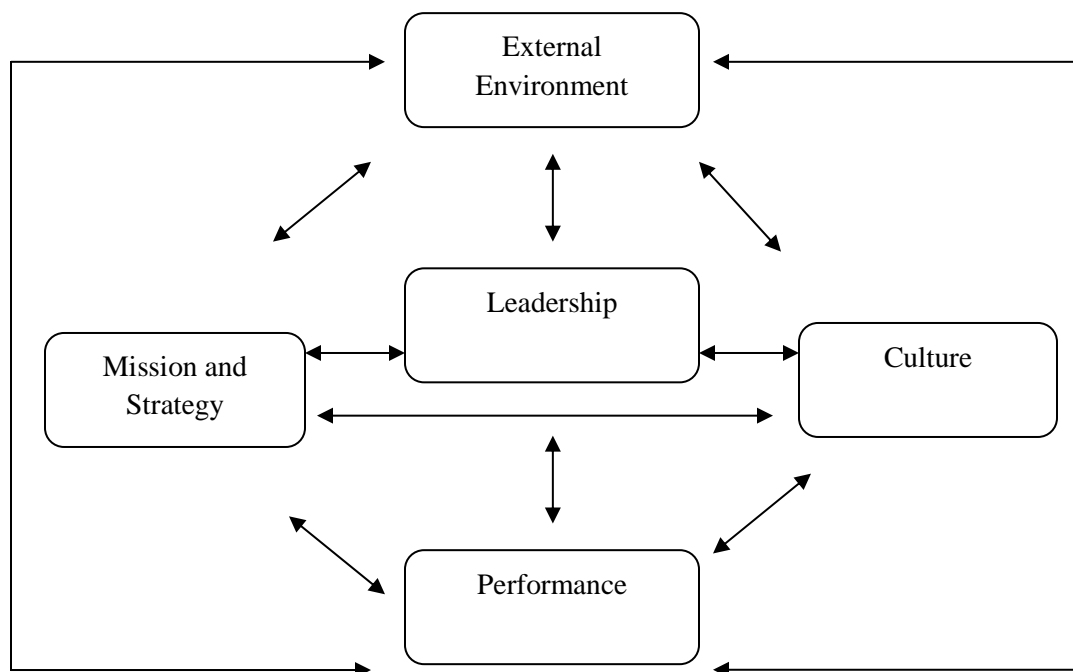
The study explores the role of Fisher College's leadership in transforming the college from a two-year junior college to a four-year baccalaureate institution. Both organizational change theory and leadership theory came into play when examining this junior college's transformation. Fisher College as an organization required significant change to improve its effectiveness (Burke & Litwin, 1992), and a transformation of this magnitude is reliant upon the organization's leadership (Burke & Litwin, 1992). Transformational leadership enables collaborative problem-solving through individualized support, intellectual stimulation, an overarching vision, and modeling change (Hallenger, 2003).

Transformational leadership as a concept was first introduced by Burns (1978) when describing political leadership, and was further refined and defined by Bass (1998) and Conger and Kanungo (1998) through differentiation of what followers and leaders offer each other. Transformational leaders are considered to offer great vision and purpose that defines long-term focus, strategy, and goals, inspiring followers to identify with the leader and work toward a common purpose (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Bass (1985; 1990; 1998; 2008) describes the four dimensions of transformational leadership to include idealized influence (i.e. charisma), inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized attention or consideration. Idealized influence is another way of describing charisma, and speaks to how much others respect, admire and trust the leader. Inspirational motivation is how a leader creates and communicates a unified vision for the future, providing meaning to all stakeholders. Intellectual stimulation is defined as the leader's ability to support innovation and inspire followers to think about things in new ways. Individual consideration is the leader's ability to take into

consideration an employee's individual needs, working with them to support their professional growth (Bass, 1990).

Transformational leadership has been associated with positively influencing several of the processes and outcomes within organizations, including job satisfaction, job performance, commitment to the organization, behavior relating to good citizenship, and attitudes toward adopting best practices (Walumbwa et al., 2005). Burke (2011) describes transformational factors as influencing the external environment, and ultimately the organization's mission, strategy, and culture. Transformational leadership attributes are deemed critical in creating an overarching vision and motivating followers to become a part of the turnaround solution (Avolio & Luthans, 2006; Bass, 1998). Many studies have demonstrated that the factor that influences organizational change the most is leadership, leading to significant improvements over time (Fleishman, 1953; Weiner & Mahoney, 1981; Smith, Carson & Alexander, 1984). Since this research study has been bound by the period of time from 2007 – 2014 (the current President's tenure through the participant interview dates), a theoretical framework focused on the growth and change spurred by this particular President aligns well.

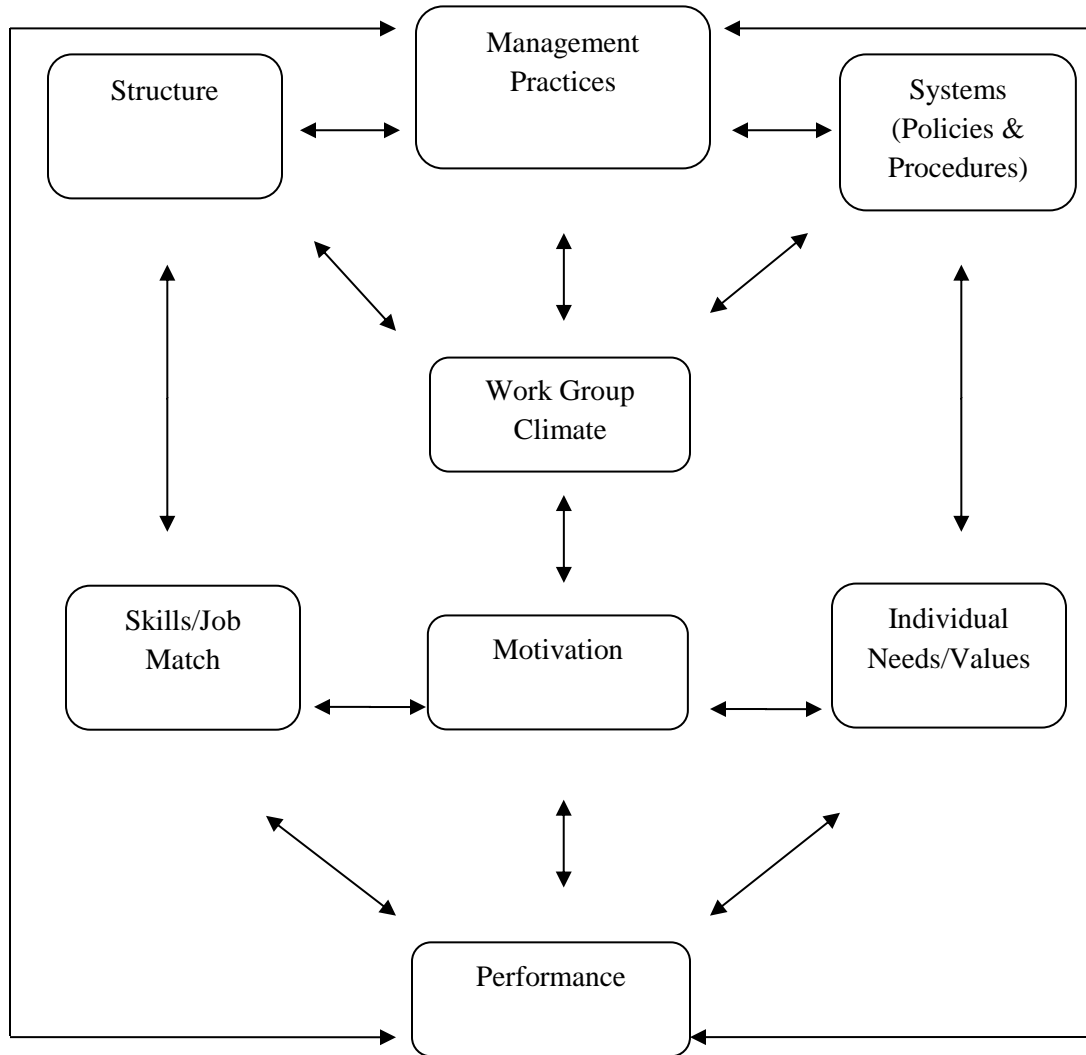
For the purpose of the study, the role of leadership has been explored through an understanding of the twelve Burke-Litwin (1992) model variables that impact one another and the organization. These variables are the main drivers of organizational performance, and represent how leadership creates organizational change. There are both transformational variables (associated with leadership) and transactional variables (associated with management) in the model. The transformational variables are depicted below, in Figure 1, and represent the top half of the model:



*Figure 1.* Transformational Variables. This figure demonstrates the top half of the Burke-Litwin model

The arrows between the variables depict the influence they have upon each other, and the fact that a change in one variable can have a ripple effect throughout. These transformational variables are impacted by strategy and key decision-making, attributed to the organization's leadership and evidenced by their behavior. The top portion of the model (transformational variables) has a larger impact on the bottom half of the model (transactional variables). Figure 2 depicts the transactional variables, which is the bottom half of the Burke-Litwin model. These variables are considered more "operational and incremental" when considering organizational change (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 537).





*Figure 2.* Transactional Variables. This figure demonstrates the bottom half of the Burke-Litwin model

While there are several drivers for change identified, leadership is the model's third dimension, and is known to influence the way change is accepted and perceived throughout the organization. Strong leadership impacts the way change is adopted, as well as the pace, depending on the demonstrated prioritization and commitment by senior leaders (Burke & Litwin, 1992).

Organizational change was important for this study because there is a need to understand how leadership impacts the variables that result in the transformation of a junior college. Burke and Litwin (1992) acknowledge that “astute leaders are people who scan their organization's external environment, choose the forces they wish to deal with, and take action accordingly” (p. 530). While the role of presidential leadership is important, examination of organizational change acknowledges the larger system that undergoes transformation and the contributions of other primary stakeholders. The literature on organizational change tells us that assessing the variables that influence an institution is a first step in transforming and changing an organization. Collecting data on every variable was important, as well as understanding how variables impacted one another. When evaluating the influence a leader has on a junior college's transformation to a baccalaureate college, it is important to understand how the president prioritizes and influences the twelve variables of the Burke-Litwin (1992) model.

Semi-structured interviews were the primary source of data collection, with supporting statistics, documentation and archival records accessed directly from the site at Fisher College when clarification or confirmation was required. Interviews were conducted and data was analyzed to determine what and how components of organizational change led to Fisher's transformation. Clarifying data was provided by the Office of Institutional Research to provide context and history around information gathered in the interviews, and work as a validation point for information provided by participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Each variable was addressed through targeted interview questions to determine the impact and importance of the variable on Fisher's organizational change, as well as examples of specific strategies and tactics that effectively drove change. Within the leadership variable, interviews were used to determine if transformational leadership emerged as the primary style of

the President, or if a different style and approach was employed. Ultimately, the study provides insight into the variables that most impacted a private junior college looking to transform to a more viable business model.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

As mentioned previously, private junior colleges are particularly at risk given their tuition dependency, limited resources, limited programming, an inability to significantly fundraise, and a reliance on achieving enrollment targets (Woodroof, 1990; Martin & Samels, 2009). Small colleges are very susceptible to shifts in both external and internal environments, and open discourse is required to create the organizational change required for survival (Cowan, 1993). Response to enrollment and budget dips vary, but a successful college turnaround requires solid leadership from a visionary and transformative president who understands how to maintain and influence key stakeholder relations (Cowan, 1993). When examining transformational leadership and the critical role of the President in organizational turnarounds, of particular importance is the leader's role in sustaining an institution's viability, and avoiding its closure. Transformational and transactional leadership attributes are deemed critical in creating an overarching vision and motivating followers to become a part of the turnaround solution (Avolio & Luthans, 2006; Bass, 1998).

The role of the college president, as the leader of a school, is critical to an institution's success. What makes a president effective in running a small private junior college, and what creates a situation doomed for failure? What is the role of transformational leadership in facilitating organizational change? This literature review explores the unique challenges small, private junior colleges face, noting several specific instances of success and failure, as well as the overarching theory involved in transformational leadership, which ultimately drives successful change.

## **The Literature**

Literature selected for review was relevant to the topic and published recently, with allowances made for historical relevancy and when certain topical areas were lacking coverage in recent publications, such as articles specific to the private junior college experience. Work was selected that revealed elements required for a successful transition to a baccalaureate institution, with a particular focus on college leadership and its role in organizational and cultural change, or identity transition. Several individual cases detailed in peer reviewed journals were examined, as well as studies that compared and contrasted defunct and viable organizations, evaluating the differences and looking for critical elements that led to viability. Additional articles examined the cycle of decline in an organization, and the presidential perspective when making decisions in a small, private college environment.

Due to a distinct gap in the literature relative to private junior colleges, several dissertations were reviewed. However, this review still did not yield substantial examples of the transformation of a private junior college to a baccalaureate institution. The role of leadership in private junior college transformation was also seldom discussed. Dissertations (Fisher, 1983; Hagovsky, 2004; Kirby, 2011; Roueche, McFarlane, & Herrscher, 1971) revealed a historic narrative approach, often focused on a single college's story. Much of the literature was published in the 1970s and 1980s, and in the newly published dissertations, transformation is often attributed to a strong leader, but also reveals heavy dependence upon another tactic such as a co-ed conversion or institutional partnership to spur enrollment growth.

## **Organization**

This review of the literature contains three major sections, followed by a conclusion and description of areas requiring further research. The first section focuses on transformational and

transactional leadership theory and its role in organizational change. Private junior colleges differ from larger institutions in both environment and culture, which translates to leadership, communication, and decision-making challenges and opportunities. The second section addresses organizational change by providing a definition and an understanding of its role in small private college transformations. The last section discusses turnarounds, mergers, and small college closures, examining the differences that exist in a small college environment, as well as the impact of transformational leadership on distressed institutions.

### **Transformational and Transactional Leadership: Philosophy and Impact**

The past two decades have revealed an immense interest and focus in transformational-transactional leadership theory. The concept was first introduced by Burns (1978) when describing political leadership, and was further defined by Conger and Kanungo (1998) through differentiation of what followers and leaders offer each other. Transformational leaders tend to offer great vision and purpose that defines long-term focus, strategy, and goals where transactional leaders focus on what resources need to be exchanged to obtain goals; where followers identify with the leader and in transformational leadership, followers receive something they want in exchange for something the leader wants in transactional leadership (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). This may be characterized as a reward exchange, in that the leader rewards the follower with a pay-off, such as a bonus, flex-time, or change in salary (Burke, 2011).

Burns (1978) defines transformational leaders as those who create change, never leaving a situation the way they found it (where the situation may be defined as an organization, a community, a nation, etc.). He describes transactional leadership as more common and less impactful than transformational leadership. More specifically, Burns describes transactional

leaders as those who view leader-follower relations as a transaction, with followers receiving rewards (such as a salary increase, bonus, or leave time) for doing something that pleases the leader. Transactional leadership may result in change, but not the kind of change that is dramatic or transformational in nature (Burke, 2011). However, Bass (2008) notes that the most effective leaders rely on both transformational and transactional leadership methods in achieving their objectives. He describes the four dimensions of transformational leadership as including charisma, inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized attention and consideration (Bass, 2008).

Burke (2011) defines transformational factors as operating on a larger and more impactful plane, influencing the external environment, and ultimately the organization's mission and strategy, and organizational culture. Transactional leadership includes the three dimensions of contingent reward, active management by exception and passive management by exception (a differentiation of the two is attributed to the timing of management's intervention) (Bass, 2008). The Burke-Litwin (1992) model of organizational change identifies transformational factors as being closely linked with leadership, and the transactional factors as being closely linked to management. This is an important distinction when one considers how to maintain the status quo, versus creating cultural change and organizational transformation.

### **Characteristics of Effective Leaders**

Timing is indeed critical to a leader's effectiveness. Burgess, Riddle, Hall and Salas (1992) conducted a review of literature associated with leadership and stress, and determined that the qualities of effective leaders in times of stress show a greater likelihood of being open to input from followers, a tendency toward collaboration and integrating team efforts, and were more approachable and unthreatening. They also demonstrated a greater tendency to

communicate transparently, explaining their decisions and actions. This style can be defined as transactional or transformational, with characteristics of authentic leadership as well (Avolio & Luthans, 2006).

During times of stress, effective leadership is competent leadership – the leader must be supportive of personnel, provide structure and vision, prioritize what must be done first and clarify individual roles, provide effective communication and coordination, and maintain focus, calm, and presence (Weinberg, 1978; Ziegart, Klein, & Xiao, 2002). Transformational leadership (Bass, 2008) demonstrates care and concern for followers, inspiration through clear vision, and messaging that convinces followers they are part of a larger purpose and what they do matters, eliminating feelings of isolation and hopelessness in the face of threats. Many studies have demonstrated that the factor that influences organizational change the most is leadership, leading to significant improvements over time (Fleishman, 1953; Weiner & Mahoney, 1981; Smith, Carson & Alexander, 1984).

Transformative leadership theory tells us that effective leaders raise morale, motivate employees and inspire individuals toward change (Bass, 1985). Effective leaders also have the ability to establish trust, not only with followers but also with external stakeholders (Burke, 2011). Leadership theory is helpful in revealing what must be present to ignite a turnaround, but currently does not do so in the literature on junior colleges.

### **Leadership at Small Private Colleges**

Small colleges are generally defined as those with enrollments under 1,000, and are greatly impacted by even the loss of a few students term to term. Success often hinges on creativity and diligence, tight fiscal controls and a culture of data-driven decision-making and accountability (Woodroof, 1990; Bates & Santerre, 2000; Biemiller, 2012). A strong president



greatly influences a small college's future, making both innovative and difficult decisions, taking on the appropriate amount of risk, and transforming the culture to align with an overarching vision to ultimately preserve a campus (Kirby, 2011).

**Role of the Junior College President.** Unfortunately, the literature is scant with respect to private junior colleges. There are even fewer articles and studies specific to the role of leadership in the private junior college setting. A recent article by Morris and Miller (2013), "*Leadership in a Time of Peril: the Private Junior College President,*" describes that the number of private junior colleges has dwindled from 350 to approximately 51. Morris & Miller (2013) identify the role these institutions play in serving a population that would not have attended otherwise. Morris and Miller (2013) went on to survey the presidents of the remaining junior colleges to understand the role of leadership, and the president's perception of upcoming challenges. 17 usable responses were returned, and the presidents identified the most important roles as Entrepreneurial, Planning, Caretaking and Advocating. The top challenges faced by these presidents included obtaining fiscal resources, maintaining the physical plant, and attracting new students. Ultimately, the authors conclude that:

The long-term challenge for private junior colleges is something more than immediate survival, but how they are able to define and enhance their niche markets in a manner that can support the physical plant and labor necessary to offer a strong academic experience. The identification of this 'niche' market will be predicated on strong presidential leadership that can collaborate effectively with a governing board to identify what the future can look like. (Morris & Miller, 2013, p.134)

Morris and Miller's (2013) work offers a significant contribution, but fails to mention that many junior colleges have opted to abandon their two-year status and have expanded to baccalaureate programming to survive. This requires change on many levels, and it is important to understand

the differences between small and large colleges as small private junior colleges move toward growth and expansion.

**Distinct Leadership Challenges at Junior Colleges.** A distinct leadership challenge for small colleges is the fact that they differ greatly from large colleges with respect to resources, how they are run and managed, as well as the culture that pervades the institutions. McNay (2002), Shinn (2004) and Eaker and Kuk (2011) point out that there are several cultural differences that make small colleges distinct from larger institutions, including the tendency to specialize in fewer disciplines, and the nature of the institution's size lending itself to a more familial environment. These differences point to specific leadership needs at small colleges.

Small colleges are closely connected to the community making public relations a key factor for leadership. McNay (2002) describes how the informal environment leads to crossover between the institution and the larger town community, which may lead to information gathering as well as conflicts of interest, depending on the nature of the interactions. Opportunities arise for information to spread fast, and for little things to become larger issues that spread across the institution. Communication becomes a large priority to ensure the accuracy of information, and this is often easier to achieve at a small private college than at a large, bureaucratic institution (Puglisi, 2011; Lee, 1979; Brown, 2011). It is therefore important that the president possess a strong degree of political savvy, excellent communication skills, transparency and an understanding of how to navigate layers of governance to create buy-in across the institution. In the absence of a strong leader, governance issues can spin quickly out of control.

