AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY: CAN RE-FOCUSING A COMMUNITY COLLEGE AS A "LEARNING COLLEGE" ENHANCE CROSS-DEPARTMENTAL COLLABORATION?

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ABSTRACT

This action research project answers the question, “How might re-focusing as a “learning college” enhance greater cross-departmental collaboration in the College of New Caledonia?” and the sub-questions, “What is the meaning of a learning college?”, and “What organizational changes and/or practices would enhance re-focusing as a learning college?” This inquiry applied a research methodology called Appreciative Inquiry, where the participants answered positive appreciative questions to discover the excellence in their past student-centred experiences, and to dream or create their vision of what an ideal learning-centred college might look like in the future. Data generated through this research were analyzed into themes demonstrating that participants had a vision of a College characterized by good relationships and collaborative student-centred processes. These themes formed the basis of conclusions and subsequent recommendations on how the College of New Caledonia might re-focus as a learning college and enhance cross-departmental collaboration in the College.

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I would especially like to thank Ralph Troschke for agreeing to sponsor this project as a further responsibility, just when he was beginning a new challenge himself – assuming the role of President of the College of New Caledonia. I would also like to thank Ralph for his advice and support.

To Ann Perodeau, my faculty supervisor, for whom I hold the utmost respect as an individual and a leader – one who lives Appreciative Inquiry – for whom integrity and ethics is everything – and one from whom I model my own leadership. In her gentle ways, she encouraged me, helped me to be creative, and gently pushed me. Ann, thank you for everything.

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Introduction

This action research project examined how a community college could re-focus as a "learning college" that would advance successful student learning in everything the College does. It utilized a research methodology that focused on the positive, and could be utilized in the context of a fragmented work environment to foster collaboration and teamwork, even across departmental boundaries. This methodology is known as Appreciative Inquiry.

The principal research objective was to determine how the organization could re-focus as a learning college, placing student learning above all else. How could the College of New Caledonia (CNC) ensure its people, processes, and policies were all working to advance the cause of learning? Such re-focusing could be an integral part of a strategy to deal with many of the threats and opportunities in the College's environment. Secondly, another research objective was to investigate how the development of a learning college might operate to bring down the organizational silos which have existed throughout the time of my employment at CNC.

It is critical to the College's future and perhaps its very existence for its employees to function collaboratively. This is necessary to ensure CNC's place in the marketplace as an effective and efficient provider of post-secondary education. As Kouzes and Posner (2002) state, "collaboration is a social imperative. Without it we can't get extraordinary things done in organizations" (p. 242).

As a long-term employee, with experience working in both academic and administrative capacities, I have a vested interest in the future growth and health of the

College and wanted to help ensure that CNC offers the greatest possible value and satisfaction to both its students and employees.

To this end, the research question is "How might re-focusing as a learning college enhance greater cross-departmental collaboration in the College of New Caledonia?"

The sub-questions are:

1. What is the meaning of a learning college?
2. What organizational changes and/or practices would enhance re-focusing as a learning college?

Mr. Ralph Troschke, President of the College of New Caledonia, agreed to be the sponsor of my project. I selected Mr. Troschke for three reasons. First, I believed that having the support of the College's Chief Executive Officer would lend credibility to the research project. Secondly, it was clear that Mr. Troschke is committed to consultation, organizational change, and to the values inherent in my research topic. Thirdly, I believe Mr. Troschke's freshness to CNC was a significant benefit: he had no baggage.

The Opportunity

With 15 years of experience as an instructor at CNC, and a recent appointment as Dean of Business and Technology, I have experienced the system first from the perspective of a faculty member, and now as a manager of an academic division. CNC is a complex organization, as is any large institution with approximately 500 full-time employees. There are three constituent groups of employees: management, faculty, and support staff. There are two collective bargaining units: the Faculty Association of CNC, and for the support staff, the Pulp and Paper Workers of Canada (PPWC). There has been a history of strong activist unions, and mediocre labour relations.