### **The Impact of Unionization and Shared Governance**

Factors that impact college leadership at small institutions may include the presence of a union, and the desire of faculty to adopt a shared governance model. Lee (1979) points out that

the presence of a union provides formal power to the faculty and broadens the locus of control. A faculty union represents the interests of the faculty, and addresses issues such as salary and benefits, retirement, workload, promotion and tenure terms, grievance processes and procedures, and the faculty's voice in decisions impacting the institution. Other departments may also unionize, such as maintenance staff, and work through collective bargaining to create policies and procedures for complaints, as well as establish compensation and workload guidelines. Once a union mobilizes, a legal foundation is established and the relationship between faculty and administration bears that tone.

For small private colleges, unionization is currently a threat, but not a reality. Private college unionization has been under increased scrutiny since 1980, when *NLRB v. Yeshiva University* deemed faculty as "managerial employees" and ineligible for collective bargaining. The right to organize and bargain collectively dates back to 1933 with the National Industrial Recovery Act (NIRA), and later by the National Labor Relations Act of 1935 (NLRA or "Wagner Act"). Another amendment came with the Labor Relations Act of 1947 ("Taft-Hartley Act") (Kaplin & Lee, 2007). Clearly the coverage extending to private institutions flip-flopped as amendments came and went, but a 1970 decision in *Cornell University* by the NLRB cemented jurisdiction of private, non-profit colleges and universities. This was affirmed a year later in *C.W. Post Center of Long Island University* (1971). In 1980 a landmark case was made in *NLRB v. Yeshiva University* when faculty were excluded from the right to unionize given their substantial managerial duties.

In 2005, the NLRB ruling on Carroll University rejected an argument that the university's religious freedom would be impacted by the presence of a union, and it was permitted; furthermore, the claims by Carroll that the faculty possessed managerial control, similar to *NLRB*

*v. Yeshiva* (1980), were rejected in 2007 (Jaschik, 2009). The ruling was based on the level of faculty control in non-academic matters, which was deemed non-substantial. However, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit Courts ended up reversing the NLRB ruling on the basis of religious ties (Jaschik, 2009). This demonstrates the fickle nature of court rulings, and the continued consideration that must be paid to the possibility of unionization on private college campuses.

The president could face significant difficulty in fighting the right of the faculty to unionize and enter into a collective bargaining agreement. The impact of a union on the campus is very large. Unionization's greatest impact is on the timing of decision-making, as it can slow down the process by requiring additional layers of approval (Lee, 1979). In the words of Rhoades (2011), "Faculty unions do not guarantee that faculty and managers will collaborate successfully" (p.26). Currently Fisher College, along with other small private colleges, is not unionized, but unionizing would dramatically impact governance structures.

Despite a leader's best efforts, when institutions are weighed down by slow decision-making, a sluggishness and inability to adapt to a changing external environment becomes an issue, and morale can be weakened (Shinn, 2004). The president has a very difficult job to do when morale is low and campuses feel divided, with an attitude of "us versus them" forming among the administration and the faculty. In addition to working with the union, the board of trustees is another entity at junior colleges that shares governance with the president.

### **Board Relations in the Small College Environment**

In "Advice to Presidents of Struggling Colleges," Puglisi (2011) provides guidance to presidents in a small private college setting, noting the importance of developing a solid relationship with the Board of Trustees, and educating them on the principles of finance, the

cyclical nature of revenue from tuition and other sources, and the strategic approach used in setting tuition rates. When board members lack a finance background, a president's job can be more difficult, as the board may offer erroneous advice or attempt to make budget cuts to the academic program, which would impact the institution's mission. It is the president's job to protect the college's integrity, stay positive and consistent with communication, and work with the administrative team to creatively solve problems. Communication must be constant and truthful, with no surprises, to maintain the board's confidence in the president (Puglisi, 2011).

Richard Chait (2006) addresses the relationship between boards and presidents, pointing out that boards either idolize and defer to the president, or bulldoze the leader with arrogance. Boards are also comprised of multiple views and members very rarely agree with one another, resulting in misgovernance (Chait, 2006). Benchmarking and adhering to best practices are solutions for mitigating internal strife and creating a more harmonious relationship between the board and the president (Chait, 2006).

Healy and Peterson (1979) found that key administrators, including the president, often withheld information from the board until situations were almost beyond repair. The board requires accurate and timely information to assist in decision-making. A recommendation to avoid this information delay is a board-appointed staff person serving on the administration, with the intent of data gathering and presenting accurate information at every board meeting (Healy & Peterson, 1979). Directly related to this issue is the board's expectations of the president. Healy and Peterson (1979) determined that boards typically maintained inflated expectations of what the president could achieve, and in cases of college closure often blamed the president, or tolerated inept leadership for far too long.

In sum, the board and the president must have an open relationship based on communication and trust. The board must be diligent in keeping a close eye on the financial well-being of the institution, and if members of the board lack financial training, expertise or training needs to be provided to fill the gap. A strong and effective president understands the need to provide timely and accurate information; to avoid doing so is detrimental to the college's future.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

The role of the president is vital to the success of the institution, and the Association of Governing Boards and Colleges (AGB) affirms this with a 1996 report entitled, "Renewing the Academic Presidency: Stronger Leadership for Tougher Times." The report notes the presidency has weakened over time, and colleges are unable to be as flexible and responsive as they have in the past (AGB, 1996). Several recommendations were made throughout the report, including 1) clarification of governance responsibilities to aid in clear decision-making, 2) board support when presidents are being attacked by internal or external parties, 3) alignment of faculty commitment to their subject matter with commitment to the institution, and 4) the reduction of state government involvement (bureaucracy/red tape) in exchange for the institution's commitment to greater effectiveness, better performance and desirable outcomes (AGB, 1996). One of the interesting points is the need for boards to often look outside academia for an effective president who is willing to take risks to maintain the college's enrollment and market position (AGB, 1996; Morris & Miller, 2013). A transformational leader (possessing charisma and providing inspirational motivation, intellectual stimulation and individualized attention and consideration) is well-positioned to align all stakeholders in a common vision required for organizational change.

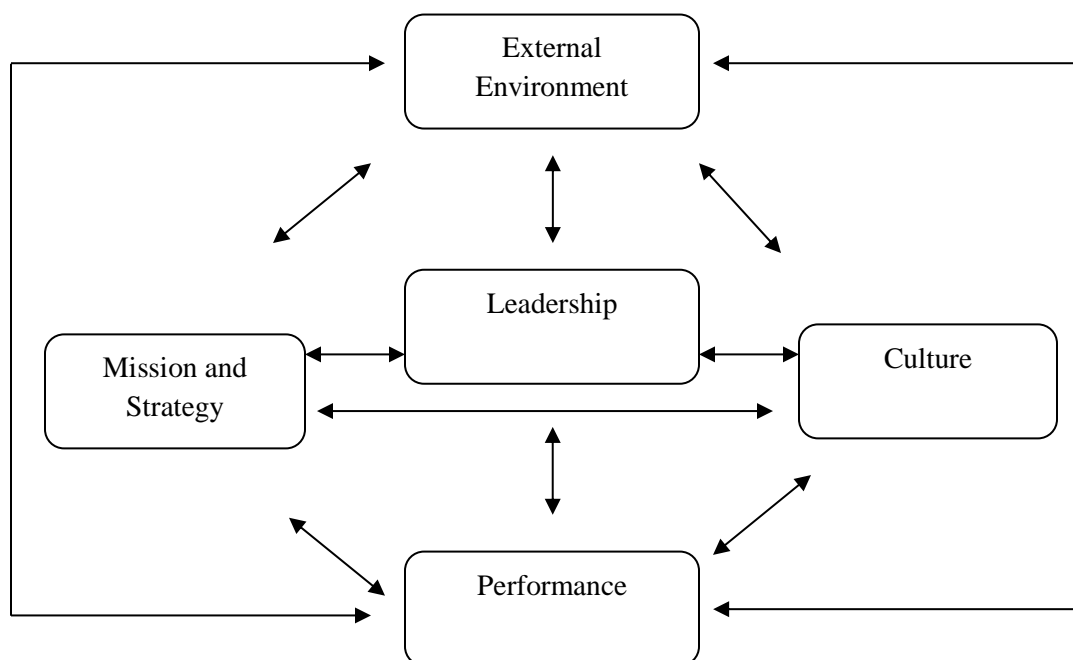
## **Organizational Change**

Organizational change is a process by which businesses undergo transition, transformation, or evolution. According to Weick and Quinn (1999), organizational change can be viewed in one of two ways – “episodic, discontinuous, and intermittent,” or, “continuous, evolving, and incremental” (p. 362). Episodic change comes from organizations that are moving away from an equilibrium position, due to internal (e.g. loss of a leader) or external events (e.g. new technology or disruptive competition on the scene) (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Continuous change is a pattern of evolving adaptation and modification over time; it is cumulative and ongoing.

For the purposes of this study, both definitions of change are important, as institutional responsiveness during episodic change is very different from a pattern of response during continuous change. The role of leadership is to generate awareness and understanding, perform strategic decision-making and be a mobilizing force (Pettigrew, 1987). Organizational change requires transformational leadership to assist the institution in conceptualizing the change process, and overcoming cultural resistance to fundamental change (Burke & Litwin, 1992; Tichy & Ulrich, 1984; Woodroof, 1990).

A strong president is one of the most significant elements at a small college undergoing transformation (Cowan, 1993; Woodroof, 1990). Cowan (1993) conducted an extensive analysis of five small colleges that had successfully achieved viability after hovering on the brink, and determined that leadership from a transformative president who could initiate comprehensive change successfully was critical in addition to acknowledgment of the decline, and implementation of a turnaround process that involved collaboration. (Cowan, 1993). The president or leader of a college is a key figure in all aspects of transformation.

This is also evident in the Burke-Litwin model of organizational change (Burke & Litwin, 1992), which was created to explore the relationship between organizational change and organizational performance. The Burke-Litwin model (1992) focuses on twelve variables that impact one another and the organization, ultimately demonstrating the main drivers of organizational performance, and how to create organizational change. There are both transformational variables (associated with leadership) and transactional variables (associated with management) in the model. The transformational variables are depicted below, in Figure 1, and represent the top half of the model:

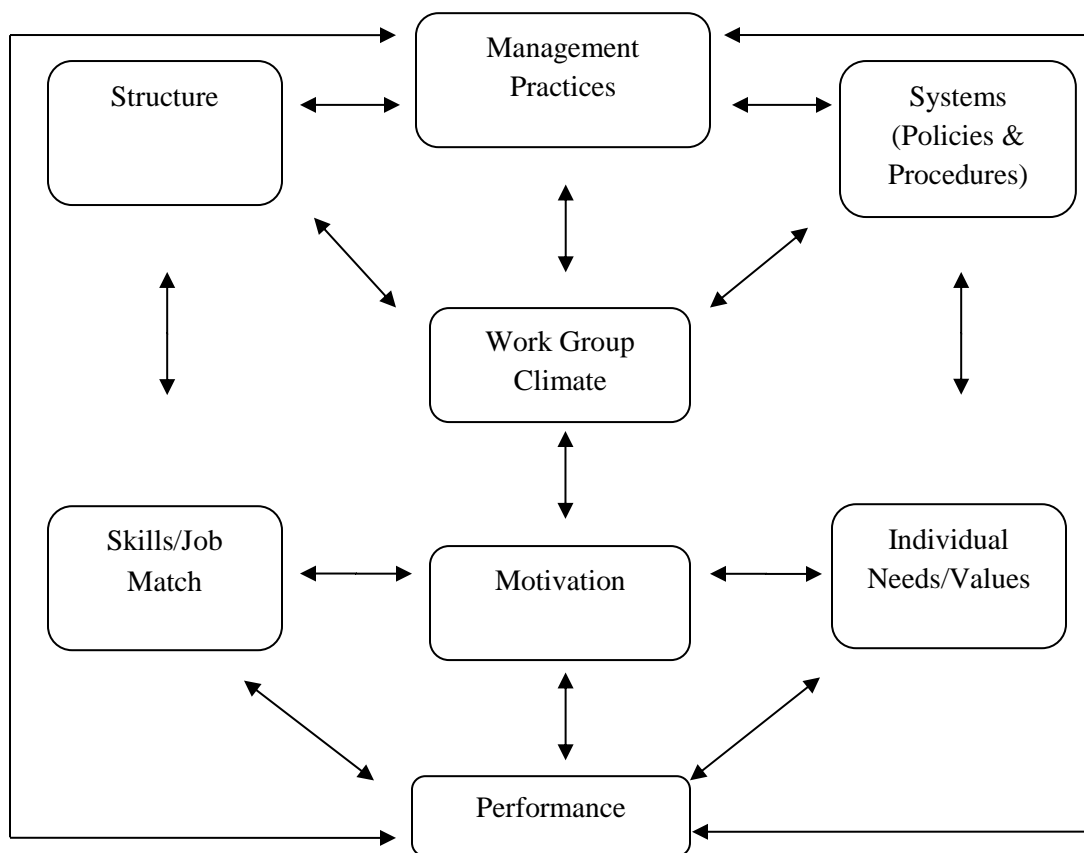


*Figure 1.* Transformational Variables. This figure demonstrates the top half of the Burke-Litwin model

The arrows between the variables depict the influence they have upon each other, and the fact that a change in one variable can have a ripple effect throughout. These transformational variables are impacted by strategy and key decision-making, attributed to the organization's



leadership and evidenced by their behavior. The top portion of the model (transformational variables) has a larger impact on the bottom half of the model (transactional variables). Figure 2 depicts the transactional variables, which is the bottom half of the Burke-Litwin model. These variables are considered more “operational and incremental” when considering organizational change (Burke & Litwin, 1992, p. 537).



*Figure 2.* Transactional Variables. This figure demonstrates the bottom half of the Burke-Litwin model

While there are several drivers for change identified, leadership is the model’s third dimension, and is known to influence the way change is accepted and perceived throughout the organization. Strong leadership impacts the way change is adopted, as well as the pace,

depending on the demonstrated prioritization and commitment by senior leaders (Burke & Litwin, 1992).

For the purposes of this study, organizational change is important because there is a need to understand how leadership transforms junior colleges. The literature on organizational change tells us that assessing the variables that influence an institution is a first step in transforming and changing an organization. Collecting data on every variable is important, as is understanding the weight of the impact one variable has upon another. When evaluating the influence a leader has on a junior college's transformation to a baccalaureate college, it will be important to understand how the president both considered and influenced the twelve variables of the Burke-Litwin (1992) model.

A transformational leader is considered by some scholars to be essential to managing a transition from a two year to a four year institution (Bemmel, Floyd, & Bryan, 2009). According to Bass (1988), a transformational leader maintains perspective and clear vision, as well as self-awareness. The leader knows what the future will look like, and commands organization-wide coordination and boundary control, adapting in a reflexive way with emotional intelligence, as the situation evolves (Bass, 1988).

### **The Role of the Transformational Leader in Small College Turnarounds**

A strong president is critical at small colleges fighting to maintain or grow enrollment. Small colleges are particularly at risk for a change in financial viability, due to heavy tuition-dependency and being subject to harder hits in economic downturns (Kirby, 2011). This is evidenced by the lack of remaining private junior colleges in today's higher education system. With fewer than 70 private junior colleges remaining, their role continues to be called into question (June, 2003).

## **Role of the President in Small Colleges at Risk for Closure**

The structure of small private colleges puts them at risk for closure. A study by Bates and Santerre (2000) examined private college closures of baccalaureate-granting institutions from 1960 – 1994, and determined that with the exception of the 1970s, colleges were less likely to close than other types of businesses. Rather, mergers were more apt to occur than complete closure, and the factors influencing closure included declining tuition rates and increasing faculty salaries (Bates & Santerre, 2000). Both of these factors are negated, however, by the presence of large enrollments and an operating budget with a surplus; a large student base means continued viability for private colleges (Bates & Santerre, 2000). Colleges with enrollment of fewer than 500 are considered at-risk, and strong leadership is required for a turnaround (Woodroof, 1990).

When examining the role of the president in school closures, it is interesting to reflect on the struggle between maintaining financial viability and curbing costs. Institutions frequently enter a downward spiral of cutting costs, shocking the culture, ruining the institution's reputation and further fueling the enrollment decline. Cowan (1993) conducted an extensive analysis of five small colleges that had successfully achieved viability after hovering on the brink, and determined that elements required for a successful turnaround included early acknowledgment of the decline by leadership, guidance from a transformative president who could initiate comprehensive change successfully, and implementation of a turnaround process that involved collaboration. It was also critical to examine the root cause of the decline, and not just the symptoms, such as decreased enrollment (Cowan, 1993).

Leadership breakdown may lead to a cycle of decline (Eaker & Kuk, 2011), which includes deferred maintenance, layoffs and program cuts, campus conflict, and decreased morale. The financial issues result in declining enrollment, which continues to perpetuate the financial

issues. As enrollment decreases, standards slip and a lesser quality student is accepted, leading to the profile and reputation of the college declining, retention and persistence issues, increased tensions and the furthering of poor morale and campus conflict (Eaker & Kuk, 2011).

A study of 45 private institutions with enrollment of less than 5,000 was conducted by Eaker and Kuk (2011). These institutions had recovered from either a severe financial decline, or a decline in student quality. The Eaker and Kuk (2011) study revealed that the top three variables referenced when pointing to the cause of decline were: (a) financial issues, (b) enrollment, and (c) leadership problems. The most prevalent means for addressing decline was through a change in presidential leadership, the addition of academic programs, targeted fundraising, and the prioritization of enrollment. Ultimately, the most successful activity across colleges to grow enrollment was the addition of academic programs to create new market opportunities, but a strong leader is required to successfully navigate accreditation hurdles while in a state of decline (Eaker & Kuk, 2011).

### **Transformation Strategies of Small Colleges**

Enrollment is impacted by what a college has to offer, and colleges who innovate as early as possible when realizing their numbers need to improve are in the best position to overcome a crisis. Eaker & Kuk (2011) observed liberal arts colleges adding non-traditional programs with a career focus, expanding into new disciplines, smaller campuses adding evening divisions to capture a new market of adult learners, institutions changing their name in an effort to rebrand and single-sex colleges moving rapidly to co-ed to capture more market share. All of these changes require risk and most often the catalyst was a new transformative president with a bold vision for dramatic growth (Eaker & Kuk, 2011).

In those instances where colleges are unsuccessful and succumbed to the spiral of decline, the organization's demise should not be considered a complete waste. Walsh and Bartunek (2011) evaluated six cases and discovered a process where new organizations are founded and actually benefit from the prior experience of former employees from defunct organizations. The lessons learned actually contribute to stimulate innovation and idea creation in the next generation of organizations.

One of the cases discussed by Walsh and Bartunek (2011) was a small college that simply could not sustain itself, despite their best efforts. In this instance, members of the college community worked together to resuscitate pieces of the organization they valued. They established a Foundation to serve as a tribute to alumni, as well as a living legacy (Walsh & Bartunek, 2011). The outcome would not have been possible without a president that maintained healthy relationships with internal and external stakeholders, such as faculty, alumni and the community at large. This idea is creative and breathes new life into a defunct organization, but relies on proper communication and decision-making from a transformative and visionary leader. This theme and emphasis on the importance of strong leadership, solid communication, and critical decision-making is carried through several other college case studies as well.

### **Case Studies on Junior College Transformations**

While there are several things that can be learned from small colleges related to organizational change and transformative leadership, the stories of junior college transformations are particularly informative. What follows is a review of studies that were conducted on junior college transformation and a summary of lessons learned from those cases.

**Wilson College.** The same scenario can have a different ending when the college's leadership does not garner buy-in, communicate appropriately and build support for the

initiative. The story of Wilson College, detailed by Armacost (2011), emphasizes the importance of shared decision-making and communication to key stakeholders in small college closure.

What follows is a description of Armacost's interpretation of the situation.

Wilson College was founded in 1869 as a women's college with a gift from Sarah Wilson. While the college was small, the size of the full-time faculty had grown to 36 by 1990. The faculty to student ratio was approximately 7:1 and several associate's degrees were converted to baccalaureate options, and articulation agreements put into place with the surrounding community and technical colleges. By 1998, however, the campus maintained over 30 buildings and owned over 250 acres of land. While some of the land was leased, rented and sold, there was a large physical plant to maintain for a small residential student population. The college turned to nontraditional sources of revenue, hosting conferences and establishing a daycare on campus. Despite an endowment of \$4M, a hired consulting firm had determined the college lacked identity, suffered from an over-application of resources (too many faculty for too few departments and students), and had a lack of planning and no solid enrollment.