Over the years at CNC, I have observed employees, including management, faculty, and staff, who do not adhere to a learning college mindset or culture. Terry O'Banion (1997) refers to the learning college model as one "based on the assumption that educational experiences are designed for the convenience of learners rather than for the convenience of institutions and their staffs" (p. 47). Rather than focusing on student learning in everything they do, using it as the filter or lens for all decisions and planning, some employees seem to focus on the needs of bureaucratic processes and systems. I have observed Admissions Department staff interact with prospective and existing students in an unhelpful, even unfriendly manner. I have noted faculty unwilling to accommodate students who are ill and unable to write an exam. I have observed managers who condone poor instruction.

A phenomenon that has struck me over my years at CNC, is the perceived existence of various tensions: faculty versus management, faculty versus staff, staff versus management, department versus department, et cetera. Perhaps the most damaging of these tensions exists between the Academic divisions and the Student Services division of the College. They have operated in isolation from one another, with a notable lack of collaboration.

Corroboration of these tensions and a non-collaborative culture was forthcoming on April 11, 2005 with the announcement of the results of the College of New Caledonia Employee Perceptions Survey (2005). In response to the statement, "faculty, operational staff and administration at CNC work together as a team", 49% of administrators strongly disagreed or disagreed. The data for staff and faculty were 76% and 67% respectively. In response to the statement, "communication is effective between faculty, operational staff

and administration", 58% of administrators strongly disagreed or disagreed. For staff and faculty the results were 80% and 76% respectively. It was also telling that in response to the statement, "collaboration is encouraged within the College", only 46% of administration strongly agreed or agreed. These numbers strongly confirm that there is poor communication and collaboration at the College.

The Academic divisions are largely composed of faculty members, while the Student Services division is largely composed of support staff. As a manager, I am now aware of and appreciate the work and challenges of staff members, something I did not appreciate when working as an instructor. As a faculty member, I perceived that the support staff functioned separately from the rest of the system. This perspective is the antithesis of systems-based thinking. After exposure to MALT, and management at the College, I acquired a more authentic systems-based perspective and awareness of the hazards of operating in organizational silos in general. In this competitive and resource-scarce environment, organizational silos impede the College's ability to put learning first, and they may even threaten the long-term existence of CNC.

In August 2004, CNC welcomed a new President, who wants to enhance collaboration, consultation, and the breaking down of organizational silos. He also believes in the learning college paradigm. Soon after his arrival, he diagnosed the existence of these silos, a lack of trust, and poor communication. He also observed attitudes, policies and procedures that impede learning (R. Troschke, personal communication, September 2005).

Through Appreciative Inquiry, College employees could acquire a new awareness of the excitement and satisfaction that comes from serving the learning needs of students,

and of the relevance and value of collaboration. This awareness could motivate CNC employees to work more collaboratively and ultimately more effectively and efficiently in meeting their mission as educators.

Significance of the Opportunity

The very choice of Appreciative Inquiry as a methodology linked specifically to the research question was intended to provide an opportunity to the College. Many at CNC already have a mindset, values, and set of practices congruent with a learning college culture. Many are personally committed to student success. However, this is insufficient to make a culture shift possible. Accordingly, the College was in the position where it could discover some of its past successes in enhancing student learning, and take those successes to greater levels at CNC - to where it wants to be. In essence, this was a project made for Appreciative Inquiry.

Appreciative Inquiry injected positive energy and focus into what is to some extent, an identified negative work environment (College of New Caledonia [CNC], 2005). In this research project, individuals focused on making the College - both its people and its systems, work well together towards the common goal of advancing learning. It was also a collaborative and collegial activity, in that members of all constituencies were involved as equals. People were invited to reflect and share what has worked in the past, with a view to making the institution a more interrelated system. Departments across the College embraced the technique of Appreciative Inquiry as a beneficial model of inquiry and communication, and this in itself was a collaborative exploration of inter-connectedness in the College. In other words, the action research process itself provided an opportunity to create cross-departmental collaboration.