Wilson College was told it needed a minimum of 1,000 students to remain viable. The administration did not believe it had any options but closure due to year after year of declining enrollment and deficits. The board voted to close the college and transition its assets to a foundation formed in the spirit of the college's mission – one committed to helping women achieve their educational goals. After the announcement, students were incensed and contacted key alumni to raise support for a reversal; three months later, the courts found in favor of the plaintiff and not the institution, resulting in reversal of the closure.

As a result, the president and one board member were removed while several other board members resigned. The new president, Donald Bletz, formerly maintained a role as the

president's assistant, and also served as a professor. Amazingly, the college was able to achieve a complete turn-around over the next fifteen years. Alumni and volunteers provided with support, both financial and labor-related. While the President had initially supported the closure, and the Board agreed, information was not shared and the external environment was not considered. A transformative President was lacking in the old regime, and the crisis was handled as if there were only one solution. It took alumni and the judicial system to shed light on the fact that options existed, and a new leader to share an inspired vision, resulting in success.

**St. Mary's College.** Sometimes a strong leader needs to take the pulse of the operating environment and determine that indeed, there is only so much that can be done in the face of an adversary and conservative board, and, lacking the ability to change the board structure, a school may need to close. In the case of St. Mary's College, Brown (2011) describes a decade of poor trustee/presidential relations. The president attempted many times to describe the campus's failing viability, supported by outsourced consulting opinions and many failed fundraising campaigns, but innovative ideas such as accepting men to a traditionally all-female institution were met with resistance from both the board and alumni. Ultimately, dismal enrollment signaled accreditation risk beyond repair, and the president carefully guided the administration and the board to the same conclusion. Thanks to his foresight, the college had options, including becoming a four-year preparatory school. The college had run a high school as part of its operation with limited success, but with all resources focused on this new mission, the college was able to achieve a substantial rebound as a leading high school and met its enrollment goals of nearly 300 (Brown, 2011). After the announcement, fundraising increased significantly and a \$16M capital campaign was put into place to vastly improve the campus (Brown, 2011). A healthy endowment was reestablished, and the high school maintains an international reputation

for excellence. This transformative leader maintained the vision for how to turn the situation around, ultimately saving many jobs and keeping a community campus vibrant.

**Bradford College.** Bradford College is another private institution, similar to others that have closed: a victim of high tuition dependency, enrollment under 500, limited programming and resources, small endowment, high employee attrition, with a liberal admissions policy and a sizable campus of 19 buildings to maintain (Levine, 2011). A new president assumed the role in 1982, tasked with performing a turnaround, but knowing that enough uncertainty about the college's future remained and a Plan B for closure was in the works (Levine, 2011). The new president, just 33, lacked higher education administration experience. However, the president's personality was a true fit for a turnaround, as he maintained a necessary comfort level with risk (Levine, 2011). The president raised \$15M for a capital campaign and put Bradford in a solid financial position before his departure, but the college ultimately closed in 2000 under different leadership; an \$18M loan taken to double the size of the dormitories was not backed by increased enrollment, and ultimately bankrupted the institution (Levine, 2011).

**Antioch College.** Antioch College is an interesting case of a small college subject to repeat closure: Antioch closed four times over a 150 year period (Hayford, 2011). As described by Hayford (2011) in a case study of Antioch, the first two closures were related to budgetary shortfalls (one during the Civil War) and the second two to enrollment drops resulting in budget deficits. When the Board brought in a corporate-based turn-around artist in 2006, the initiative failed and the President left after a short time, citing a toxic environment. Operations were suspended for 2008, with the intent of reopening in 2011, and faculty and alumni criticized the Board for its secrecy and lack of communication, along with a lack of cooperation with other campuses in the larger university system. Again the issue of communication and decision-



making comes to the forefront at Antioch, demonstrated by a revolving door of seven appointed presidents from 1994 to 2008.

March of 2012 found Antioch attempting a fresh start, with 33 students finishing up the winter quarter (Biemiller, 2012). A promise of free tuition for the students who were part of the initial four classes resulted in the college receiving 3,200 applications for the fall semester (Biemiller, 2012). Accreditation, however, will not be forthcoming for several years, and there is much work to do to build a budget that can support the institution's plans. Antioch is on its way, however, as a \$35M windfall resulting from a start-up technology company sale increased the endowment to a healthy \$52M (Biemiller, 2012). Nevertheless, a new leader has much work to do in transforming the culture in an environment like Antioch's, overshadowed by a strong board presence, political issues and a deeply rooted culture of distrust and history of failure (Hayford, 2011).

**College of Charleston.** When a college has appropriate communication and recognizes early on the need for change, a successful turnaround is possible through innovation and creativity. In the case of the College of Charleston, it took a new president to identify a losing situation. President Stern, a former navy captain, quickly recognized that declining enrollment, budget deficits, accreditation scrutiny and the threat of new market competition were a recipe for disaster (Brown, 2011). After an initial attempt to salvage the institution through a restructure and the addition of new programs, he quickly changed course and lobbied the state to grant the College of Charleston the ability to become a public institution, instead of maintaining their plans to open a new public college in the same geographic area (Brown, 2011). The success was tremendous – the College of Charleston moved its endowment to a private foundation and became a public institution, growing enrollment from approximately 500 students to over 5,000

by the time President Stern retired in 1979 (Brown, 2011). Stern's success is attributed to his vision and willingness to take risks, and his political savvy (Brown, 2011). For this kind of turnaround success to occur, Brown's account of Charleston notes that several elements must be present: vision, creativity, communication, and healthy community and government relations.

**Innovation at Southern New Hampshire University.** In an article describing the impact of transformational leadership in the United States through several case examples, Dess, Picken & Lyon (1998) observe several required elements for a successful business turnaround. The status quo must be constantly challenged, with a focus on innovation to ward off the competition and maintain market share (Dess, et al., 1998). Additionally, a leader must make fast decisions and create a sense of urgency within an organization, aligning the culture with the overarching vision and goal-setting. Data-driven decision-making and strategic planning are also critical for success, and the leader must institutionalize the change with focus and accountability (Dess, et al., 1998). This is evidenced in higher education, where many observe the pace is slower than the corporate sector, but time and time again the innovative institutions are coming out ahead, with the rest of the market struggling to keep pace.

An example of this is Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU), deemed a pioneer of online education, and the only university listed in Fast Company's World's 50 Most Innovative Companies, ranked 12<sup>th</sup> in 2012 (Kamenetz, 2012). Southern New Hampshire's innovation is attributed to a transformational leader, President Paul LeBlanc. He takes traditional ideas of higher education and sees what else is out there, constantly focusing on new delivery models, increased flexibility, accelerated courses and real world experience (Kamenetz, 2012). While other institutions are discussing which general education requirements may need to be phased out, LeBlanc is discussing contract delivery to an entire city to offer higher education to its

workforce under one contract (Kamenetz, 2012). It is clear one of the keys to a successful future for many small private colleges and universities will remain the transformational leader.

**Case Study Leadership Lessons.** In exploring the literature on small colleges and the critical role of the president in times of duress, it must be noted that few success stories exist, and the tales are commonly more tragic. Even though there are several narrative case studies on small colleges (Armacost, 2011; Brown, 2011; Gleazer, 1982; Hayford, 2011; Levine, 2011), there are few studies that analyze the closure of private junior colleges, and even fewer works that take a research-based approach to studying the private junior college.

It is evident, from a review of junior college case studies of organizational change, that there are no examples of junior colleges in the literature that have been able to transform into baccalaureate institutions, and the case studies that are available are frequently written or largely informed by the president of the college (Armacost, 2011; Brown, 2011; Gleazer, 1982; Hayford, 2011; Levine, 2011). These articles, despite publication in peer reviewed journals, provide more of an anecdotal narrative based on data sources such as local press, letters from the president, the president's autobiography, a personal journal, alumni publications, and an interview or two. They do not take a research-based approach to data collection, reflecting the perspectives of multiple stakeholders.

Even though there is a focus on the president in the literature on junior college transformation, few articles analyze the role of leadership within the transformation. Similar to the flaws mentioned previously with the narrative cases, the discussion of leadership is not grounded in the literature, and there are no references to a specific leadership style being attributed to positive change. While leadership is frequently mentioned as a flaw or a cause for institutional demise, such as the case of Antioch (Hayford, 2011) that went through several

changes in leadership leading to distrust for the position, the cases are not grounded in an analysis of leadership behavior or leadership theory.

What is similar in these cases is that they all describe the difficulty small, tuition-dependent colleges have in maintaining their existing resources and preparing for future growth, particularly when enrollment targets are not met. Transformative leadership theory tells us that effective leaders raise morale, motivate employees and inspire individuals toward change (Bass, 1985). Effective leaders also have the ability to establish trust, not only with followers but also with external stakeholders (Burke, 2011). Leadership theory is helpful in revealing what must be present to ignite a turn-around, but the cases reveal that timing is critical. Other elements also greatly impact a leader's success in executing a turn-around, such as communication and transparency, key stakeholder and community relations, and critical decision-making with an appropriate level of risk.

The literature on school closures emphasizes the pain that always accompanies college closure, and resistance must be overcome through communication and transparency (Brown, 2011; Armacost, 2011; & Hayford, 2011). While many college closures are spurred by blindness and denial, they are all exacerbated by poor decision-making and a culture of secrecy and distrust. Response to the enrollment and budget dips vary, but a successful college turnaround requires solid leadership from a visionary president who understands how to maintain and influence key stakeholder relations. Small colleges are particularly susceptible to shifts in the external and internal environment, and open discourse is required to create the organizational change required for survival.

### **Summation**

The president is a transformative force in crisis situations such as college closures, and

when the president lacks the ability to be an innovative visionary, cases demonstrate that the board is thrown into a decision-making position. Generally the outcome is an unrecoverable closure, as they were taken from a position of general oversight and put into an on-the-ground decision-making mode, in the 11<sup>th</sup> hour. When the president possesses those qualities necessary for organizational transformation, such as effective communication and creativity, the college is shown to achieve success or a viable second option is often presented (such as an effective foundation conversion or a conversion to a public college, or a school with a new mission such as a preparatory high school).

Transforming a private junior college can be overwhelming for any institutional administrator. The common impetus for change driven is a failing business model, which does not bode well for organizational change. Organizational change can be difficult to manage in high times, let alone times of economic stress (Woodroof, 1990). Case after case of failed transformation provides no clear indication of what distinguishes successfully transformed institutions from those that collapse in transition, with the exception of references to leadership. Transformational leadership is known to be critical to the process (Kirby, 2011), and future research should examine more specifically the strategies employed by a transformational leader in a private junior college turnaround.

There is a need for studies that demonstrate how junior colleges were able to transform and remain viable institutions of higher education, as success stories are lacking. There is also a need for studies that utilize research methodologies that can capture perspectives of transformation beyond the narrative of the president. As this review has demonstrated, the president is important, but there are also other key stakeholders to consider, such as the board and the faculty, that influence both organizational change and transformation. As such, there is a

need for studies that utilize a variety of data sources and that interview multiple stakeholders (Morris & Miller, 2013). This study is designed understand the role of leadership in the transformation of a junior college using case study methodology.

### Chapter Three: Research Design

The purpose of this study was to better understand the nature of Fisher College's success with organizational change, through the lens of the Burke-Litwin (1992) model, and with an understanding of transformational leadership theory. The Burke-Litwin model hypothesizes that both external and internal factors impact organizational performance and its ability to change. It provided a framework to assess which variables are important for transformation, and how they are linked, which can help organizations diagnose how change occurred, or plan for future change. There are 12 dimensions that the organizational model revolves around (Burke-Litwin, 1992), including the following:

- External environment – an external factor that impacts the organization's performance (i.e. the economy, political situations)
- Mission and strategy – the organization's mission and strategy as stated by the organization's leadership, and followed, believed in, and adhered to by employees. What is the organization's mission and how does it achieve this over time?
- Leadership – behavior by senior level executives that establishes guidance and direction for the organization, as well as employee/follower perception of leadership's behavior and values.
- Organizational Culture – the norms, values and beliefs that guide the organization. Culture is strongly influenced by tradition - past history and past practice - within the organization.
- Structure – usually depicted by an organizational chart, the structure of the organization refers to how employees are functionally arranged within specific areas and with certain levels of responsibility. Structure impacts level of decision-making authority, how

employees and departments communicate with one another, and ultimately how these relationships work to carry out the organization's mission.

- Management Practices – leadership's use of labor, financial, and material resources to carry out the organization's mission and strategy.
- Systems – the organizations systems are its policies and processes that ultimately facilitate and control how work gets done, how employees are rewarded, and how information is input, analyzed, and output (examples: budgeting process, computer information systems, performance appraisal system).
- Work Unit Climate – climate refers to the impressions and feelings of employees working within a department (how they feel about working with one another, and their department supervisor, as well as the ability to work with other departments).
- Skills/Job Match or, put another way, Task Requirements and Individual Skills/Abilities – in order for an employee to be effective at their job, they must possess the right skill set, knowledge, and abilities. This dimension evaluates if employees are a fit for their specific job based on exhibited behavior.
- Individual Needs and Values – refers to the psychological factors required for an employee to feel they provide value and worth to the organization for their contribution.
- Motivation – behavior and energy exhibited by employees that reflects a desire to take action and achieve goals (often reflected by curiosity, displayed initiative); in an organization, the combined motivation of employees leads to discovery and innovation, as well as affection and information sharing among employees).
- Individual and organizational performance – performance refers to the indicators and achievement of results (service quality, customer satisfaction, productivity, profit).



Coupled with an understanding of the role of leadership in driving successful organizational change, analyzing the transformation of Fisher College provided awareness and the potential to impact the future of other private junior colleges. This chapter describes the research project's methodological approach, including a description of the research design and tradition, study participants, the approach for data collection and analysis, data verification and study design limitations.

The primary research question for this study is: What has been the role of leadership in creating the organizational change required to transform Fisher College from a private two-year junior college to a four-year private baccalaureate institution? The study was approached from an interpretive paradigm, which brought a participant frame of reference instead of the researcher playing a purely observatory role, engaging the researcher in the discovery process to make sense of findings and apply meaning (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003).

### **Research Design and Tradition**

A qualitative case study methodology allowed for the exploration and examination of how the transformation worked in a single setting through in-depth data collection methods from a variety of sources, determining how and why it was successful (Merriam, 1998). Colleges and universities are constantly evolving in response to external factors, such as the changing economy, regulatory environment and competitive landscape. Successful organizational change within institutions of higher education requires effective leadership. This case study of Fisher College explored the role and influence of leadership within the organizational change process, allowing for recommendations for best practice. Therefore, this study explored the process by which a president of a small, private, two-year junior college led the change to a 4 year institution. The role of leadership was examined within the context of the overall organizational

change process, determining what elements were critical to Fisher's ability to successfully change as an organization, and how the institution's leadership (a new, transformative college president) influenced the change.

The study was bound by the 2007-2014 timeframe, and interviews were conducted with key stakeholders and participants, including the current president, board members, faculty, and staff who were present during the major transition. Thematic connections among all sources of evidence uncovered the essence of the transformation, chronicled elements of its history, and revealed the true drivers of change and progress. The case study approach allowed for data from multiple stakeholders to be analyzed, with supporting evidence provided from the College's Office of Institutional Research, ultimately revealing and confirming themes among the data (Yin, 2009). Multiple sources also provide an in-depth understanding of the case and its context (Creswell, 2013).

This research question worked best with a case study approach. As the researcher, I am leveraging my role within the college as participant-observer. My time at Fisher College has mirrored the president's tenure, and I have unrestricted access to the site and participants through my existing employment. I have been observing the transformation and actively participating in the success of the college since 2008, and currently serve as the President's Chief of Staff and Vice President of Strategy and Planning. Ultimately, this case study's findings will enable other small private schools to reframe their strategies around growth and business viability. The research will also enable Fisher College to understand itself better – what happened to support and drive successful change within each of the variables of the Burke-Litwin (1992) model, and what should be considered for future strategic plans as the College continues to grow. Exploration of this topic was best approached through a case study.

## Research Site

The research site was a single setting, Fisher College. Fisher College is an institution of higher education, offering associate's degrees, bachelor's degrees and certificate programs. The traditional day school campus is located in Boston's Back Bay, with adult continuing education locations in North Attleboro, New Bedford, Brockton, Boston and Online. Fisher serves traditional students living on campus or commuting from their homes; international students seeking a cosmopolitan city; and adult learners, whether in a traditional or virtual setting, balancing work and family. Rising interest in Fisher is evidenced by record enrollments, new programs, and expanding services and activities. The Back Bay cornerstone is unlike any other college setting, and its proximity to all that Boston has to offer is invaluable. Fisher College's total enrollment was approximately 2,100, with a traditional day school population of 800 students in the fall of 2013.

Fisher College believes in the equalizing power of education, and its appeal stems from its friendly campus and commitment to small classes and career readiness. Fisher works with many first generation students, priding itself on dedicated counseling and access to resources. International students comprise approximately 20% of the day school population, with over 30 countries represented.

Fisher College's executive team, comprised of Executive Council members and the President, realized in the strategic planning cycle from 2005 to 2010 that a move to the baccalaureate was warranted. The process involved three community meetings and planning approval from the Board of Trustees. Many students were transferring, and reasons cited in their departure interviews included a lack of baccalaureate offerings in their preferred area of study, the need for greater intellectual challenge, and minimal student organizations. The

administration also recognized a need to better prepare its graduates for the work force, and grow enrollment through purposeful expansion of baccalaureate degrees and the physical plant. The addition of new baccalaureate degrees and focused, relevant, market-ready fields of study was imperative. The College worked to ensure that sufficient resources were available to support programs in order to become a thriving baccalaureate institution (Strategic Planning Cycle 2011-2016).

### **Participants**

Purposeful sampling was relied upon to successfully recruit participants for the study. My existing role was leveraged and collegial working relationships with faculty, staff, the Board of Trustees and administrators increased access to key stakeholders. Participants were recruited on the basis of their contributing knowledge, and participation was voluntary. A variety of stakeholders were recruited to understand how the institution's leadership influenced organizational change within each of the twelve variables in the Burke-Litwin (1992) model, and to understand how participants view and perceive their professional experiences during Fisher College's transformation.

Participants in the study were recruited based upon the contributions they were able to provide from their unique perspective. All participants took part in the transformation process through their various roles at the college. Participants were chosen based on their employment dates (being present throughout the transformation to a baccalaureate was required), their level of involvement, access, and interaction with the college's leadership throughout that time, and ultimately the potential for insight into the organizational change process. It was important to select personnel who had been working at the institution since before Dr. McGovern's Presidency, or at a minimum since 2007.

Participants were selected to ensure representation of multiple key stakeholder perspectives across the college. Lastly, in selecting participants, it was important to ensure a balance of individuals who could speak to both transformational and transactional elements, to fully represent the variables in the Burke-Litwin (1992) model. The participant list represented faculty, senior staff, board members, the president, and managers. The intentional selection of participants is referred to as “purposeful sampling,” (Creswell, 2013) and requests were made of 13 individuals, and 11 participated in the study. The participant list represents a diverse range of stakeholder perspectives, including a board member, four senior administrators (two with faculty status), two faculty members, three mid-level directors/managers, and the President.

Participants were recruited on the basis of their contributing knowledge, their willingness to reflect on the topic of interest, and their time and availability. It is important to note that each participant in this study maintains a different role at Fisher College and has had a different experience with the transformation process based upon that role. While some participants may not have had a major role in effecting change during the college’s transformation, they all had the opportunity to observe and consider the change from a unique vantage point. Next, I will briefly describe each participant’s stakeholder category in order to provide some context on their positions and connection to the transformation process.

**Participant Descriptions.** Because the Board of Trustees is responsible for oversight related to finances, governance, strategic planning and approving new academic degree programs, at least one participant was essential to understand the important role of the Board in the transformation process. Recruitment criteria for board representation focused on both tenure and candor.

Faculty are responsible for shaping the curriculum and delivering content to the students. The faculty were well represented through two solid, long-time members of the faculty through several decades and changes in administration. They offered a pure faculty perspective and provided feedback on organizational change from a self-study accreditation perspective as well, having worked to prepare the college on several accreditation visits. One of these faculty members also maintains a position as Dean, and is involved with curricular programming and international student services; she has worked at the college for over thirty years. Two members of the Executive Council also serve on the faculty, and were recruited.

Fisher's Executive Council meets weekly to discuss operational issues, establish and revise policy, strategize and plan for the College's future. The college's Executive Council is comprised of seven individuals, myself included. The Chief Academic Officer and Dean of the Division of Accelerated and Professional Studies serve on the faculty and maintain a dual role as senior administrators. The Vice President of Enrollment and Dean of Students have been at the college for over a decade, and were recruited. The Vice President of Enrollment's insights into recruitment strategy, and Dean of Student's comments on how student services have evolved to meet baccalaureate standards were essential to the study.

Unit climate, hiring, and management practices are an important part of the Burke-Litwin (1992) model of organizational change. Insights into these variables and their impact on the college's transformation are relevant to a full exploration of the model. Therefore, two to three manager or director level individuals who could speak to working conditions, managing employees, communication across departments, and performance appraisal/human resource issues were included as participants. The Director of Operations/Finance is the longest serving employee in the Finance Department, and has been with Fisher for over a decade. His father is a

historian and has detailed the evolution of Nichols College. Given his appreciation for the research process and case studies, and his tenure and position at the college, he was a prime participant. The Director of Athletics was also able to provide additional insights into the college's transformation, having over a decade of experience and significant student interaction; he also worked under four presidents.

Lastly, the President was an important interview, particularly since this President has been associated with Fisher College in some capacity for the past three decades. Interview protocols (Appendix A and B) describe what questions were asked of each participant within each variable. Participants in this study were contacted in person or via telephone, and the purpose of the study was explained. A copy of the research will be provided upon the study's conclusion as incentive to participate. There were no issues with participation, as established working relationships with all targeted participants were established, and fellow employees have been supportive of doctoral research. The culture at Fisher College is one that supports educational research. It was made expressly clear to each participant that participation was strictly voluntary.

### **Access**

As mentioned previously, my role at the college as Chief of Staff and Vice President of Strategy and Planning afforded unique access to the site and key stakeholders, allowing participant recruitment at all levels. Having a solid relationship with the Board of Trustees, senior executive team, faculty and staff at the college has assisted me in researching Fisher's organizational change. I also had access to all of the college's records, and many of the documents I relied upon to add context to the case were those that I have personally worked on or accumulated through my day-to-day working experience. Fisher is a small institution, with a

total full-time faculty and staff of approximately 120 individuals. The culture at Fisher is supportive and encouraging of research and academic inquiry, with many of this study's participants having completed research studies themselves.

### **Recruitment**

Given the level of access I maintain at the site through my role at Fisher College, the participants are known personally, and were contacted individually over email with information about the study through a data collection protocol (Appendix C). Participation was on a strictly voluntary basis. The use of email allowed for easier rejection of participation in the study, as it is less personal than face-to-face communication.

### **Data Collection**

Sound qualitative inquiry is based on the ability to constantly challenge assumptions and question the obvious, as well as reveal what is hidden (Richards & Morse, 2013, p.219). If a researcher is not actively engaged, a shallow study will result and only what is obvious will be reported. Therefore, the researcher worked to identify discrepancy and opposition through analytic questions that force the researcher to “think, confirm and refute, collect more data, and pursue every avenue” (Richards & Morse, 2013, p.211).

In this study, the interviews were relied upon to fully capture the tenor of change as the institution underwent its primary period of transformation, and provided insight into factors that enabled success. All interviews were conducted for a targeted one hour in length. A second interview was conducted, when needed, to clarify any gaps in the data. Due to the additional focus on leadership style, the President was asked to participate in three one-hour interviews, to address all questions in the President's interview protocol substantially.



All interviews were recorded (with permission) and transcribed; once transcription was complete for a particular interview, the transcript was sent via electronic mail to the participant to confirm an accurate representation of their thoughts. Referred to as “member checking,” this provides a layer of validation in which the source confirms the accuracy of their account (Creswell, 2008). Participants were asked if the account accurately described their thoughts on the topic, and if additional data should be included.

Two interview protocols were designed to guide the discussion with participants: a general protocol, and a President’s protocol. The general protocol (Appendix A) was comprised of two parts: introductory open-ended questions to allow participants to voice their experiences with the transformation, and specific questions contingent upon their role, exposure to a particular aspect of the change process, and ability to speak to a specific variable within the Burke-Litwin (1992) Model of Organizational Change. The introductory questions remain the same for all participants, with the exception of the President.

The twelve variables within the Burke-Litwin (1992) Model of Organizational Change guided question development for Part 2 of both interview protocols. For example, the college’s Vice President of Enrollment could speak to both transformational and transactional factors within the Burke-Litwin (1992) model. On the transformational side, he monitors the external environment for factors that impact recruitment, and participates in frequent discussions at Executive Council around how the labor market and demand for degrees is changing and evolving. He was well-equipped to address this variable, as well as the variable on Organizational Structure, having participated in several re-organizations over his tenure at the college. On the transactional side, he manages one of the college’s largest departments, and can speak to Work Unit Climate, Motivation, and Individual and Organizational Performance. In

other words, the interview questions derive from the theoretical framework, and a participant who can speak to each variable and shed light on its impact upon organizational change and Fisher's transformation was recruited. All interviews, with the exception of the President, were designed to specifically solicit insights based upon the participant's role at Fisher. Again, the introductory questions were broad and the same for each person to elicit their opinions on the transformation. The follow up questions were designed to get a sense of each participant's perspective. The recruited participants as a whole addressed all twelve variables within the Burke-Litwin (1992) model.

The President's interview protocol (Appendix B) also led with questions about role and longevity, and included questions on leadership role and the President's perspective on the college's transformation. The introductory part of the President's protocol took a full 60 minutes. The second part of the President's protocol, similar to the general protocol, included questions within each variable of the Burke-Litwin (1992) model. It was essential to gain an understanding from the President's perspective on the importance and evolution of each variable within the context of the organization's transformation. The questions asked the president to reflect on his perceptions of leadership and vision within each variable, and were designed to obtain perspective on how leadership prioritized and influenced change within each variable.

All interviews were conducted within a six month time period. All interviews were conducted onsite at the college, in a quiet, mutually agreed upon space to ensure privacy for participants. At the time of the interview, the session was digitally recorded with a small, handheld digital voice recorder.

Data was also pulled from documents to provide context and history around information gathered in the interviews, and to clarify when accounts were in discrepancy. These documents

included strategic plans, accreditation reports, minutes from major meetings of the Board of Trustees and Executive Council, and the operating budget. All documents were easily accessible through my role at Fisher College.

### **Data Storage and Management**

All data collected was stored and managed by me personally. Documents were obtained from personal files, and from the Office of Institutional Research when clarification of participant responses was required. All data was maintained electronically in a web-based, encrypted program called Dropbox, which provides password-protected, cloud-based backup and secure storage and retrieval. While data was accessible across devices (laptop, iPhone, iPad), it requires a password logon. Paper documents were scanned to PDF and stored in Dropbox, and interviews were recorded in .mp3 format and uploaded to Dropbox. Transcriptions and dissertation drafts were created in Microsoft Word, organized in folders electronically and stored in Dropbox and not on the local hard drive. This ensured both security and cloud-based data backup. A transcription service, Rev.com, received transcripts through an encrypted upload process, and emailed the file location once complete. Again, password protection ensured restricted access to the data.

An informed consent form (Appendix D) was used to document agreement from the participants, acknowledging a desire to participate in the study. This was important to protect the rights of participants (Creswell, 2008). Every participant completed a consent form that contained a statement ensuring their participation is voluntary and noting that they may withdraw at any time, explaining the purpose of the study and researcher information, outlining procedures documenting how data will be collected, managed and stored, sharing the fact that there are no

known risks to study participation, and noting the perceived benefits from the study (Creswell, 2008, p.159). The participants were afforded confidentiality.

Every participant was assigned a pseudonym and a number, which was tracked in a password-protected file on Dropbox. This preserved confidentiality and was used to identify participants when working with the data. After the completion of each interview, and throughout the completion of the thesis project, the information was stored securely on Dropbox. Audio recordings were destroyed after successful defense of the thesis project, within a two month timeframe. During the study's data analysis phase, accuracy of the data was cross-checked with participants. Coded data will be maintained for up to five years. Again, all data is stored in Dropbox through a secure logon.

Approval for the study was solicited from both Northeastern University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Appendix E) and Fisher College (Appendix F). The President of Fisher College provided approval for the researcher to access the site and participants. Once Northeastern University's IRB approval was received, Fisher College's IRB reviewed and filed the acceptance.

### **Data Analysis Overview**

Data was gathered from interviews, transcribed by a paid service, member-checked for accuracy and then coded to uncover themes. A case study index and database of information was created in Excel to ensure original evidence was maintained, well-organized and validated (Yin, 2009). During the study's data analysis phase, accuracy of the data was cross-checked with participants ("member checking"), and coded data will be maintained for up to five years (Creswell, 2008). Data is stored in Dropbox through a secure logon.

The coding process that was employed included pre-coding, in vivo coding, and pattern coding (Saldana, 2013):

- 1) **Pre-coding** allowed the researcher to go through the data on a preliminary basis, highlighting particularly rich passages and quotes, ensuring they were tagged.
- 2) **In Vivo coding** identified words and short phrases in the words of the participants, honoring the authenticity in which the thought was spoken (Saldana, 2013). In Vivo coding literally captured relevant words and phrases from the participant's own words (Saldana, 2013, p.91). Using the words of the participants lent validity to the study, and worked to eliminate researcher bias.
- 3) **Pattern coding** identified similarities, frequency, sequencing (specific order of events), correspondence (something happening in relation to another event) and causation (Saldana, 2013). This round of coding ultimately led to emergent themes to answer the "how" and "why," grounded in the initial theoretical propositions of both organizational change and transformational leadership (Yin, 2009).

Coding the participant's responses allowed the researcher to identify emerging themes and drivers of change behind the Burke-Litwin (1992) variables, and their influence on Fisher College's organizational change. Within the theme associated with Presidential Leadership, style was identified based on the words of the participants. Coding took place on hard copies of the transcript initially, and then codes were highlighted in Microsoft Word and exported to Microsoft Excel for organization by participant. After themes emerged, codes were grouped by theme in a separate workbook. This allowed the data to be explored from a stakeholder perspective and then a thematic perspective, noting the frequency of occurrence, exploring the interrelationships, and observing variances within the data (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Trustworthiness, Quality and Verification**

Qualitative research is often scrutinized for its ability to present a true and accurate representation of a phenomenon or case, and this is particularly important for case studies that strive to provide insights into a situation that may be transferable or generalizable, and therefore useful in application to another setting (Shenton, 2004). For this study, measures were put into place to maintain the trustworthiness and validity of the study.

The adoption of well-established research methods were used to ensure credibility (Yin, 2009). I had great familiarity with the culture of the participating site (which was established early on, prior to data collection, by the nature of my employment), and the credibility of information received was verified (Creswell, 2013). A wide range of participants were interviewed, allowing individual viewpoints to be cross-checked among the experiences of a wider range of informants, and member-checking was also employed. Member checking confirms accuracy with participants and affirms true intentions of the participants, as well as the researcher's inferences and interpretation of the material (Shenton, 2004; Creswell, 2013). Participants were invited to review and comment upon their transcripts to ensure accuracy.

With respect to researcher bias, In Vivo coding assured impartiality and maintained the integrity of comments as they were captured. Using the participant's words in detailed descriptions of interview narratives accurately conveyed the reality of the situation, providing richer and more detailed findings.

### **Threats to Internal Validity/Limitations of the Study**

Creswell (2008) stresses the importance of validating findings to ensure accuracy and credibility. This line of qualitative inquiry lends itself to triangulation of data as a means to mitigate threats to accuracy. Triangulation is "the process of corroborating evidence from

different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research” (Creswell, 2008, p.266). As multiple perspectives arose from the various participants of the study, findings that did and did not match were called out. Every information source (participant interview) was examined to find evidence to support a theme. Since information was drawn upon from multiple sources, the process resulted in the researcher’s ability to analyze the data and produce a credible report of findings (Creswell, 2008).

A researcher must actively avoid conducting research to “substantiate a preconceived position” (Yin, 2009). Since the issues of a case study are commonly known beforehand, case studies are particularly prone to researcher bias. However, a researcher can work to be open to contrary findings, and compelling evidence that contradicts preconceived notions (Yin, 2009). One way to prepare for the reporting of contrary findings is to report preliminary findings to a few critical colleagues, who can offer “alternative explanations and suggestions for data collection” (Yin, 2009, p.72). Openness and awareness can greatly reduce researcher bias.

Researcher bias was also addressed through member-checking and peer review of the research findings, which is achieved through both the dissertation committee and through discussions with colleagues at the researcher’s institution. Member checking provides additional opportunity for participants to revisit the information provided, and ensures the accuracy of the response (Shenton, 2004). In addition to participants member-checking the transcripts, they also had the opportunity to member check themes that have emerged from the study. While participants may initially have had concerns that saying something negative would impact their career at the institution, confidentiality was granted for general participants (names and positions are avoided altogether, or become pseudonyms once published). The informed consent form guarantees participants safety from consequences as a result of their statements, and finally

member-checking allows the opportunity to remove anything the participant considers to be revealing of their identity.

Limitations of the study include generalizability, perspective, and the effect of the researcher. This case study is highly specific to Fisher, and it is not generalizable. Another limitation to the study is that while several participants were interviewed to obtain a holistic approach, the President is being interviewed at a more in-depth level – three hours total – which had the potential to impact or skew the findings toward his perspective. However, these transcripts were separately analyzed and I was extremely careful to not weigh his perspective more heavily. This was made possible through two separate processes of analysis – one by participant, one by emerging theme – ensuring that the President’s words did not weigh more heavily, or occur more frequently in quotes.

It is important to note that participant opinions are not entirely representative of the stakeholder group that they are representing; for example, two faculty members could not be described as giving the true faculty perspective on behalf of the entire institution. The same is true of the board, middle managers, and Executive Council. A complete perspective could not be truly achieved unless every individual at the college were given a voice; however, that level of exposure could not be achieved through a study of this nature, with a six month projected timeframe for interview completion. Lastly, while every effort was made to reduce the impact of the researcher’s position on the candor of the participants, it is impossible to know if any participants were withholding information or providing false information. Efforts were made to put participants at ease and ensure no negative consequences would result from participation and honesty. Given the nature of the candid information provided, it appeared participants were very much at ease.



## Chapter Four: Findings and Analysis

This chapter focuses on the study's results, describing the central themes and findings that emerged through the coding and analysis of interview data. Multiple stakeholders were interviewed across departmental levels and roles, representing the various perspectives of the faculty, staff, the Board of Trustees, and the President. Senior level executives, middle managers, full time faculty and program directors provided insights that contributed to a full understanding of the College's transformation from a junior to a baccalaureate culture. All eleven participants had been employed or involved with the College for a minimum of seven years.

The purpose of this study was to determine the role of leadership in creating the organizational change required to transform Fisher College from a private two-year junior college to a four-year private baccalaureate institution. Questions were structured to determine and better understand leadership's influence on organizational change. The Burke-Litwin (1992) dimensions impacting organizational change guided the creation of the survey instrument. The Burke-Litwin (1992) variables were described fully in Chapter 3, and include External Environment, Mission and Strategy, Leadership, Organizational Culture, Structure, Management Practices, Systems, Work Unit Climate, Skills/Job Match or, put another way, Task Requirements and Individual Skills/Abilities, Individual Needs and Values, Motivation, and Individual and organizational performance (Burke-Litwin, 1992).

Analysis of the interview data led to the emergence of ten primary themes. These themes include: 1) Drivers of Change, 2) External Environment, 3) Changes over the Past Seven Years, 4) Leadership, 5) Strengths of the Transformation, 6) Weaknesses of the Transformation, 7) Mission, 8) Organizational Culture, 9) Presidential Leadership Style, and 10) Board of Trustee Involvement. Factual background and historical information provided during the interview was coded as "Fisher History" or "Participant Background" and was grouped separately. Each theme

is discussed below, followed by a summary that ties the findings back to the original research questions this study was designed to answer.

### **Drivers of Change**

Drivers of change included data coded with either “Driver of Change” or “Organizational Performance,” since discussion surrounding the performance of the organization was so clearly tied to its dramatic change and ability to transform. Participants described that Fisher College’s ability to transition from a junior college to a baccalaureate was the result of a focus on the organization’s performance, and without this focus, the resources required to attempt change would not have been available.

**A New President.** The most prevalent driver of change in Fisher College’s transformation was the hiring of a new President, Dr. Thomas McGovern, in 2007. Across interviews, Dr. McGovern was credited with possessing the leadership required to speed up the pace, develop a sense of urgency, communicate a common vision, make the tough personnel decisions required to create an aligned community, and motivate the community toward loftier goals. Possessing a business background in government and corporate affairs, coupled with experience in higher education and 28 years on the Fisher faculty, the new President had been watching the Administration from the sidelines and knew what needed to be done. One participant expressed why the new President was able to drive change: “The president is a prior faculty member, and division chair. So to get it from where it once was to where it had to be, it had to be an insider like that. Bringing somebody in from the outside that would not have understood the culture, would not have understood the madness of the faculty, would not have had a good grasp on it. But being a faculty member and knowing what would need to change, because he was there when the school went from no bachelor's degree to the first bachelor's

degree, he knows what it takes and he knew what it takes to get from one point to the other. Some people are on board and some people aren't.”

**New Departments, New Functions, New Programs.** New departments and roles were created, where before there was a gap. These departments included Public Relations, Institutional Research, Compliance, a full-time Career Services department, a full-time College Nurse, and the Center for Leadership in Public Service. Data-driven decision-making and accountability became the norm, where before, as one participant observed, “In the past, there may have been goals but if you didn't reach them, ‘Okay, it was there, you didn't do it.’” Without planning and accountability, there is no hope for change.

New departments and new functions resulted in new individuals at the college, with a different perspective and approach. Additional drivers of change mentioned by participants included a focus on market demand (what degrees were relevant to the marketplace) and student demand (what degrees did students perceived to be most relevant, and therefore in the highest demand). Given this new focus, curricula were developed to satisfy demand, and the increase in programs was also a strong driver of change, as it attracted more students to the college. Fisher College went from one bachelor's degree to the addition of eight more (Communication and Media Studies, Human Services, Psychology, Criminal Justice, Liberal Arts, Marketing, Health Information Management, and a Nursing RN to BSN degree) between the years of 2007 – 2015, and launched a master's degree in Business Administration in 2015. The expansion of the academic program drove a significant enrollment increase in the traditional day student population from 536 in the fall of 2006, to 762 students in the fall of 2014.

**Credentialed Faculty and a Baccalaureate Culture.** With the new academic programs came the hiring of faculty with higher credentials, and the President launched an initiative to

encourage the attainment of terminal degrees for personnel, both staff and faculty, institution-wide. Several participants noted “improved faculty credentials” as positively contributing to change, and the impact was felt across the college and with the accreditors. Faculty with terminal degrees raise the profile of the college, impact the quality of teaching and learning, and contribute to a baccalaureate culture focused on scholarship and research. Professional staff was also encouraged to pursue terminal degrees, and the total percentage of faculty and staff who had achieved a terminal degree by 2014 was 52%, as compared to 33% in 2008, while Master’s level education rose 6 percentage points over the same period of time.

	<b>Fall 2008</b>	<b>Fall 2009</b>	<b>Fall 2010</b>	<b>Fall 2011</b>	<b>Fall 2012</b>	<b>Fall 2013</b>	<b>Fall 2014</b>
<b>% with Master’s Degree or Higher</b>	92%	96%	92%	93%	94%	93%	98%
<b>% with Terminal/Doctoral Degree</b>	33%	27%	31%	35%	42%	43%	52%

Office of Institutional Research, February, 2015

As enrollment increased, access to financial resources changed and additional improvements were made in the physical plant and campus facilities. Technology upgrades and renovations improved the look and feel of the campus, and the morale of the staff and faculty. The campus was able to expand and grow, and two new buildings were acquired in 2010 and 2013. Finally, a baccalaureate culture was achieved and noticed by visiting accreditors; Fisher received commendations at its 2010 accreditation visit. Participants noted a focus on strategic planning was also a major driver of change, with a vision communicated across the community and through all hands meetings, and a senior level position devoted to strategic planning established in 2013.