It was anticipated that through this research, employees would come to see that they each play a critical part in student learning, whatever role they play - whether an instructor, clerk, custodian, or manager. Employees in one department would understand their influence on other departments of the organization - its people, its processes, and its outcomes, and vice versa. In a system where each part impacts the other, it would be foolish to plan and act in isolation from the other parts. With employees deeply committed and passionate about student success, the institution would coalesce as a unified and collaborative body, driven by the shared value of placing the learning of students, and each other above all else.

Without an enhanced awareness of organizational silos, and the compelling need for collaboration across departments, the College is unlikely to successfully re-focus as a learning college, and find the effectiveness and efficiency needed to prosper in the face of increasingly fierce competition, declining enrolments, scarce resources, and demanding stakeholders. Another factor that is of increasing concern to Colleges and especially small rural Colleges such as CNC, is the difficulty of recruiting good people. Demographics are already starting to work against us in that regard (BC Business Deans, personal communication, April 1, 2005). Kouzes and Posner (2002) reiterate that: "collaboration is *the* critical competency for achieving and sustaining high performance – especially in the Internet Age" (p. 242).

The results of this research project could be of interest to any educational organization seeking to advance student learning in everything it does, and struggling with the challenge of employees who do not appreciate the value of collaboration. This research project adds to the body of knowledge of how to create a culture characterized

by cross-functional collaboration. Kouzes and Posner (2002) state that "leaders must . . . provide frequent and lasting opportunities for team members to associate and intermingle across disciplines and between departments for collaboration to occur" (p. 258). This action research is hopefully a catalyst to re-focus as a learning college, and to erode the silos, allowing ever-greater cross-departmental collaboration at CNC.

Systems Analysis of the Opportunity

Post-secondary education, like many other sectors in Canada, is in a state of turmoil. Twigg and Doucette (1992) even go so far as to say that "the current model of higher education will inevitably change because it is economically unsustainable . . ." (p. 2). The College of New Caledonia is a small raft buffeted about in a stormy sea. Larger colleges are ocean liners in the stormy seas, but with more resources/tools to handle the rough waters. Passengers might get seasick, but they are less likely to drown. In the case of CNC, we are talking life or death.

The College must be a strong and healthy sub-system within the whole post-secondary system, if it is to stay afloat. It is in this context that the College must acquire an awareness and true appreciation of its vision to promote the success of every student. Re-focusing as a learning college and a resulting improvement in collaboration among the different departments, will allow the College to succeed more in attracting students, meeting their needs, fulfilling its mission, and dealing with the challenges it faces. To cope and survive in this system, CNC must embrace collaboration and teamwork across all its departments, to become an effective and efficient sub-system. It must do this to survive on the high choppy seas we find ourselves where united we float, divided we sink.

Knowles (2002) has developed a systemic viewpoint, the Process Enneagram, which is a helpful tool in understanding how to frame CNC's internal system in this research project:

> The rigorous and disciplined use of the Process Enneagram enables us to see and understand . . . the interactions and dynamics of people in organizations . . . and see them *from the perspective of living systems*. We become healthier when our organizations move into the living systems mode by sharing information, building relationships and becoming clear, together on our identity and intentions. (p.107)

The reader will perhaps see the congruency between the components of living systems articulated in Knowles's model--identity, relationship and information--with this project's focus on CNC's identity as a learning college, more collaborative relationships, and the sharing of information to bring these about. Knowles continues, "When these conditions are present, we will spontaneously self-organize around the work and energy and creativity will begin to flow" (p.97). Finally, Knowles observes that with an abundance of shared information, a good sense of our identity and purpose, then we begin to truly connect, and trust emerges. Now let us consider the stormy seas that batter CNC.

The sources of the storms are many and systemic: political, economic, competitive, and demographic. First, the College functions in the context of a fiscally conservative provincial government from which it derives a majority of its funding. A corollary of this fiscal system is that CNC, just like other post secondary educational institutions in British Columbia, has been obliged to significantly raise its tuition fees. At the same time, CNC's enrolments on average have fallen. The provincial College and Institute Act (1996) requires CNC to balance its budget; therefore, both layoffs and increased individual workloads have become more common.

The College is located in Prince George, a city in the central interior of British Columbia, with a population of about 75,000 and 500 miles from any major city. The

College of New Caledonia lies in the “hinterland”, and isolated from the world in which it operates. Economically, the city is dependent on a resource-based economy, primarily forestry. Therefore, the region is very sensitive to economic business cycles, the softwood lumber dispute with the United States, and the generally volatile conditions of international commodity markets.

The competitive position of CNC is one that has altered tremendously in the past 10 years. Once the only post-secondary education player in town, it now shares the market in Prince George with the University of Northern British Columbia (UNBC), and competes for the attention of, and funding from the Ministry of Advanced Education. With the advent of UNBC, online distance learning, private colleges, higher tuition, et cetera, competition is fierce and enrolments are falling. The world has become the market for many post-secondary institutions. Where does this leave a small rural British Columbia community college, such as CNC?

There are demographic factors to consider in CNC’s external system and in the internal system of the College itself. The population in CNC’s region has been shrinking with poor economic conditions and the closure of public schools. Internally, the College’s work force is ageing with the pace of retirements accelerating, a trend affecting many Colleges throughout the province. Last year alone, CNC retired their President of 14 years, a Vice-President of 35 years, and a Dean of 12 years. This factor opens up new possibilities; the current senior management is now more alert to the emergent conditions and receptive to necessary change and to this research opportunity, than would have been former senior management.

These external challenges impacting the College provide further incentive to consider the research opportunity proposed.

Organizational Context

The College of New Caledonia has served the needs of students in British Columbia's Central Interior since 1969, and with the inclusion of the British Columbia Vocational School, since 1962. The College region is approximately 117,500 square kilometers (or 12% of the province), with a population exceeding 145,000. The region encompasses three school districts and College campuses are located at six sites including the City of Prince George and the Towns of Valemount, Vanderhoof, Quesnel, Burns Lake, and MacKenzie. The College offers a full range of Career, Technical, Vocational, and University Transfer Credit programming. Average annual enrolment is approximately 5,000 students (CNC, 2004b).

CNC has not enjoyed especially good labour relations. The last strike occurred in 1995; it was an acrimonious affair with faculty on the picket lines for about three weeks, myself included. Both the support staff and faculty have had strikes previously. The two unions, the Faculty Association of CNC and the Pulp and Paper Workers of Canada, play active roles in their respective provincial labour federations, sending delegations to the annual meetings of their federations every year. Moreover, the faculty has bargained in a province-wide faculty bargaining group for the past three bargaining periods.

The College of New Caledonia Education Plan 2002-2006 (Revised July 2004) (CNC, 2004a) declares "at its core CNC is a place of learning" (p. 3). The vision statement of the College states that "the role of CNC is to provide access to lifelong learning and to deliver quality programs that promote the success of every student" (p. 3).

In another institutional document, entitled College of New Caledonia Historical Highlights (CNC, 2004b), the mission statement is longer, with the additional words: "we are responsive to the diverse needs of our students, our employees, and the communities in our region. In a dynamic, consultative environment, we deliver quality programs, and promote the success of every student" (p. 1).

The College of New Caledonia Education Plan 2002-2006 (Revised July 2004) articulates the College's values:

> CNC believes that shared values are fundamental to the success of the College in achieving its mission and realizing its vision. CNC believes in promoting a positive atmosphere for students, staff and community, facilitating access to educational opportunities, and responding to the diverse learning needs of students, employees and the communities in our region. (p. 3)

The College of New Caledonia Education Plan 2002-2006 (Revised July 2004) articulates some key strategic directions, two of which are most relevant to my research question. The first strategic direction is "to continue to foster and develop a learning centred environment" (p. 6). This is based on the guiding principle that "CNC is committed to learning" (p. 4). The second strategic direction is "the College will foster positive relationships among all members of the CNC community . . . that are built on shared goals and mutual respect" (p. 10).