Additional drivers of change noted by several participants included the formation of the athletics program as a major driver toward the baccalaureate culture, the use of consultants and

subject matter experts in key areas such as financial aid, grant development, government relations, retention and curriculum development (not heavily relied upon or accepted in previous administrations), the creation of an operating surplus to invest across the college and fund new programs and ideas, and a more business-focused institution. Drivers of change identified by the new President included changes in personnel and the organizational structure, more focus on data-driven decision making and accountability, and changes in communication and transparency.

### **External Environment**

Many external factors were described as having impacted Fisher's ability to transform to a baccalaureate institution and recruit a strong student body. The most prevalent included: college affordability and student debt, competition, accreditation and government regulations and compliance, the labor market, the declining high school population, the economy, the college's Boston location, international events and perceptions of Fisher through branding campaigns, public relations and the media.

**College Affordability.** The cost of college tuition and the issue of college affordability were described as major external factors impacting the college. Existing debt, and the willingness to take on more, is a large factor in many students and parents decision to attend college. While much of this is dependent upon the economy as a whole, additional factors include a family's socioeconomic background. One participant observed that "it is harder for consumers to get financing for tuition." Fisher has done what it can to keep tuition stable, implementing small increases to reflect cost of living increases annually to ensure a salary increase pool for its personnel. The college has also hired a third party financial advisor firm to assist the students in understanding the relevance of their debt and to provide a financial literacy

curriculum. The firm, American Student Assistance, provides resources, advice and counseling, as well as modeling tools to assist the students in creating a payback plan. When speaking about college affordability, one participant noted that, “offices have to be much more collaborative to succeed,” and this thought was echoed throughout the interviews and arose again under the theme of organizational culture. As a small school, Fisher is uniquely positioned to work more cohesively across departments, and with less bureaucracy. A president that support a “students first” mentality is also important to finding creative solutions to the question of how students with low income backgrounds can afford the cost of tuition.

**The Shrinking High School Population.** The Fisher day school population is split almost 50/50 across residents and commuters. This has allowed students to flex their living situation according to their financial situation, spending a year or more at home, and then moving to the dorms when it becomes affordable. One participant said, “We’re finding that there are less resident students now, and we know that’s directly related to the economy. Parents do not have the money necessary to pay the board and the room.” Another participant noted that Fisher students are also being more heavily recruited by schools that used to have no interest in them, due to the shrinking high school population: “Some schools are going deeper into their waiting lists, and recruiting students that have been accepted here.” Where before neighboring schools may not have accepted a student considering Fisher, more and more frequently the competition is increasing and students have more options available. At the same time, the quality of student at Fisher is increasing in response to more baccalaureate offerings. Both trends have increased the competition within the recruitment pool, making it more difficult to recruit every year.

**Accrediting Bodies.** Accreditation was an external factor that negatively impacted the college for too long of a time, according to participants. Many attributed regulatory hurdles to contributing to a delayed transition to the baccalaureate, citing the “incredible amount of regulation that is coming down from all levels of government - federal government, the state government, and the City of Boston.” A participant noted that it is not only time consuming, but an incredible investment of other resources as well. Until Fisher received general approval from NEASC in 2014, there were two approvals required to offer a new baccalaureate degree. Both the State’s Department of Higher Education and the regional accreditor had to visit, conduct a hearing and approve the offering. Much preparation went into obtaining these approvals, including document gathering, interviews, committee formation and meeting time, report writing, and time for the core team at each hearing. When program changes were requested, additional time was spent refining the curriculum and resubmitting. Across interviews, participants generally reflected an understanding of the value of the important role of accreditation in ensuring a quality program, but one participant noted that when the institution is hurting financially, it can be very tough to recover. He questioned, “So why did it take the 10 years? Probably, the finances but, maybe rigorous thinking, or maybe the Board of Higher Ed just said ‘no, not until your finances shape up,’ which is a Catch 22.” If an institution can truly be stalled from progressing for nearly a decade because they are not in the financial shape to offer a new program, yet they require new program offerings to increase and stabilize enrollment, how are smaller and lesser tier institutions expected to survive?

**Response to the External Environment.** The College’s response to the external environment revealed an institution looking to adapt. One participant noted that Fisher has had to be creative while facing a changing external environment, specifically a decline in the available

recruitment. “Right now,” he noted, “one of the biggest challenges we face is the lack of graduating high school seniors in the Northeast. That’s required us to go beyond the borders of New England and spend a lot of resources in states like Texas, Florida, California.” The participant goes on to describe that “we’ve really ramped up our international recruiting to try to offset some of the areas that are deficient.” The strategy of recruiting international students has been successful. In the fall of 2008, Fisher’s international population was 88 students, whereas in fall of 2014 it had risen to 122 students, or approximately 16% of its total day school enrollment. International students are typically high income and are “full pays,” which frees up internal scholarship funding and financial aid for domestic students. Creative strategies that counter obstacles in the external environment are required for future success.

The College will continue to be responsive to the changing environment, with one participant noting, “We really need to be three or four moves ahead of the competition. I don’t think we’re there yet. I do think we will get there. Right now, the answer is we’re better than we were, but we can still be better than we are.” Across interviews, participants revealed that strategy and planning, along with data gathering and benchmarking, were critical to continued future success.

### **Changes over the Past Seven Years**

Participants were in agreement that the changes over the past seven years have been significant, since Dr. McGovern assumed the presidency. Similar statements were heard throughout the interviews, from middle managers, faculty, senior staff and the Board. Former leadership lacked the sense of urgency and business focus that the new President brought to the College. Major changes discussed and described included: finances, communication, organizational structure, business-like approach, marketing and promotion of the college, work



ethic of college employees, increase in enrollment, particularly with international students, the President's leadership and ability to lead by example, approach to data gathering and analysis, the ability of employees to voice concerns and ideas, and the evolution of curriculum and the quality of the faculty.

**Changes in Leadership.** Participants painted a picture of stark contrast when describing pre-2007 and post-2007 times. A sampling of comments that do a particularly good job of describing the difference in culture, feel, and sense of urgency include the following:

- “It was just a different pace. It was not the same sense of a vision and a place to go. I know that there were years where there were probably some financial issues that prevented anything from happening.”
- “It was more laissez faire in the past.”
- “Under Chuck we did not have the ability to make that next step happen and really get to a four year.”
- “Through Chuck's administration, the whole planning thing wasn't happening. That's where Tom made a huge, huge difference. He truly understands what it means to develop a plan, to layout the goals over a long period of time. Then, this is the hard part - is to make people accountable for reaching those goals.”
- “Chuck Perkins was a calm force, and a very respected leader. He respected the people who worked here. He just couldn't seem to drive to push us forward.”
- “The biggest thing I remember about Chuck at the time he was here we went through our 100th year and his inauguration was at the same time, so it was like a big party.”

It is evident that many changes have transpired from an operating business perspective, with differences in financial management, accountability, and approach to assessment and planning.

The impact of the change in leadership was echoed throughout the interviews. One individual described the differences between the past President and Dr. McGovern: “If you go back to the president prior to the current president, it was very hands off and it was ‘turn the switch, the college will run by itself.’ Now, the leadership style is participative and that of being a doer and leading by example. It shines through the whole place now, especially at the executive council level, and people see that.” Another participant confirmed the same sentiment, and said that in the past, “It was more of a turn the key and the college will run itself.” Leadership was characterized as passive and ineffective, with participants expressly stating, “The past presidents were very passive,” and “the executive council ran the college and not the president in the past.” One participant explains a stalled transformation with the comment, “There weren't many major decisions made. There wasn't much change in the past.” One participant observed that, “Tom really broke the mold and started to expand how things got done.”

**Communication, Idea Sharing, Professionalism.** Communication across the college changed dramatically with the new President. A participant described, “prior to 2007, it was ‘no news is good news,’ and the less people knew, the better, which can be dangerous.” Another noted, “prior to 2007, new degrees or programs would just show up with no communication.” A participant spoke to the differences at the college now, observing “Everyone have a voice and can share ideas at ‘What do you know, what do you hear’ luncheons with the President for faculty and staff. He does ‘Pizza with the President’ for the students, too, so that the students can feel as if he's approachable and that they have a voice.”

Another significant change was the elevation of the faculty, through the hiring of more faculty with terminal degrees, and supporting degree achievement through professional development funding. A participant observed, “I look at the number of PhDs now on staff. It's

unbelievable. It's just like sixty percent or some bizarrely high number. That adds different energy.” This change impacts the organization’s culture, as the dialogue, faculty perspective, and interactions among staff and faculty change. Many participants noted that the new President’s leadership was dramatically different than past leadership, citing examples such as listening to ideas from everyone, expecting people to do their jobs, surrounding himself with a strong leadership team, and investing in staff and faculty. The result is an elevation in professionalism and a change in the quality of communication, throughout the college.

**Additional Resources, Targeted Investment.** It is important to note that many of these changes described over the past seven years also arose as drivers of change. Participants remarked that several departments that never existed prior were born under this President, with significant resources backing them (staff and technology required) for success. The approach to the business has changed or has been revamped, noted several participants, with improvements in things as basic as the performance review process creating a major impact. While a couple of participants mentioned that past Presidents were not as budget conscious as this President, one participant observed that in the past, the financial resources were not available to make the changes that this President was able to make. Another participant noted that the mentality toward the finances had changed, where in the past it was expected that you would work hard to spend every penny in the budget (lest you be approved for less the next time around), this President did not punish a surplus but rather rewarded those who were efficient with their resources. The participant noted, “Before Dr. McGovern, you got the feeling that you should spend every penny in your budget. There was never a discussion of if we have surplus it's okay.”

**Becoming a Destination College.** A strong focus on both mission and retention of students were mentioned by participants as significant changes over the past 7 years, as was the

focus on the big picture, and a common vision. As Fisher became a baccalaureate and the quality of the college experience improved, participants described that a dramatic change occurred with its transfer student population. In the past, Fisher was a school that many students would transfer out of after achieving an associate's degree. Now, however, Fisher is a school that students transfer into, due to its athletics program, additional degree options and marketplace reputation. It has become a destination school. This, along with the description of strong Presidential leadership and the change in finances, academic program and enrollment, was one of the largest changes described over the past 7 years.

### **Leadership**

Interview data that referenced the leadership style, management style, traits and impact of senior leaders, supervisors and managers were coded and grouped into the theme of "Leadership," not to be confused with a separate theme focused entirely on "Presidential Leadership Style," to be discussed later in this chapter. The Executive Council serves as the President's cabinet, representing all departments across the college. The Executive Council is comprised of Vice Presidents and Deans, and participants described the impact of their leadership pretty consistently throughout the interviews. Comments such as "I think they're all focused on the business aspect of the college when making decisions for their departments," and "The fact that all the Executive Council have MBAs and they're not necessarily academics tells you what the mindset is; what the mindset has to be" reveal a business focus and the ability to rise above individual agendas in support of what is in the best interest of the college. One participant states this clearly, commenting "I think everybody keeps the interest of the college front and center."

**Business-Focused.** The role of leadership is considered by participants to be important, with key leaders setting the tone and enabling faster decision-making. One participant mentioned, “This initiative comes from the top, it can’t come from anywhere else. If you don’t have a leader that pulls it together and gets everybody pointing in the same direction, it’s not going to happen.” Participants stated that the college’s leadership possessed many strengths, including living the mission, communicating important information across departments, possessing a business focus, communicating a sense of urgency, making decisions quickly and based on data, being ethical and seeing the big picture, working collaboratively, but micro-managing when necessary, and wearing many hats to get the job done.

The current leadership was not criticized, but past leadership at the cabinet level (pre-2008) was considered a source of frustration. One participant summarized the current state well, commenting, “It’s a good, strong group of dedicated core individuals that also umbrella over their own groups to give them the same sense of dedication and urgency. The willingness to go above and beyond here is extraordinary. We’ve eliminated some dead wood along the way here, and that’s something that you are always going to deal with in any organization. At a snapshot point in time like today, I think it’s extraordinary how many people really do work for Fisher College as opposed to themselves.”

Overall, opinions of the leadership reflected the tone the President has set throughout the college, increasing accountability and using data to analyze situations and aid in decision-making. Participants expressed that the college’s leaders were fair but firm, and worked to communicate decisions made at the Executive Council meetings to all staff, which was perceived to be quite different from past leadership, before President McGovern’s arrival.

## **Strengths of the Transformation**

Factors that led to a successful transformation, and what was strong about the transformation itself, were coded under “Strengths of the Transformation.” Participants expressed that the transformation was made possible through a President and leadership team that carried out the requisite planning, communicated the intent, and then executed on the tactics required to carry out the plan. A sense of urgency, the financial investment required, and the actual expansion and elevation of the academic program offerings were made possible through a communicated vision, which was lacking in the past.

**Changed Mindset: Finances, Consultants, and Creative Solutions.** One participant observed that it wasn’t possible in the past, due to weak finances, but under this President the college was able to build the “financial capability to maintain an infrastructure for bachelor's degrees and personnel,” allowing transformation to the baccalaureate level. The constant theme of a changed mindset arose throughout the interviews. Participants noted that new leadership was open to bringing in outsiders for their varied perspective, with comments such as “You’ve got to bring in people from the outside with a little different perspective” and, “the success is due to looking at advanced planning and employing individuals that can bring us to the next level in a professional manner.” Leadership was open to new ideas and innovative solutions in accomplishing the major transition, and one participant commented, “The strength was that it was basically wide open, how we are going to do this and just go get it done. We will do whatever we can to get this done. The idea and the big picture was that.”

**International Student Recruitment.** A new focus on recruiting international students was a key success factor. One participant explained, “opening our campus and our minds to these transfer students and different cultures and making the appropriate adjustments here at the

college to accommodate the student population has been key. Adult learners, transfer students, minority students, first generation-- working with groups that we may not have necessarily mingled with prior to working here has allowed us to succeed.” The participant goes on to explain, “We recognized early on that the international student population was going to be the key to our growth. Both again, declining high school graduation rates and financially. With little to no discount rate they allowed us to offset our domestic discount rate that we offer. Where other schools said ‘No, we don't want to deal with that. We don't want this person because they're from a certain area,’ we built the infrastructure here, appropriately aligned ourselves with ESL companies and then placed an ESL institution on our campus. We invested in international travel, which was very aggressive for an institution our size, but we realize Boston really is the hub for international students and it's a population that we needed to expand and integrate into our community and we did so successfully.” The addition of international students to the day school population resulted in a more global perspective across the campus community, and financially contributed to creating the baccalaureate infrastructure required to strengthen the academic program and co-curricular activities.

Other participants echoed the change in mindset, attributing the transformation to “getting outside of our comfort zone and trying different things,” and “it was an attitude of moving forward at all costs, this is what we have to do. This is where we have to get to, and we are going to do it. If you are not on board we are going to have to drop you off the bus.” Indeed, personnel changes were required to create a transformed culture, and the new leadership was not afraid to identify and make changes, even removing individuals who had been perceived as institutional icons. Ultimately, it was the personnel who enabled the transformation to occur and occur quickly, from the top down. One participant summed this up succinctly, “a lot of people

were involved; a combination of both legacy and new blood that understood the importance and sense of urgency.”

### **Weaknesses of the Transformation**

While the transformations’ strengths included planning and appropriate financing, communication, creativity and a sense of urgency, the weaknesses all pointed to the fact that transformation took far too long to begin. Many participants spoke about the specific barriers to organizational change, focusing consistently on the college’s past leadership as hindering change. A participant observed, “Prior administrations, prior to 1998, hurt us because a lot of the schools - two year female schools - transitioned in the early 90's, where we didn't start thinking about it until the late 90's so we were 10 years behind everyone else.” Another participant commented, “We had no structure. We had nothing to base it off of. There was one person just doing everything. We did not have any of the infrastructure here. We did not have facilities to use. We had nothing. And no financial resources.”

**Scarce Financial Resources and Accreditation Hurdles.** When the college was in an unhealthy financial state, significant growth was impossible, so for years the college stagnated as a junior college with one bachelor’s degree offering in management, unable to develop new degrees or get off of the accreditor’s financial watch list. A participant observed, “A big challenge we faced was accreditation. We were on the secret probation list with prejudice from the accreditors, so at that time we did not have the ability to add additional degrees.” With increased accreditation scrutiny, resources were diverted from running the college to preparing for the next visit, to make the case that additional degrees could be developed with appropriate oversight. The diversion of resources contributed to a declining state, and stagnation continued – new bachelor’s degrees were not allowed. It took a new President with incredible business savvy



to put the controls in place, eliminating excess spending and non-performing personnel, creating a culture of accountability and providing a vision for the future. A plan and timeline to fit the vision was also required, as a participant observed, “a lot of it had to do with making decisions late, and was in the execution.”

Interestingly, one participant made the case that a distracted focus was responsible for a lagging transformation to the higher degree. This participant expressed, “The reason why they made the decision late is because they were very successful in the continuing education business. In the 90's, 60 - 70% of our revenue came from continuing ed, whereas now 60% of our business comes from day school.” If too much of the focus was on the continuing education program, and the administration felt secure with the revenue in that division, attention was not being paid as closely to the day school.

**Lack of Vision and Planning.** However, the opinions of why the administration moved so slowly before 2007 were varied, making it clear that a common vision did not exist, nor a clear strategic plan. One participant discussed approval of the first bachelor’s degree, which was followed by a degree drought from 1998 to 2007, saying: “The team felt the accreditation hurdles were almost insurmountable, and that it got approved by just the skin of their teeth. The tenor at the college after the approval of the degree was ‘we must be happy with we've got, and stick with it. It's too painful and too arduous a task to go on and do another degree.’ I think looking back it was a huge mistake and we lost a whole lot of time.” Consistency was found in this sentiment, expressed well by one participant, “Yeah, there was no sense of urgency. If you looked at the numbers in 2004 and 2005, they were dismal. It really didn't take a genius to figure out that we weren't attracting students because we didn't have the programs to attract them.” Unfortunately,

creating those programs and obtaining the accreditation approvals did take a different kind of leadership, and some time.

**Resistance to Change.** Participants also cited academia as being slow, describing “People that are trained academically ponder, they think, they ponder, they reflect, they revisit, and they think, and reflect. Things take a really, really long time,” and the faculty were also blamed for holding the process up, and being resistant to change. Fear from the faculty was actually described by one participant as being a contributing obstacle: “They wondered, are you going to cancel all the associate’s programs? Who are you going to hire to run these bachelor programs? What are you going to do about me? A lot of the resistance might have been self-serving as opposed to in the best interest of the college. People were scared.” Another participant shared similar thoughts, pointing out, “That's part of the reason why there was such resistance to do more bachelor's degrees because you had to have the faculty creating them. If the faculty were afraid that their livelihood is at stake and the PhD's were going to get hired at much higher salaries to come in and replace them, you come up with all sorts of creative reasons why or why not.” If cultural resistance could not be overcome by the administration, then stagnation sets in.

Also included in weaknesses were discussions of existing challenges, those that persisted prior but continue to be a struggle in today’s environment. There is some overlap here thematically with external factors, as weaknesses of the transformation include an inability to reconcile challenges brought forth by the external environment. Examples of this include the aforementioned accreditation hurdle, as well as the challenge of recruiting a baccalaureate level student, overcoming the external perception of Fisher in the marketplace as primarily an

associate's degree-granting institution, and the natural sluggishness of how long it takes to launch and populate a new program.

### **Mission**

Fisher College's mission is clearly stated in course catalogs, marketing collateral, the college's website and in many presentations given across the institution: "Fisher College improves lives by providing students with the knowledge and skills necessary for a lifetime of intellectual and professional pursuits." Many participants were asked specifically about the relevance of the institution's mission to organizational change, but the topic of mission also arose naturally throughout the interviews. It was surprising how many participants were not only aware of the college's mission, but also felt it to be an innate part of their job to be loyal to the mission, and were proud to say they lived it. Interestingly, participants expressed that the mission has been the same for the over 110 years the college has been in existence. One participant said "The mission is positioning students. It's very career oriented. I would say the mission is to provide students with an education so that when they leave they can get a job. It's very career focused. I think that's going back to when they first opened in Somerville with the secretarial population, the immigrants, focusing on immigrants and career readiness."