The College's Strategic Plan articulates key goals, including, "to develop a dynamic consultative environment that encourages an excellent intellectual and cultural life" (CNC, 2002, p. 5). This document discusses leadership, and the promotion of a positive atmosphere, success and emotional and social wellbeing to both students and employees. It also speaks frequently of promoting the success of every student.

This research project was intended to support the College's effectiveness in attaining its objectives. It was intended to raise awareness in the College of its values,

particularly those relating to the overriding importance of successful student learning, and to a positive and consultative atmosphere. Beyond the references above, there do not appear to be any formal institutional documents, policies or procedures that address student learning, communication, collaboration and teamwork, all of which are focus areas of this research project.

There are, however, a number of recent organizational activities that set the framework for the issue and research opportunity. Recently appointed President Troschke has initiated a number of working groups that are cross-functional teams, such as the Learning College Group and the College Marketing Team. This reorganization demonstrates a new emphasis on student learning first, and on building relationships and communication outside the confines of individual silos or departments. These new initiatives seem to be going well. In March 2005, President Troschke led a CNC delegation of faculty, staff, and managers to three community colleges in eastern Canada, to observe their initiatives in developing learning colleges. I was fortunate to be a part of that tour. This trip did prove to be a catalyst in the institution to my research project.

I am not aware of other inquiries being conducted within the College on this topic, although the Vice-President Student Services, Mr. John Bowman, undertook a MALT Major Project at the Quesnel regional campus of CNC in 2003. His research question was “How can collaborative leadership in a small community college facilitate a cross-functional team in the development of improved enrolment management processes?” (Bowman, 2003). Several of Mr. Bowman’s recommendations have been adopted. First, there is a new emphasis on the use of cross-functional teams particularly “as a core strategy for collaboratively addressing organizational process improvement

and problem-solving . . .” (Bowman, p. 86). Secondly, there is a new emphasis on leadership competency development and training. However, it is premature to pass judgment on the impact of Mr. Bowman’s research and initiatives on the College’s culture.

As noted earlier, CNC is moving out of a period that was characterized by a very directive style of management that was not supportive of teamwork. As a result, the current culture is one lacking in trust, and openness to collaboration. Departments often function in isolation of other departments. To effectively meet our challenges the College’s new senior management believes that it is time to develop new strategies around a learning college paradigm and cross-departmental collaboration. There is an air of openness to try new things, and to break away from old habits and practices that are not conducive to the College’s mission and values. Over the next year, CNC will be working to identify a new values statement, vision statement, strategic plan, and organizational structure. The findings of this research project facilitate and support those efforts, and hence the College’s interest and support of this inquiry was well placed.

Organizational politics are always an issue in any institution the size of CNC, especially with a history of strong union players and directive, non-consultative managers. There was suspicion of the project from the unions and some employees who were distrustful. However, with my recent status as a faculty and union member, and open communication as to the project’s origins, objectives and methods, I found that people generally accepted this research project had merit, and was worthy of their support and participation.

This completes the description of the research opportunity and the context of the

organization in which the research was conducted. Next, it is appropriate to consider what the literature contributes to an understanding of the research question and the subject matter of this research project.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The reader will recall that the research question is "How might re-focusing as a learning college enhance greater cross-departmental collaboration in the College of New Caledonia?"

The sub-questions are:

1. What is the meaning of a learning college?
2. What organizational changes and/or practices would enhance re-focusing as a learning college?

This literature review will synthesize selected scholarly writings and research related to these research questions, organized under three main topics: the Learning College, Organizational Culture and Change, and Cross-Departmental Collaboration. Additionally, the literature review will inquire into the definition, philosophy, and theoretical basis of Appreciative Inquiry.

The Learning College

The learning college, also referred to in the literature as the learning paradigm, or the learning-centred college, is the essence of the research question. It speaks to the vision, mission, and values of the organization – its identity. It is the desired outcome of cultural and organizational change within the organization. This section of the literature review will examine the meaning of the learning college concept, its origin, and its challenges.

O'Banion (1996) is the father of the learning college concept. He is a recognized authority of the learning college movement and is widely cited in educational literature. Nonetheless, this analysis will temper his fervour and his use of words such as

"revolution" with some objective analysis of his views. O'Banion uses the term "learning college". He states that "the learning college places learning first and provides educational experiences for learners any way, any place, any time" (p. 3). He adds that the learning college is based on six key principles:

1. The learning college creates substantive change in individual learners.
2. The learning college engages learners as full partners in the learning process, assuming primary responsibility for their own choices.
3. The learning college creates and offers as many options for learning as possible.
4. The learning college assists learners to form and participate in collaborative learning activities.
5. The learning college defines the roles of learning facilitators by the needs of learners.
6. The learning college and its learning facilitators succeed only when improved and expanded learning can be documented for its learners. (p. 3)

O'Banion (1996) adds that the aim of the learning college is to create a new learning culture "in which the learner is placed at the center of everything that occurs in the educational enterprise" (p. 4).

Another significant source of scholarship in addressing the learning college is the work of Barr and Tagg (1995), who describe their new learning paradigm concept in

great depth. They argue that a college exists to produce learning (the learning paradigm), rather than teaching (the instruction paradigm). Their concept overlaps significantly with the O'Banion (1996) learning college concept, as Barr and Tagg place an emphasis on the ends, the learning, rather than merely the means to that end, the instruction. While the objectives and values of O'Banion's learning college and the learning paradigm of Barr and Tagg are the same, there is a different focus in their respective understandings of placing student learning first. O'Banion simply focuses through the lens of doing everything possible to advance student learning, in a college's decision-making and operations. Barr and Tagg on the other hand, focus more through a lens on teaching/learning structures, learning theory, and pedagogical aspects relevant to enhancing student learning.

Schuyler (1997) refers to both of the preceding articles in his work; however, he articulates his learning paradigm in a different yet persuasive manner. Along with O'Banion (1996), Schuyer believes that "the primary goal of education is student achievement" (p. 1). He reflects O'Banion in his assertion that a change is required by way of "an organizational climate that fosters the belief that student learning is the central objective of all employees of a college – no matter if they are faculty members, financial officers, or administrative assistants" (p. 4). However, Schuyler focuses more than O'Banion on the inadequacy of the learning institution to meet the needs of contemporary students due to the bureaucratic operations and structures which typically exist in the North American college system. He states that "some believe that the goal of student learning has become incongruent with the current way higher education institutions function" (p. 1). In identifying the problem of bureaucracy, he goes on to articulate the

learning paradigm as being

> . . . more than incremental changes in an institution's organizational procedure or priorities. Rather, it involves a holistic and system-wide change away from the instruction paradigm and the organizational structures that reflect it. The purpose of the learning paradigm is to place learning first in every policy, program, and practice in higher education by overhauling the traditional architecture of education. (p. 2)

McPhail (2004) brings an interesting perspective to the issue by questioning the redundancy of the learning-centred concept in higher education. As Chancellor of the Community College of Baltimore County, a college similar in some ways to CNC, McPhail raises the question posed by many outside the post-secondary education sector, and indeed by many faculty inside the sector. That question is whether the concept of a learning-centred college is not redundant: "Why wouldn't a college be learning-centred?" (p. 29). McPhail replies, perhaps shockingly, that "it's rare to find a college that actually focuses on doing whatever it takes to ensure that students learn" (p. 29). This quote seems to echo the thinking of O'Banion (1996) and Schuyler (1997) as to the meaning of the concept, and further, that colleges are simply not generally learning-centred.

McPhail, Heacock, and Linck (2001) believe that learning-centred colleges are possible. Consistent with O'Banion's (1996) thinking, they specify the following points as areas of focus for institutions distinguished as learning-centred:

1. Make student learning its central focus.
2. Make students active partners in the learning process.
3. Assume final responsibility for producing student learning.
4. Focus on learning outcomes to assess student learning and success.
5. Create a holistic environment that supports student learning.
6. Ensure that every member of the college community is a learner.