While the interpretations of mission varied slightly, the participants all expressed a desire to help students grow and mature into a meaningful profession. One participant expressed, "I would say it's been consistent for 110 years. The degrees changed, the type of degrees students are seeking have changed, but the types of students we serve and how we serve them I don't think has changed." Another participant shared, "In terms of living the mission, I put the mission up all the time and interpret the mission for people. I had to give a little presentation last night to

a group, and that's the first thing I told them." Yet another participant mentioned, "I would say the majority of the people who work here live the mission."

**Passion for the Students.** The attention and awareness of mission by participants came across as a true passion for the college and the work it does for the students. One of the reasons passion may be so high at Fisher College is because of the students it serves. As one participant mentioned, "The people that choose to come here, in general, need something special. They either need the small space and they are perfectly capable of doing it on their own. Or, they actually need to go to center across the street and have someone help them read. All those things are available." When students that require extra help succeed and graduate, finding a meaningful career, the success is felt by the employees across the college. One participant described the work involved in helping these students achieve success: "To me, Fisher College is all about helping young people to grow and mature and become the men and women they're meant to be. That takes a lot. This is the time they should be making mistakes because there's someone here that cares about them and is going to help them right that path. So I think Fisher is all about helping people."

Throughout the interviews, it was clear that Fisher employees, both faculty and staff, feel they are working together toward a common goal under a widely understood mission. Participants expressed working for a special place, serving a unique student population. Ultimately, attention to mission translates to impacting an organization's culture.

### **Organizational Culture**

Organizational Culture was discussed frequently throughout the interviews. Data pertaining to Burke-Litwin dimensions such as work unit/departmental cohesiveness, motivational drivers, and what an employee valued about the job or what skills were required to

succeed at Fisher were also included in the theme of Organizational Culture, as the discussion illuminated specific characteristics of Fisher's unique culture and contributed to a larger understanding of change readiness.

**Toward a Baccalaureate Culture.** The picture that was painted across interviews was that the organizational culture at Fisher even twenty years ago bore some resemblance to the culture today. The constants included attention to mission, a strong focus on student success, a familial feel driven by the school's relative smallness and the founding family's influence. However, Fisher as an organization today has moved toward a baccalaureate culture as a result of being business-focused, making decisions faster, communicating a sense of urgency from the top down, and encouraging more communication and transparency. There is more collaboration across departments, and employees feel they have more of a voice with leadership.

While some participants felt elements of Fisher's culture had remained constant, others expressed a significant change unfolding under Dr. McGovern's leadership. One participant described the difficulty in creating the cultural change required to transform to a baccalaureate, saying, "What was difficult was dragging the academics into the business side of the house. Forcing them to understand that this entire culture- this entire progress towards the development of the school itself – is a survival process. You may be a great teacher, but you've got to get on board with this process. You have to be aware from top to bottom what that means to the institution, what that means from the perspective of the amount of dedication and hard work it's going to take to get there. That's difficult when a culture has been like that forever." Another employee, hired to impact the culture, described the organization when she first arrived at the college, "I observed a culture of a small school, 'associates-type' atmosphere. I think that part of the reason that I was hired was that my background was not in academia. Part of the reason I was

hired was to bring more of a business perspective to the position -all functions of the school had to accelerate in a more professional manner in order to achieve the goal of moving forward to a four year institution.”

**A Common Vision and Collaboration.** Participants described a school in turmoil, suffering from an identity crisis: “Survival mode forced the cards for the school, the administration and the board, to look at a different perspective on moving forward. We went through this, and were damn lucky to get out of it alive. We almost shut the doors. We had to clean up our act, we had to figure out what we are going to do going forward, and who we were going to be.” Because of the small school environment, a change in communication was felt strongly throughout the college, allowing for a more collegial and team-oriented environment. One participant describes how personnel were able to pull together under a common vision, after the new President arrived, “A significant number of folks are able to see the big picture, which is very unusual in any organization. I find it very satisfying. The ability of everyone to work together, pulling in the same direction, is extraordinary.” Another participant described the culture today: “The culture now is alive and it's one of everybody is in it together, and leadership has definitely pushed that down so everybody understands it. Again, communication all the time. Transparency is everything.”

One might expect a strong divide to have occurred between the faculty and administration at a college undergoing such substantial change over a period of seven years. When asked, a faculty participant described, “I don't think there has been a faculty divide. Has there been a little bit of resentment? Maybe.” Despite subtle resistance, participants described a collaborative environment, “I would say that the culture is very supportive. I think people like working here. I think they want to do the right thing for the college. I think they're willing to go

and give the extra when it's necessary." Participants described the buy-in required to get to the next level, saying "It's so important that full faith is placed in the leader and then getting buy-in from everybody to get to that next level. It's a cultural shift, it's cultural and I'd say it again, it's buy-in. Yeah that includes involvement, buy-in, collaboration and at the end of the day wanting to make this place a better place than when you first started." In order for the culture to change, a strong vision was required, and the majority of employees had to be on board and persuade others to overcome their resistance in fulfillment of the greater good.

**Focus on Student Success.** Focus on the success of the students was a constant from Fisher's inception, but remains an integral part of Fisher's culture. Participants shared stories of employees helping students succeed, though personal financial contributions (one employee paid for a student to go home to see a sick mother, dying of cancer), volunteering with students at local Habitat for Humanity activities, and staff taking the time to tutor them. A participant summed it up well, saying "We are here for our students, period. Everything that we do ultimately should be towards that goal of working with the students. To do whatever we can to educate, assist them in school, in life through their issues, through their problems. There is more to it than just throwing courses at them." Attention to mission, without explicit mention of mission, was also commonly referenced. An example of this is found in this participant's words, "Students come first. We are here to serve the students and to provide them the best education we possibly can and help them grow and develop. To become young successful professionals in their chosen career path, or to now prepare them for graduate school, which is a really cool thing. I don't think that that's changed." This attention to individual student success, consistently expressed throughout the interviews, is the product of a small school environment with an

awareness of mission. If Fisher had been a larger school with layers of bureaucracy and communication challenges, large-scale organizational change would have been unlikely.

**Business-Focused.** While many participants described a culture focused on student success, often the same participants (and this was also true across participants) described another dominant focus, which was that of the college also being a business, with a corporate atmosphere. An example of this is seen in this participant's words: "Everybody feels devoted to our students' success. Student success is what drives the culture. The culture is also one of fiscal responsibility and it's run like a business, and there is a sense of it being a business." Another participant observed, "It's definitely much more of a business-like culture than my perception of other colleges where it has more of an academic culture." While the culture at Fisher is business-focused, it is clear that the faculty is not opposed to this focus, but rather understands the necessity of a small school to focus on its financial state. One participant expressed, "The faculty does respect the fact that without students, there's no money, and without money, there is no college and there's no jobs and nobody gets helped. Everybody understands that it has to have a business-like culture."

**Small, Familial, Nimble.** The culture was described as quick and nimble, due to its size and the mindset of its leadership. Another contributing factor was a lack of bureaucracy, and one participant expressed being grateful for the current state, "I'm often very, very grateful that we have neither tenure nor unions, because we can make decisions quickly. We can react to changes in the marketplace. I can make a decision about a staffing change without going through these bureaucratic and administrative nightmares. We're more nimble because we operate with fewer restrictions and we have that business-like culture."



**Burke-Litwin Dimensions.** The Burke-Litwin (1992) dimensions were addressed throughout the interviews, but responses to questions such as, “What do you value most about your job?” and “What are some of the things that have to be in place for you to enjoy your work?” varied widely, as did answers to questions about personal motivation and skills required to do the job. Work unit cohesiveness was found to be collaborative across the board, with participants citing examples of supporting students above and beyond what is expected. The school’s organizational structure was reported to be hierarchical, yet collaborative, with titles of importance to some, but not others. Communication was perceived to be strong, and the school’s “survival mode” was perceived to have created a bond among employees present during the tougher years.

### **Presidential Leadership Style**

The President’s leadership style and focus was a dominant discussion topic across interviews, with participants describing a driven, hands-on leader determined to take the institution to the next level for the good of its survival. His involvement was touted consistently, with participants mentioning how surprised their peers are to see him so visible and so hands-on, how “You’ll see him at athletic games, alumni events, in the cafeteria eating with students,” and how he has relationships with every population on campus. He has taught in the master’s program, and has visited every freshman class to deliver a guest lecture and ask questions about student satisfaction, also sharing the history of the college and goals of the current strategic plan.

**Transformational, Creative, Entrepreneurial.** When it comes to defining an actual leadership style, a couple of concrete suggestions were offered by participants. “Participative” leadership was mentioned, as was “transformational,” and “visionary.” Indeed, the words used to describe the President all point to characteristics of transformational leadership, where a leader

sets the vision and achieves incredible results in leading and inspiring organizational change (Sashkin, 2004). Many pieces needed to fall into place, as expressed by participants, for this style to work and be effective.

When the new President arrived at Fisher College, participants shared that he enforced a no-jeans policy to increase the professionalism of the institution, and differentiate faculty and staff from students. One participant observed, “He felt that we needed to provide, not only an education, but also a physical image of what a professional person looks like because these kids are here for more than just the process of [obtaining] knowledge.” Beyond professionalizing employee image, Dr. McGovern held a concrete vision of transforming the college and helping it realize its full potential. Participants characterized the President in many ways, and believed that his leadership was central to change at the institution. Their words shape a picture of a strong leader; thus, it is important share their quotations about Dr. McGovern at length:

- “He has a presence of authority. He will make decisions. He will take the advice of others.”
- “Clearly, he likes to have a good time. Clearly, he wants to be respected and make people comfortable. I'm not so sure he cares about if anybody likes him. There's a real difference.”
- “Dr. McGovern came in with a very clear vision to change us, and to change the institution, and to move it forward from administrative processes, to academic processes, to strategic planning processes, everything was going to come to a different level and move us forward.”
- “Tom holds them to goals he's established and he expects people to work as hard as he works, and to meet those goals.”
- “He’s not too much of an academic. They go slow, and Tom has the social ability to be able to interact with them. Super, super bright. Book smart.”

- “He has pushed us all out of our comfort zone and made us drive forward. Doing things that we didn’t think we could do, or that were even possible.”
- “He can make decisions on the fly, but I think he is well informed.”
- “What changed the stagnation was definitely Tom McGovern, I have no doubt. It was night and day.”
- “He definitely sets a vision and has forced the transition to that vision, which I would say in my years having worked through four presidents, he was the only one who even came close to doing that.”
- “Focused, dedicated, impatient by nature. I think that he always wants the dessert before the supper but he knows he needs to eat the healthy meal. He sees things... He has an entrepreneurial part of his brain that sees things before he gets there.”
- “When Dr. McGovern became the President, he instituted all-hands meetings, something that didn’t exist before. In these all-hands meetings, there is an update on the college and includes the financial update which, prior to this, I don’t think anybody was really sharing.”
- “Tom is a bull dog, he's a pit bull. The more you push against him, the more pissed off he's going to get and he's going to push forward. That's not a bad thing. You don't become a college president because you're looking to be miss congeniality and win friends.”
- “He's not easily swayed, but he definitely listens and values our opinions.”
- “He knows probably way more than he should about the nitty gritty because of the small nature of the college.”
- “The best thing about Tom's leadership is that he has seen things other than higher ed. He's been involved in consulting and government work so he can think outside of higher ed. He can think about business and the structure within business and how to make change.”

- “Tom's mission is to make sure that the institution survives. He gets, very clearly, that this is a business. Bottom line it's a business. The only way businesses can survive is that there are satisfied customers.”
- “Tom is a very strong guy; he took over and said, ‘Listen, this is where we can drive this institution. We can bring it back where as a not for profit there is a surplus. We can grow.’ It's happened. It wouldn't have happened without him.”

The portrait painted through the words of the participants is one of a strong and decisive leader with a varied and nontraditional background, who came in with a vision for the institution, directly tied to its survival. Not concerned with winning friends and more concerned with winning the respect required to drive the institution forward, he became involved in all kinds of decisions and interacted with the community from top to bottom, sometimes micromanaging, but always driven by a sense of urgency and necessity. His business focus was required to correct the financial trajectory and create a surplus needed to reinvest in the institution's growth. Culturally, the institution has changed the way it communicates, operating in a more transparent and collaborative fashion, and operationally there are clearer processes and an overarching accountability driven by the larger leadership team, the President's Executive Council.

**Core Leadership Team.** The new President required a core leadership team that, in the words of one participant, “if he said jump, they were going to say how high, and that he could trust them and they would know that whatever he was asking was in Fisher College's best interest, and they would help him drive things forward.” Another participant noted, “Tom's management team is able to relay the nature of what's going on, and the sense of urgency.” The President also acknowledged the importance of the team in his interview, and expressed, “I guess the first thing I had to do was look at my leadership team and make sure everybody was on

board. I make no assumptions that the team I had in place was a team that was aligned with my thinking. As time evolved, I realized that I probably had to make some changes at the top if this was going to happen, and recruit some people with a similar mindset. It took me almost five or six years to get to that place, but that was the critical step and if I had to do it again, that would be the first place that I look.”

**Board of Trustee Buy-In.** While it took time to get the complete team in place, change did occur right away, and it was important to obtain buy-in from the Board of Trustees. The President explained his thinking and his actions frequently to the board, recalling “Obviously with the Board I always explained what I was doing, what the rationale was. Probably ad nauseum. In fact, a Board member said that to me, that I went into so much detail that it was a no-brainer. And I probably didn't have to provide that kind of detail to convince the Board.” Because survival of the college was at stake, aligned thinking with the Board was easier to obtain. A Board member noted of the President, “He unquestionably wants this institution to survive and recognizes that it has to be strong monetarily. That it needs to be strong structurally. That it needs to be strong professionally. Without the underlying finances in order, it's not going to happen.” The message the President has been sending has been well received, enabling this institution to transform.

### **Board of Trustee Involvement**

Fisher College’s Board of Trustees is comprised of 14 individuals from diverse walks of life. Participants characterized the board as “engaged, interested, and dedicated,” as well as “highly educated and successful.” Meetings occur four times a year and take place at the Boston campus. The format of board meetings is either committee working group sessions with members of Executive Council, or departmental presentations of successes and challenges faced

the past quarter. Each meeting also includes an hour-long report by the President, and an Executive Session that excludes the Executive Council. Parliamentary procedure is used to run the meetings, and minutes are maintained by the Board Clerk. Participants described the frequency of the meetings to be, “often enough so that they’re constantly informed.” The President also maintains contact with many of the board members through phone calls and meetings over the course of any given quarter.

**Alignment with the President.** The involvement of the Board of Trustees was described by participants as critical and important, but some participants were hesitant to comment on the founding family’s representation on the board, and their continued involvement with the College. Those that spoke up expressed concern for the continued involvement, suggesting that past Presidents were unable to move the college forward and speculating that the involvement contributed to the stagnation suffered for many years. One participant said there are times at which the process was “driven back.” This sentiment was echoed by another participant who remarked that the family’s involvement was a weakness of the transformation, “Fisher family influence is a negative. Not from a perspective of any ability or a leadership, but it continues to perpetuate a perception of the same culture within the institution. Where you are dealing with trying to transform the thought process of a large body of individuals who’ve been under this old regime, the perception of nothing changing at the top - the Fishers held us back.” With three family members presiding on the Board, one as Chair, a positive relationship between the President and the Board is critical, and a President will not be successful unless they walk a careful line, knowing politically what moves are acceptable. A Board participant expressed, “In terms of the family involvement and the buy in and the acceptance of the change... It has been

and will continue to be the need of any President to get buy-in. Until that energy changes, they will always need that buy in. That's just the reality of the institution.”

Participants commented that this President has earned the Board’s confidence, and they have permitted him to manage the day-to-day. When they begin to micromanage decisions, the President is not afraid to speak up. A Board participant expressed, “It comes up in discussion but Tom being Tom, I would do the same thing. It's like, ‘OK let me just make sure. Do you, in fact, want to call me in the morning and ask you what kind of coffee I should have? Because that's part of my day to day.’ The answer is of course, ‘No.’ The Board is like, ‘We get it. That's an administrative thing.’” In the past, the Board was much more involved in the decision-making, but this President has set the direction the College is heading and has more confidence. The successful financial and enrollment results over the past several years have earned the President some latitude in decision-making and moving forward in creative new directions.

### **Summation**

This chapter described the emerging themes and findings resulting from the coding and analysis of eleven interviews with stakeholders across the institution. Several themes emerged from this study including Drivers of Change, the External Environment, Changes over the Past Seven Years, Leadership and Presidential Leadership Style, Strengths and Weaknesses of the Transformation, Mission, Organizational Culture, and Board of Trustee Involvement. Across the ten themes described in this chapter, three important ideas emerge. First, the role of leadership in driving organizational change was critical; the single-most attributed factor to the transformation’s success was the hiring of a new and transformational President. Second, in a small college dominated by the founding family’s influence, Board of Trustee buy-in and alignment with the President’s thinking was instrumental in facilitating change, as Fisher

maintained a small, collaborative and familial culture, and these characteristics facilitated change; had they not been present, the College may not have survived. Third, organizational change at the college was influenced through all of the Burke-Litwin (1992) dimensions.



## **Chapter Five: Conclusions and Recommendations**

The intent of this study was to examine a small junior college undergoing transformation and evolution in response to both external and internal factors, and understand how successful change to a baccalaureate institution was accomplished. Junior colleges commonly serve a significant number of marginalized and at risk students, and must evolve to offer more relevant degrees to satisfy the ever-changing job market. Private junior colleges require data-driven decision making and a keen awareness of their operating budget and tuition dependency; they often require restructuring to remain competitive, and end up closing before a turnaround or transformation is possible (Fisher, 1983; Woodroof, 1990).

Organizational change requires transformational leadership to assist the institution in conceptualizing the change process, and overcoming cultural resistance to fundamental change (Burke & Litwin, 1992; Tichy & Ulrich, 1984; Woodroof, 1990). Fisher College underwent a significant organizational change in order to transform from a private junior college to a four-year baccalaureate institution. The study's central research question is "What has been the role of leadership in creating the organizational change required to transform Fisher College from a private two-year junior college to a four-year private baccalaureate institution?" with the sub-questions of:

- How was the institution led through this transformational process?
- How do stakeholders describe Fisher College's transformation and the role of leadership throughout the process?

### **Themes and Major Take-Aways**

The themes that emerged throughout analysis of the interview data are provided below, along with the major highlights from within each theme:

Table 1

*Major Themes and Highlights*

<u>Ten Themes</u>	<u>Major Highlights</u>
Drivers of Change	New President New Departments, New Functions, New Programs Credentialed Faculty and a Baccalaureate Culture
External Environment	College Affordability The Shrinking High School Population Accrediting Bodies
Changes over the Past Seven Years	Changes in Leadership Communication, Idea Sharing, Professionalism Additional Resources, Targeted Investment Becoming a Destination College
Leadership	Business-Focused
Strengths of the Transformation	Changed Mindset: Finances, Consultants, and Creative Solutions International Student Recruitment
Weaknesses of the Transformation	Scarce Financial Resources and Accreditation Hurdles Lack of Vision and Planning Resistance to Change
Mission	Passion for the Students
Organizational Culture	Toward a Baccalaureate Culture A Common Vision and Collaboration Focus on Student Success Business-Focused Small, Familial, Nimble Burke-Litwin Dimensions
Presidential Leadership Style	Transformational, Creative, Entrepreneurial Core Leadership Team Board of Trustee Buy-In
Board of Trustee Involvement	Alignment with the President

From these themes, three major ideas developed: the President's role in driving organizational change was the single-most attributed factor to the success of the transformation; Alignment with the Board of Trustees was instrumental in facilitating change, as was Fisher's small, collaborative environment, which contributed greatly to its ability to undergo a rapid

transformation; and organizational change needed to occur in parallel throughout the Burke-Litwin (1992) dimensions.

**A Transformational President.** Harry Truman once said, “A leader is a man who has the ability to get other people to do what they don’t want to do, and like it” (1958, p.139). Indeed, this is what is required of a transformational president. Transformational leadership enables collaborative problem-solving through individualized support, intellectual stimulation, an overarching vision, and modeling change (Hallenger, 2003). The transformational leadership construct was evident throughout stakeholder interviews. In the President’s own words, leadership begins at the top: “Again, it starts at the top. People have to realize that the people at the top are willing to work just as hard as those in the middle and at the bottom. I think the culture right now is very positive, and also it’s in a good place.”