7. Evaluate all areas of the college by the ways they foster student learning. (p. 19)

McPhail et al. share the same emphasis as O'Banion, but do not seem to emphasize pedagogy as do Barr and Tagg (1995).

Ruiz (1999) is another scholar who supports O'Banion's (1996) view of learning-centred colleges. She re-iterates O'Banion's (1996) description of the traditional educational structure as being time-bound, place-bound, efficiency-bound, and role-bound. Today's students can no longer be limited to set class times in set classrooms allocated by the college. As administrators struggle to meet performance standards by implementing more rules and regulations, and where faculty and staff resist taking on new roles to get the job done, the learning needs of students will continue to go unmet. Ruiz is also critical of bureaucratic structures, declaring, "these structural limitations must be transformed if education is to be changed" (p. 9).

The Origin of the Learning College

As O'Banion (1996, p. 1) surmises, "a learning revolution appears to be spreading rapidly across the higher education landscape." He is referring to a community college reaction across the United States to a wave of reform reports, in the early 1990s that shared a common theme: to place learning first. O'Banion felt that because of these reports, many community colleges would soon be "busy redrafting statements of values and mission, redesigning organizational structures and processes, developing outcome measures, and applying information technology, all in the name of making their institutions more learner-centred" (p. 1). Since publication of O'Banion's work, this forecast has proven to be largely correct.

Barr and Tagg (1995) explain more fully than O'Banion (1996) the underlying reason for this apparent learning revolution. They indicate that the origin of the learning paradigm is the recognition that the instruction paradigm is simply ineffective:

> the gap between what we say we want of higher education and what its structures provide has never been wider . . . .the more we discover about how the mind works and how students learn, the greater the disparity between what we say and what we do. (p. 2)

Schuyler (1997) reinforces the position of Barr and Tagg (1995) by stating that there is a "mismatch between what American society needs and what it is receiving from the higher education system" (p. 2). Schuyler further notes that

> advocates of change see the present structures as inadequate to meet changes in work, knowledge, and citizenship while serving a greater number of students with diverse backgrounds and educational objectives. Under the current system, many students . . . of those who do graduate . . . are lacking important skills. (p. 2)

McPhail, Heacock, and Linck (2001) reiterate the positions of the above writers respecting the origins of the learning paradigm, by describing external and internal environments that pose challenges which coincidentally, correspond to CNC's external and internal environments and resultant challenges. McPhail et al. state that external challenges include "an economic downturn, competition for students, changing demographics, technological needs, and public distrust" (p. 17). The internal challenges include " . . . the college's board of trustees . . . pressed for needed efficiencies, funding was drastically reduced, pressure for accountability increased, and enrolments declined dramatically" (p. 18).

Robles (1999) examines the origin of the learning-centred college through a very different lens than the other scholars. She ties the origin to performance models developed primarily in the corporate world and moved into academia. She notes several reasons, including "the shift from a local to a global economy, heightened expectations in

a period of limited resources, and increasing demand for accountability" (p. 2). Robles also refers to increased dialogue between business and higher education about student's lack of skills necessary to work in a new and continually changing environment" (p. 2), as a relevant factor in the origin of the learner-centred college concept.

Robles (1999) argues that the learning paradigm has its origins in business management approaches such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI). These approaches share characteristics with the learning paradigm such as continuous improvement in the workplace, client-centredness, and the use of measurement for decision-making.

Challenges to the Learning College

While O'Banion (1996) is clearly one of the principal advocates for the learning-centred college and the learning college, he spends little time articulating the challenges that a college will face in endeavoring to implement such a change. However, O'Banion does discuss the significant challenge faced by colleges in transforming from bureaucracies, and from places of teaching to places of learning, by borrowing a quote from Roger Moe, a Minnesota state politician. Moe described the state of higher education as "a thousand years of tradition wrapped in a hundred years of bureaucracy" (1996, p. 4). O'Banion (1997) observes that "resistance to change is a hallmark of higher education" (p. 28). He adds that "changing a college is a lot like moving a cemetery – you don't get a lot of help from the residents" (p. 28). In this case, the residents are the faculty, staff, administrators, and students – "all stakeholders in the status quo" (p. 28). Despite this observation, O'Banion's rhetoric seems to downplay the challenges faced by colleges in changing to a learning college culture – yet his enthusiasm for the cause

seems to diminish the intensity of the challenges.