Across all themes, the role of leadership dominated the discussion. While additional drivers of change were mentioned, the hiring of a new President was the critical driver. With respect for the external environment, the President’s handling of challenges and obstacles brought about by accreditors, the economy, and new financial regulations was what drove ultimate success. Over the past seven years, the biggest change at the college was strong leadership and follow through, and the new President’s was able to create programmatic, financial, and enrollment change that led to improved organizational performance. In themes relating to both strengths and weaknesses of the transformation, again the focus of participants shifted to this President’s ability to drive change, create a sense of urgency, and ultimately change the organizational culture to one of accountability, planning, and data-driven decision-making. The President’s leadership style was described as participative, visionary, and transformational and his focus on mission drove the institution’s priority of student success. The

role of leadership, quite simply, was found to be integral. Without it, as participants commented, Fisher would not have been able to change. The College would likely still remain a junior college offering one or two baccalaureate degrees.

The literature addresses the critical role of a President as change agent, describing how a transformational leader creates positive organizational change by influencing several key variables (Woodroof, 1990; Martin & Samels, 2009; Brown, 2011). Transformational leadership comes from a place of strength within the leader, putting the needs of the organization above self-interest, and helps everyone create a shared vision for the future (Burns, 1978). This kind of leader motivates a team toward effectiveness by focusing on goals and accountability. A charismatic and highly visible leader, a transformational leader operates with a chain of command and is always seeking ideas; focused on the big picture, a transformational leader is surrounded by those who can take care of the details, and consistently moves the organization toward a larger vision (Burns, 1978). In Eaker & Kuk's 2011 study evaluating 45 small private colleges in a state of decline, the catalyst of change was a new president, a reexamined mission, and a focus on strategic planning; the president was an essential driver of organizational change.

The study confirmed the findings from Eaker and Kuk (2011), and in the case of Fisher's transformation, it was evident that the new President was a transformational leader (Burns, 1978). The organization was reshaped through an organizational restructure, with resourceful and business-focused professionals placed in key positions to influence the entire operation. Over time, a common vision was shared and communicated through proper strategic planning, with everyone working toward student success and excellence throughout the operation. Academic programs were added, along with credentialed faculty, and at the same time opportunities for professional development and advanced degree attainment were made available

across the institution. Purposeful investment resulted in technology and facility improvements, as well as the expansion of the campus. Data-driven decision-making and accountability were major changes that resulted in better budget management and fiscal controls. Creativity was blooming, with an increased focus on international student recruitment and the birth of a grant-funded Center for Leadership in Public Service. With non-traditional sources of revenue offsetting tuition dependency, and research and scholarly activity capturing the notice of accrediting bodies, every success led to increased strength and more success. Enrollment grew and stabilized - the struggling junior college transformed into a solid baccalaureate.

### **Support from the Board of Trustees: Governance in the Small College**

**Environment.** With Board of Trustee support, offered in a way that did not mirror any other President's support, Dr. McGovern was given the latitude to make the necessary changes to bring Fisher into the baccalaureate institution it is today, now offering master's degrees. The relationship between Boards and Presidents in the small college environment is very important, as is the way information is shared. Participants described the balancing act the new President needed to maintain in order to ensure progress. Calculated risks were taken, but only after establishing confidence from the Board. This was particularly important when making personnel decisions, increasing the international population, adding new programs, and moving toward a master's degree offering. Strategic planning assisted this process, along with an overarching vision. Goals were set and expectations followed.

The role of the president is central to successful governance. Richard Chait (2006) addresses the relationship between boards and presidents, pointing out that boards either idolize and defer to the president, or bulldoze the leader with arrogance. Boards are also comprised of multiple views and members very rarely agree with one another, commonly resulting in

misgovernance (Chait, 2006). Benchmarking and adhering to best practices are solutions for mitigating internal strife and creating a more harmonious relationship between the board and the President (Chait, 2006).

The Association of Governing Boards and Colleges (AGB) affirm the importance of the relationship between the President and the Board with a 1996 report entitled, “Renewing the Academic Presidency: Stronger Leadership for Tougher Times.” The report notes the presidency has weakened over time, and colleges are unable to be as flexible and responsive as they have in the past (AGB, 1996). Several recommendations were made to presidents and boards to create stronger governance on campus, including 1) clarification of governance responsibilities to aid in clear decision-making, 2) board support when presidents are being attacked by internal or external parties, 3) alignment of faculty commitment to their subject matter with commitment to the institution, and 4) the reduction of state government involvement (bureaucracy/red tape) in exchange for the institution’s commitment to greater effectiveness, better performance and desirable outcomes (AGB, 1996). One of the interesting points in the report is the need for boards to often look outside academia for an effective president who can take the necessary risks to maintain the college’s enrollment and market position.

Governance at small colleges has been found to differ greatly from governance at large institutions. McNay (2002), Shinn (2004) and Eaker and Kuk (2011) point to institutional differences emanating from a smaller institution’s culture. Small schools have a tendency to specialize in fewer disciplines, which creates a different feel and overall culture, and the nature of the institution’s size lends itself to a family-like environment (McNay, 2002). McNay (2002) describes the issue of informal contact among governors/trustees with the rest of the community both inside and outside of the institution, which is more likely to happen at a smaller college and

in a smaller community. This can lead to information gathering as well as conflicts of interest, depending on the extent and nature of the interactions. At a minimum, opportunities arise for issues to be mentioned that then carry over to board meetings. The presence of a familial culture sets small colleges apart from large institutions.

Culture greatly impacts institutional decision-making. Communication is a major factor in an effective governance structure, and this is often easier to achieve at a small private college than at a large, bureaucratic institution (Puglisi, 2011; Lee, 1979; Brown, 2011). The organization's responsiveness was undoubtedly the result of a small, familial culture receptive to a visionary leader, and able to adapt and understand the need for change. Without a transformational leader, the College went for years through a period of stagnation and suffered a degree drought, where nothing new was being created and offered. The organization began a cycle of decline. But because the school environment was small, with fewer layers of bureaucracy, there was more of a susceptibility to change; without tenure track faculty and a complicated governance structure, the new President was able to come in with a sense of urgency and create change within one year's time, creating a surplus and increasing enrollment. Without the financial stabilization, the college would not have been able to continue much longer on the course it was on. If change had not been approached aggressively and in a way that inspired action, the school may have quickly declined.

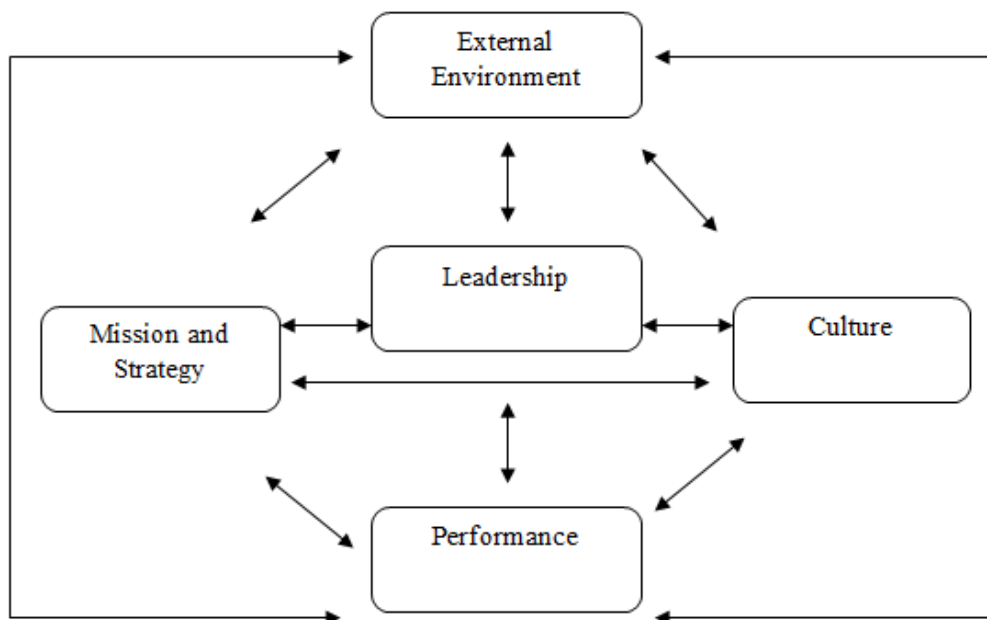
When contemplating the true value that a smaller college provides, the focus on student success in a small class environment with customized attention is a hallmark of the experience. The attention to mission and student success described by the study's participants, including examples of employees funding student trips home out of their own paychecks, points to an extreme passion for doing work that matters. The participants described a collaborative culture

where ideas were shared and voices were heard. Departments were not standoffish and siloed, but worked together to get things accomplished. If the environment was large and unwieldy, crippled by too much process and red tape, organizational change would have been very difficult to achieve.

**Change Triggered within the Burke-Litwin Dimensions.** Organizational models are useful in providing clarity, understanding and awareness of the changes being observing within an organization (Howard, 1994). Data is more clearly categorized, interpreted, and translated into a common language and understood within common variables, through the use of a model, particularly when there is a need for systematic data collection (Howard, 1994). The Burke-Litwin (1992) model describes how both transformational variables (associated with leadership) and transactional variables (associated with management) drive organizational performance and change. Many of the transformational variables emerged as their own theme through the process of analyzing the data, while many of the transactional variables were discussed in the context of



changes within the organization's culture and performance.



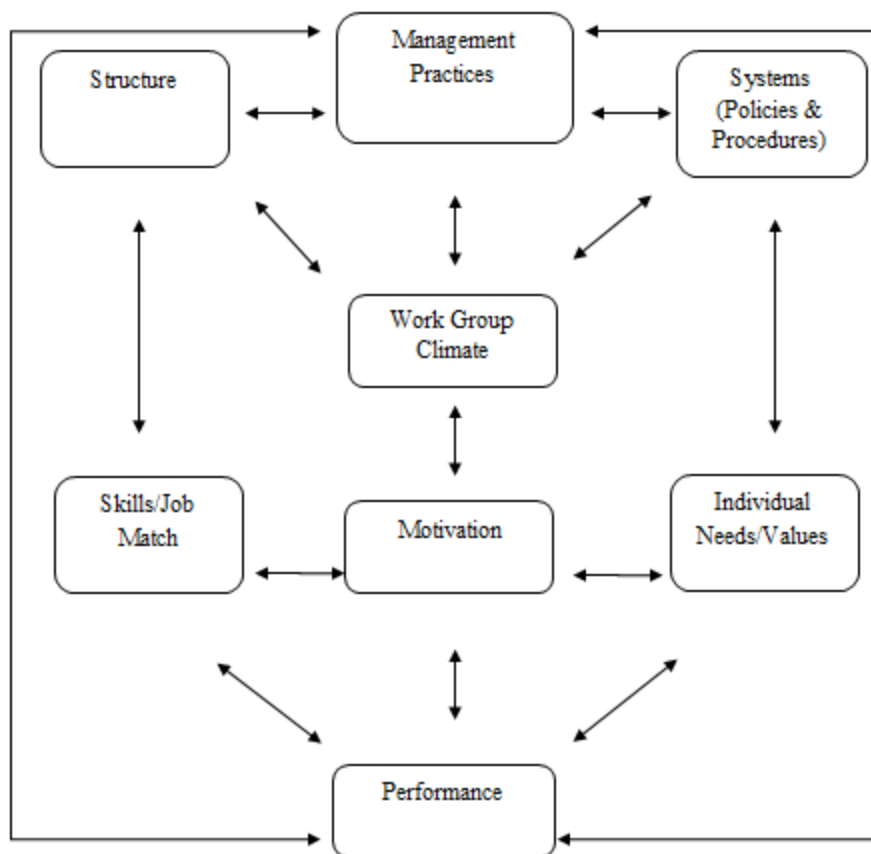
**Figure 1: Transformational Variables. This figure demonstrates the top half of the Burke-Litwin model**

While the new President was the catalyst and driving force behind change at the institution, it was clear that change needed to occur across the institution, within multiple layers, and in parallel for success to be achieved.

- External Environment - Burke and Litwin (1992) note that “astute leaders are people who scan their organization's external environment, choose the forces they wish to deal with, and take action accordingly” (p. 530). In the case of Fisher College's transformation, the President did exactly that, evaluating the external environment and battling those factors that could be influenced, such as overcoming accreditation hurdles and battling competition through a revitalized brand and new program offerings.
- Mission and Strategy – It was discovered through the interviews that the President's focus on both mission and strategy was dramatic. Participants spoke so often about the ties to mission

that it emerged as its own theme, noting that the President began each meeting with a slide on the mission, and that he had coined a phrase related to what's in the "best interest of Fisher College," or BIOFC. Passion for the mission was pervasive throughout the institution, as leadership begins at the top and personnel often mirror the values of leadership. The importance of strategy and planning was also a new and clear focus for this President who declared and communicated the strategy often throughout the community, describing defined goals and outcomes and the steps to achieve them.

- Leadership – Leadership was noted throughout the emerging themes as the single largest driver of change within the institution. The new President's leadership was focused on the business and operation in a different way, and was characterized by a style that inspired, motivated, and created a unifying vision. In surrounding himself with strong leaders, their management also contributed to cultural change and aided the overall organizational change.
- Organizational Culture – The organizational culture held many of the same traditions and principles under the new President as it did under other leaders with respect to its small, familial environment; however, a new focus on accountability and a constant reminder of the students Fisher serves did create change within the organization's culture. A business focus, a new pace (sense of urgency), data-driven decision-making and the way problems were approached were all changes that permeated throughout the institution.
- Individual and organizational performance – Both individual and organizational performance and effectiveness was found to improve significantly across the college, spurred by increased accountability, data-driven decision-making, rewarded performance, increased attention by management, and inspiration for the understood goal: becoming a baccalaureate institution.



**Figure 2: Transactional Variables. This figure demonstrates the bottom half of the Burke-Litwin model**

While it was important for the larger transformational pillars of change to take root, such as creating a common vision, adding new programs, focusing on data-driven decision-making and putting fiscal controls in place, the smaller process and procedural (“transactional”) changes were also essential to creating a culture ready for change.

- Structure – The organizational structure was hierarchical and while that did not theoretically change, individuals and departments were restructured under the new President to create a more streamlined and logical operation. Participants also noted the difference in “having a voice” and being able to make decisions independently, all reflections of the structural changes made.

- Management Practices - Management practices improved with new leadership at the cabinet level, and fiscal controls were put into place. A focus on accountability and data-driven decision making was seen throughout the organization, with management encouraging collaboration, communication, and idea sharing.
- Systems – Changes occurred in the organization’s systems and processes, particularly in the way performance reviews were handled and good performance was rewarded. The approach to curriculum development was tightened up. Participants also described positive changes in the hiring process, mentioning how the new President wanted to meet every single new hire to explain what kind of organization they were considering joining, and what it took to be successful at the college. Through the strategic planning process, goals were tied to an operational plan that held individuals accountable for specific tasking. These new management tools and processes were a dramatic change across the organization’s systems.
- Work Unit Climate - At the departmental or work unit level, collaboration and communication improved, unifying personnel toward a common goal. Many participants described improved and positive morale, communication and collaboration.
- Task requirements and individual skills/abilities – With respect to what was required to complete tasks, this is another area that benefitted greatly from a new President. Participants described the new President’s focus on providing professional development and advanced degree pursuit options for employees, prizing improvement in skills, increasing knowledge and improving credentials to create the needed baccalaureate culture. Where talent was lacking, new faces were brought in, including MBAs to support the Executive Council and consultants to assist in the areas of financial aid, grant development and support, and retention.

- Individual needs and values – When participants spoke of morale increasing and having a voice, they were describing psychological factors that were met, and the result was a positive attitude toward the work required. While every individual perspective is unique and it participants value different things in the workplace, a consistency throughout the interviews was improvement in this area. Participants felt that a different kind of attention was being paid to the work happening across the college – employee contributions were valued in a different way, and when someone was positively impacting the institution, it was being noticed. The President’s engagement and visibility at all levels of the institution received notice and impacted employee sentiment and productivity.
- Motivation – Participants described how motivation changed after new leadership was in place, and how accountability created a boost in morale as dead weight was identified and removed, and good performance was rewarded.

This study affirmed the necessity of leadership in driving change, encouraging improvement across multiple variables. Transformational leaders work to reshape organizational culture by hiring strong and resourceful leaders, creating structure and informing policy and processes that position an organization for excellence. Bass (2008) describes that the most effective leaders employ both transformational and transactional methods in achieving objectives, which was clearly mirrored in Dr. McGovern’s approach at Fisher College.

### **Implications for Practice and Research**

#### **Transformational Leadership**

Small colleges in need of change require a transformative president. Dr. McGovern’s background in government and consulting provided a business focus the organization desperately needed. Within the first year, the finances were turned around a surplus achieved, where in prior

years the organization had suffered a financial loss. An implication for practice is for Boards and search committees to recruit a transformational leader when there is a need for organizational change. However, there is a leadership deficit right now, with 58 percent of America's college presidents 61 years of age or older, and retirement is fast approaching (ACE, 2013).

Ideally, this kind of leadership could be identified and recruited, and one way to accomplish this is through succession planning. Dr. McGovern's familiarity with Fisher College and what was required for change came from several sources, but a primary source was the institution itself. After working at Fisher for years, he understood the culture. If Presidents of small colleges identify strong internal candidates to succeed them upon their departure, leadership training can begin years in advance of the candidate assuming the role. Programs offered by the American Council on Education (ACE), such as "Advancing to the Presidency" and by the Council for Independent Colleges and Universities (CIC), such as the "Presidential Vocation and Institutional Mission Program" pair students with a mentor, discuss challenges and strategies for overcoming them and ultimately strengthen a candidate's understanding of the position and ability to perform. Once in the position, Harvard, ACE, CIC, and the American Association of Community Colleges offer leadership programs for new presidents (Inside Higher Ed, 2012).

Another option for locating a transformational leader is looking outside of academia. Dr. McGovern did not rise up the ranks in the traditional fashion, from faculty to Chief Academic Officer (CAO), to President. He came to the college after directing a government agency, and left the college at one time to pursue management consulting, ultimately came back to apply for the Presidency. This differs from many of today's college presidents, who have risen up through a traditional pathway, beginning as a professor and progressing through the ranks to dean or

department chair, provost or chief academic officer (Cohen & March, 1974). In a 2007 report conducted by ACE, only 17 percent of sitting presidents were from outside of higher education, while 63 percent came from either the CAO position or another senior administrative role.

With the trend toward hiring non-traditional presidents still relatively new, there are significant gaps in the literature relative to actual studies that could determine if the impact of presidential leadership from outside academia is either positive or negative. There are several studies that highlight the diminishing role of academics in the role of the president (Dunn, Gibson, Whorton, 1985; Kauffman, 1980), but these are not tied to a traditional or non-traditional hire. Future research should examine what drivers make presidents truly effective in their roles, across backgrounds and institutional tiers. Additional research should also focus on leadership training that best prepares candidates for a presidency, and what has been driving the demands of the job to shift so much that different skill sets are required in a leader. Lastly, additional research might take a hard look at why the candidate pipeline is the smallest in the history of higher education, and what can be done to increase and support interest in the role.

### **Alignment with the Board of Trustees**

This study supports the recommendations from the AGB (1996), and also suggests that clear decision-making is aided by an abundance of communication and alignment between the President and the Board. If a similar alignment can be achieved with accrediting bodies, the institution would achieve greater effectiveness. Furthermore, looking outside of academia for an effective president may result in finding two things: a strong and transformational leader for a struggling college, and a leader who is particularly aligned with Board thinking, since many Board members come from outside of academia. As participants discussed throughout the interviews, Dr. McGovern's business focus, and hiring of MBAs on his Executive Council drove

a significant amount of change. His experience directing a government agency and consulting throughout the country brought a lot of additional skills to the position. A transformational leader may come from outside of academia, possessing a non-traditional background and skillsets focused on finance, politics, and fundraising to combat the current economic climate.

If the Board is concerned that timely and accurate information is being withheld, a recommendation made by Healy and Peterson (1979) can mitigate this problem. Healy and Peterson (1979) found that administrators often withheld information from the board until situations were so dire that revealing something like a problematic financial state or declining enrollment were impossible to correct. The board requires accurate and timely information in order to make decisions, and a recommended solution for this is a board-appointed staff person to serve on the administration, with the intent of data gathering and presenting accurate information at every meeting (Healy & Peterson, 1979).

Lastly, Presidents and Board Chairs should train together to strengthen their communication skills and rapport, through a premier program such as those offered by the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB). AGB offers one particular program, an Institute for Board Chairs and Presidents of Independent Colleges and Universities, that: “allows chair-president teams to develop robust partnerships and create a focused agenda that moves both the board and the institution forward. As a result of this Institute, board chairs and presidents will strengthen their relationship, find answers to emerging challenges, and develop an action agenda for the board. Facilitated group sessions provide best practices in governance and effective strategies from other institutions, while president-chair team meetings and one-on-one consultations allow participants to focus on shared work at their own institutions” (AGB, 2015). This kind of training is particularly important for small colleges



and those that are struggling, where timely and accurate communication can mean survival for the college. Future research could examine consistencies among successful college presidents in a small school turnaround situation, studying leadership style, political savvy, and connectivity with the Board of Trustees.

### **The Burke-Litwin (1992) Model**

The President found it important to begin change with a clear vision, a focus on mission and strategic planning, and inspire employees before addressing the transactional variables and improving processes. With no prior knowledge of the Burke-Litwin (1992) model, this happened naturally; however, an understanding of the model and its effects would have been potentially helpful to the organization, to diagnose problem areas and explain how change would be achieved, particularly when working with senior management.

The Burke-Litwin (1992) model was useful for evaluating change within an institution of higher education, but models are limited in their interpretation of reality. While this was a valuable tool and framework for developing the interview guide and interpreting results within specific dimensions, additional variables also aid in comprehension. Specifically, if the organization is a business that benefits the social sector, the importance of mission is akin to the importance of strong leadership. Success is bred by fulfilling an important mission, and success breeds additional success through support and commitment (Collins, 2005). Therefore, the type of business should be a consideration or variable within the Burke-Litwin model. Collins (2005) describes solid social sector businesses to exist on a foundation of “tangible results and emotional share of heart, so potential supporters believe not only in your missions but in your capacity to deliver on that mission” (p.25). The emotion of employees undergoing a

transformation is touched upon in the variable related to values, but it could be more fully developed within the model.

Two additions that would strengthen the model include mindset and discipline. When considering the impact of transformational leadership at Fisher College, there was a change in mindset that could be compared to an almost religious fervor; individuals were revitalized and excited to be a part of change. This was inspired by an increase in discipline across the college, evidenced in everything from a more professional dress code to the hiring of more credentialed individuals, to the introduction of more rigor in the curriculum. Collins (1995) describes the need for increased discipline across nonprofits – “disciplined planning, disciplined people, disciplined governance, disciplined allocation of resources” (p.1), and this speaks to the heart of the change that transformed Fisher. Yes, it took a specific kind of leader to ignite the process of change and keep it on track, but the changes that permeated throughout the Burke-Litwin (1992) variables required discipline. Without it, the change would not have taken place as quickly or to the degree it transpired – it may have been sluggish or resulted in a mediocre outcome. The degree of discipline was an important consideration when operating with a sense of urgency. Future research could evaluate if additions to the model strengthen its effectiveness.

### **Limitations**

The use of the Burke-Litwin (1992) model in the study was considered by the researcher to be a useful framework, but there are limitations in relying on a framework. Occasionally, a study will limit itself to the defined variables, causing a researcher to focus narrowly and not consider other drivers. The researcher was aware of this potential limitation and worked to consider other variables. Given that conclusions led to proposed changes in the model, the limitation was likely overcome, but should still be noted.

This study was limited to one college, and generalizability is difficult, given the numerous variables that surround every organization. The primary researcher holds an executive position at the college, and while every attempt was made to ensure participants were comfortable and knew they could speak candidly without repercussion, responses may have been tempered due to the researcher's role at the school. Lastly, this study used participant perceptions as the primary source of data. These individuals were in the best position to observe and understand changes within the organization and its culture, and many of the senior level executives and board members interviewed, along with the President, were in a position to influence the organization's process of change (Bass, 1999). However, obtaining data through a single method approach (one researcher interviewing participants) may have introduced bias. Spector (2006) cautions that use of a single method does not automatically introduce systematic bias, but future research should work to gather both independent and dependent variables across multiple data sources to combat bias.

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## Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

### Introduction

As you know, Fisher College has undergone transformation from a two-year to a four-year institution, and I am studying the change process. I have asked you to share your experiences with me today as someone who has observed or participated in the process of Fisher's change. I am working to understand the major drivers for change, and learn how the institution was led through this transformational process. I am interested in hearing about your experiences and the role of leadership throughout the transformation. I believe this study will help inform our understanding of organizational change and leadership, with findings guiding future success for both our institution and others going through similar circumstances. This interview will take approximately one hour, and I thank you for your participation.

Responses will be audiotaped so I can be sure to capture everything you say, and I will also take written notes during the interview. All of these responses will remain confidential and a pseudonym will be used in the report findings. While a transcriptionist will be employed to create transcripts from the recordings, pseudonyms will be used when sending the recordings.

In order to meet the research requirements for Northeastern and Fisher College, I have a form that must be signed today before we proceed. This document basically states that (1) all information provided will be maintained as confidential, (2) your participation is on a voluntary basis, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) this study does not intend to inflict any harm. *(Provide Form)*

Do you have any questions?

1. Please describe your job position at Fisher, and how long you have been at the College.
2. What has been your role in the transformation process as Fisher moved from a two-year to a four-year institution?
3. What were the strengths and weakness of the transformation process?
4. When reflecting on Fisher's transformation from a two-year to a four -year baccalaureate institution, what are the factors that have enabled this transition to occur?

**PART II** (Questions will be asked/ Variables will not be referenced, or seen by the participant):

Variable	Questions	Targeted Participant
External Environment	What are the biggest factors in the external environment that impact the college's performance? Is the college aware of these? What does the college do in response to external factors? How has awareness of and response to external factors changed over the last 5-7?	Vice President for Enrollment Director of Finance
Mission & Strategy	What is the college's mission? Is leadership aware of the mission? Does everyone who works at the college "live" the mission? Are there examples of this? Has attention to the mission changed in the last 5-7 years?	Dean of Curric & Center for International Students Board member
Leadership	Who leads the organization? Describe the style of leadership at the college. Is leadership respected? How has leadership changed, or been different from the past, over the last 5-7 years (if participant has been at Fisher College for this duration)?	Board Member Continuing Education Dean

Transformational

Transactional

Variable	Questions	Targeted Participant
Organizational Culture	How would you characterize the organizational culture at Fisher College? What basic principles guide the actions of leadership at Fisher College? Do employees mirror this as well? Are there any anecdotal examples that help to characterize or describe Fisher's culture? Has the culture changed over the past 5-7 years?	Board Member Chief Academic Officer Director of Finance
Structure	Describe the organizational structure at Fisher. How important are job titles to you and those you work with? Who are the key decision-makers? Are decisions made in a participative manner? How is information communicated throughout the college? Do you believe the structure enables faster decision-making, or is it an obstacle? How has the structure changed over the past 5-7 years?	Dean of Students and Housing VP Enrollment Chief Academic Officer
Systems	Does the organization have clear policies and procedures? Is good performance rewarded? Do you have access to the resources you need to be effective in your department? How have systems changed over the past 5-7 years?	Faculty Dean Chief Academic Officer Director of Finance
Management Practices	What is your management style? How do you access the resources you need to carry out your job? Has your ability to manage changed over the past 5-7 years, under new leadership? If so, how so? If not, why not? Does the institution's leadership encourage innovation and creative problem solving? How has this changed over the last 5-7 years?	Dean of Students and Housing Site Coordinator

Variable	Questions	Targeted Participant
Work Unit Climate	How would you characterize your department's cohesiveness? What are the department's basic goals? What are your department's expectations of leadership? Does everyone have a voice and an opportunity to share ideas and opinions? Has your department's effectiveness changed over the past 5-7 years?	VP Enrollment Director of Finance
Task & Individual Skills	What are the skills, abilities, and knowledge required to perform your job and daily tasks? Do you feel you have access to everything you need in order to be effective in your role? Does Fisher match individuals well to the appropriate job, based on competencies, when hiring? Has this changed over the past 5-7 years?	Faculty Member Site Coordinator
Individual Needs & Values	What do you value most about your job? What are some of the things that have to be in place for you to enjoy your work? Do you find that this exists at Fisher? Has it changed over the last 5-7 years?	Director of Finance Dean of Continuing Ed Dean of Liberal Arts & Sciences
Motivation	How would you characterize the motivation level of yourself and others? What are key drivers of motivation to perform at Fisher College? Has this changed over the last 5-7 years?	Faculty Member Dean of Continuing Ed VP Enrollment
Individual & Organizational Performance	How would you describe Fisher College's performance over the last 5-7 years? Has this been a dramatic change from past years? What can you point to in terms of your individual or departmental performance that helped drive Fisher's performance? What are the factors that impact the organization's performance the most?	Dean of Students and Housing VP Enrollment

## Appendix B: President's Protocol

Participant Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Location: \_\_\_\_\_

### Introduction

Fisher College has undergone transformation from a two-year to a four-year institution, and I am studying the change process. I have asked you to share your experiences with me today as someone who has influenced the process of Fisher's change as the leader of this institution. I am working to understand the major drivers for change, and learn how the institution was led through this transformational process. I am interested in hearing about your experiences and your leadership role throughout the transformation. I believe this study will help inform our understanding of organizational change and leadership, with findings guiding future success for both our institution and others going through similar circumstances. This interview will take approximately one hour, be followed up with two subsequent one hour interviews, and I thank you for your participation.

Responses will be audiotaped so I can be sure to capture everything you say, and I will also take written notes during the interview. All of these responses will remain confidential and a pseudonym will be used in the report findings. While a transcriptionist will be employed to create transcripts from the recordings, pseudonyms will be used when sending the recordings.

In order to meet the research requirements for Northeastern and Fisher College, I have a form that must be signed today before we proceed. This document basically states that (1) all information provided will be maintained as confidential, (2) your participation is on a voluntary basis, and you may stop at any time if you feel uncomfortable, and (3) this study does not intend to inflict any harm. *(Provide Form)*

Do you have any questions?



**PART I:**

Please describe your job position at Fisher, and how long you have been at the College.

What has been your role in the transformation process as Fisher moved from a 2 to 4 year institution?

What were the strengths and weakness of the transformation process?

How do you measure the effectiveness of Fisher's transformation to a four-year institution?

When reflecting on Fisher's transformation from a 2-year to a 4-year baccalaureate institution, what are the factors that have enabled this transition to occur?

How would you describe your leadership style? What has been most effective in transforming Fisher and driving change?

Fisher has experienced an almost doubling of enrollment from 2008 – 2013. What drove enrollment increases?

How did the culture adapt to new terminal degreed faculty and increased oversight?

How did you, as a new president, obtain buy-in and was there – or was there not – resistance at any point?

How were these challenges overcome?

How did the institution purposefully invest during a time of budget tightening to enable such a transformation?

**PART II** (Questions will be asked/ Variables will not be referenced, or seen by the participant):

Transformational

Variable	Questions
External Environment	<p>What are the biggest factors in the external environment that impact the college's performance?</p> <p>What do you do in response to external factors?</p> <p>How has awareness of and response to external factors changed over the last 5-7?</p>
Mission & Strategy	<p>What is the college's mission? How do you ensure that everyone who works at the college "lives" the mission? Are there examples of this? Has attention to the mission changed in the last 5-7 years?</p> <p>Vision: What is your vision for the organization?</p>
Leadership	<p>How would you characterize your leadership style?</p> <p>Would you say that leadership at the college has changed significantly over the past 7 years? (if yes: Can you give some examples?)</p>
Organizational Culture	<p>How would you characterize the organizational culture at Fisher College? What basic principles guide the actions of leadership at Fisher College? Do employees mirror this as well? Are there any anecdotal examples that help to characterize or describe Fisher's culture? Has the organizational culture changed over the past 5-7 years?</p>
Structure	<p>Describe the organizational structure at Fisher.</p> <p>How does the structure impact decision-making and communication?</p> <p>How has the organizational structure changed over the past 5-7 years?</p>
Systems	<p>What is your philosophy with respect to organizational policies and procedures?</p> <p>What is your philosophy with respect to rewarding performance? How have systems changed over the past 5-7 years?</p>

Transactional

Variable	Questions
Management Practices	<p>How would you describe your management style? Has your management style changed over the past 7 years?</p> <p>What kind of managers do you hire? Can you talk about how you encourage innovation and creative problem solving?</p>
Work Unit Climate	<p>How would you characterize the cohesiveness of your senior leadership team? What are the team's basic goals? What does your executive leadership team expect from you, and from one another? Does everyone have a voice and an opportunity to share ideas and opinions? Has the effectiveness of the senior leadership team changed over the past 5-7 years?</p>
Task & Individual Skills	<p>When hiring personnel, how do you ensure a match of skills to the appropriate job? Has anything you have put into place impacted this over the last 5-7 years?</p>
Individual Needs & Values	<p>What do you value most about your job? What are some of the things that have to be in place for you to enjoy your work? Has this changed over the last 5-7 years?</p>
Motivation	<p>How would you characterize the motivation level of yourself and others? What are key drivers of motivation to perform at Fisher College? Has this changed over the last 5-7 years?</p>
Individual & Organizational Performance	<p>How would you describe Fisher College's performance as an organization over the last 5-7 years? Has this been a dramatic change from past years? How have you driven Fisher's performance? What are the factors that impact the organization's performance the most?</p>

### Appendix C: Data Collection Protocol



Dear Colleague/Board Member/Faculty Member,

As many of you know, I have been working to complete a doctorate in higher education administration. As a part of this work, I am conducting a research study on Fisher College's transformation from a two-year junior college to a four-year baccalaureate, and am examining the nature of organizational change and the role of leadership in driving this change. I am inviting you to participate (as one of not more than 15 participants) in this research study.

Your active participation in this study will take, at most, three hours. You will be asked to participate in one or two individual interviews, each lasting approximately sixty minutes. Should you consent to participate in this study, you will be interviewed in February or March at a time that is convenient for you. The interview will take place in person or over the phone at a time and location of your choosing, and be audiotaped to ensure capture of an accurate record of your thoughts. The purpose of the interview is to learn about your perceptions of organizational change and leadership at Fisher College from the time period of 2007-present. I will contact you via e-mail to set up a convenient time for the interview. While one interview will be satisfactory for most participants, a second interview may be requested to obtain clarification on responses, or request missing information (again, audiotaped and held at a convenient location and time).

If you would like to participate in this study, please contact me by email me by [DATE set to correspond to approximately one week after the email is sent, following IRB approval]. If you decide to participate in the study, you will be asked to sign a consent form at the first interview. The consent form that I have attached to this email provides additional information about the study. If you have questions that need answers before you decide, please do not hesitate to

contact me. If you decide to participate, I will answer any other questions you may have about the study whenever they arise.

Joining the study is voluntary. You may refuse to join, or you may withdraw your consent to be in the study, at any time and for any reason, without penalty. You can choose to skip over any question in the interviews that you do not want to answer, and can respond as much or as little as you choose to any particular question. Your employment at Fisher College will not be impacted by your decision to participate or not participate in the research.

I believe this study will help inform our understanding of organizational change and leadership at the junior college level. In addition, I believe this study will inform our understanding of how Fisher managed effective change, with findings guiding future success for both our institution and others going through similar circumstances. I hope that you will take advantage of this opportunity to share your thoughts and experiences.

Again, if you are interested, please contact me at [cook.me@husky.neu.edu](mailto:cook.me@husky.neu.edu). If you have questions you can reach me by email, or you can call me at 617-320-3195 (cell).

Thank you for your consideration of this study!

Sincerely,

Melinda Cook

## **Appendix D: Informed Consent Form**

### **INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The College of Professional Studies at Northeastern University supports the practice of protection for human subjects participating in research. The following information is provided to help you decide whether you wish to participate in the present study. You retain the right of refusal to sign this form and not participate in this study. You should be aware that even if you consent to participate in this study, you may withdraw from this study at any time without consequence. If you choose to withdraw from this study, it will not affect your relationship with this department, the researcher, or either Fisher College or Northeastern University.

#### **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the nature of Fisher College's success with organizational change, and the leadership required to transform from a two-year junior college to a four-year baccalaureate.

#### **PROCEDURES**

Data will be collected through audio-recorded interviews. Interviews will be transcribed and you will receive a copy and asked to confirm that the account accurately reflects the discussion that was held with the researcher. Do not hesitate to ask questions about the study before participating or during the study. Your name will not be associated with the research findings in any way, and only the researchers will know your identity.

#### **RISKS**

There are no known risks or discomforts associated with this study.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The data collected are confidential. All data are coded so that that your name is not associated with them. The data are made available only to the researcher associated with this project.

#### **BENEFITS**

The expected benefits associated with your participation are the information about the experiences observing and participating in Fisher College's organizational change. Additional understanding and awareness of contributing factors, including leadership practices and behavior, will impact positively the success of other junior colleges in transition. I would be happy to share findings with you after the research is completed.

#### **QUESTIONS ABOUT PARTICIPATION**

If you have any questions about the procedures, you may direct them to the principal investigator, (Investigator's name)

### **CONSENT**

I have read the above information and received a copy of this form. I have had the opportunity to ask questions regarding my participation in this study. I agree to take part in this study as a research participant.

By my signature I affirm that I am at least 18 years old.

---

Print Participant's Name

Date

---

Participant's Signature

Date

### **RESEARCHER CONTACT INFORMATION**

Melinda Cook [cook.me@husky.neu.edu](mailto:cook.me@husky.neu.edu) 617-320-3195 (cell).

### **RESEARCH ADVISOR CONTACT INFORMATION**

Dr. Corliss Brown Thompson [co.brown@neu.edu](mailto:co.brown@neu.edu)

## Appendix E: Approval from Northeastern University



# Northeastern

### NOTIFICATION OF IRB ACTION RENEWAL APPROVAL

Date: February 13, 2015      IRB #: CPS14-02-03

Principal Investigator(s):      Corliss Brown Thompson  
Melinda Cook

Department:      Doctor of Education  
College of Professional Studies

Address:      20 Belvidere  
Northeastern University

Title of Project:      A Case Study of Organizational Change in a Small, Private  
Junior College

Approval Status:      Closed to Enrollment – Ongoing Analysis Only

Participating Sites:      Fisher College Permission Letter on File

Original Protocol Approved:      February 20, 2014

DHHS Review Category:      Expedited #6, #7

Informed Consents:      N/A

Monitoring Interval:      12 months

*Human Subject Research  
Protection*

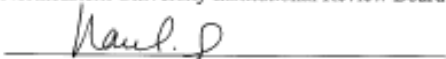
950 Renaissance Park  
300 Huntington Avenue  
Boston, MA 02115  
617.373.7570  
fax 617.373.4595  
northeastern.edu/hsrp

### APPROVAL EXPIRATION DATE: FEBRUARY 12, 2016

#### Investigator's Responsibilities:

1. The informed consent form bearing the IRB approval stamp must be used when recruiting participants into the study.
2. The investigator must notify IRB **immediately** of unexpected adverse reactions, or new information that may alter our perception of the benefit-risk ratio.
3. Study procedures and files are subject to audit any time.
4. Any modifications of the protocol or the informed consent as the study progresses must be reviewed and approved by this committee **prior to being instituted**.
5. Continuing Review Approval for the proposal should be requested at least one month prior to the expiration date above.
6. This approval applies to the protection of human subjects only. It does not apply to any other university approvals that may be necessary.

  
C. Randall Colvin, Ph.D., Chair  
Northeastern University Institutional Review Board

  
Nan C. Regina, Director  
Human Subject Research Protection



**Appendix F: Approval from Fisher College**

January 29, 2014

Dear Melinda,

This letter is to confirm our recent discussion and serve as written acknowledgement that you have permission to conduct your thesis research on Fisher College's organizational change from a 2 year junior college to a baccalaureate institution at Fisher College. You have permission to access all documents required to support your case, including but not limited to: strategic planning documents, accreditation documentation, Board of Trustee and Executive Council meeting minutes, and anything required from the college's archives. You have permission to recruit participants from all Fisher stakeholders, including faculty, staff, board members, and others in the Fisher community over the age of 18. You may conduct interviews on site, if desired. Good luck with your research!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas McGovern". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and "M".

Thomas McGovern, President  
Fisher College  
118 Beacon Street  
Boston, MA 02116