Barr and Tagg (1995) fully compare and contrast the learning and instruction paradigms along six dimensions, canvassing a number of the challenges faced in developing and implementing the learning paradigm. I would like to focus on two dimensions only, namely, the teaching/learning structures, and the nature of roles in the learning paradigm.

According to Barr and Tagg (1995), the notion of structure includes the organizational chart, role and reward systems, decision-making customs, communication channels, and feedback loops. Referring to Peter Senge and his book, "The Fifth Discipline," Barr and Tagg write that "leaders . . . seldom alter basic structures . . . to improve organizational performance, even though those structures generate the patterns of organizational action and determine which activities and results are possible" (p. 6). Barr and Tagg believe there is good reason to attend to structure. They believe that "structure is leverage" (p. 6), and offers the greatest hope for increasing organizational success. This point of view corresponds closely with O'Banion's (1996) belief that wholesale structural change is required to implement the learning college concept.

Presumably some re-structuring would be required to achieve Schuyler's (1997) goal of "cross-disciplinary or non-disciplinary teams of specialists who work collaboratively to devise programs to increase student competency" (p. 3).

Not surprisingly, Barr and Tagg (1995) concede that the transition to a learning paradigm will take time and be gradual, with experimental changes to many organizational parts in light of the new vision. It is also no surprise that they recognize the critical need for an institution-wide assessment and information system to provide

feedback along the way. Barr and Tagg state that "information from a sophisticated assessment system will gradually lead to the transformation of the college's learning environments and supporting structures" (p. 8). Several writers, including O'Banion (1996), McPhail (2004), and Robles (1999), all note the need for information and assessment systems to function well for implementation of the learning paradigm to succeed in colleges. They also concede that colleges do not historically perform these functions well.

McPhail (2004) also advocates the adoption of flexible learning options, consistent with O'Banion's (1996) notion of learning any time, any place, and any way. He also feels that there are two important questions that drive the learning college: "what does the learner know" and "what can the learner do" (p. 31). These two questions reinforce the emphasis placed on gathering feedback and information, and measuring student learning outcomes, articulated earlier in this document by O'Banion, Robles (1999), and McPhail. Without evidence of what learners know and what learners can do, there is no way of knowing how the learning paradigm journey is progressing.

The second dimension to consider from Barr and Tagg (1995) is the nature of roles. They state that "with the shift to the Learning Paradigm comes a change in roles for virtually all college employees" (p. 11). Roles will begin to blur under the learning paradigm, as college employees from all functional areas will contribute to and shape the environment in which student learning occurs. Teamwork will over time replace the "independent work of the Instruction Paradigm's hierarchical and competitive organization" (p. 11). The Royal Roads University model of team teaching used in the MALT program illustrates this contention and as a learner, I have appreciated and found

this model very effective in advancing my learning.

McPhail (2004) agrees with this assessment of Barr and Tagg (1995), but he is clearer in describing how cross-functional teamwork will result in a college implementing the learning paradigm. He emphasizes that student services administrators "must reorient their work to foster student learning and assess the effect of their activities and programs on learning . . ." (p. 31). McPhail also provides a powerful example of the teamwork referred to by Barr and Tagg, and which is very relevant to this action research project in stating:

> Because student development administrators and college faculty members have the most interaction with students, they can provide a comprehensive view of the total student learning experience. Collaboration between the two groups allows both not only to participate in the central enterprise of the college, but also to share the responsibility for student learning in a way that enables the entire college to improve. (p. 31)

Robles (1999) also finds it important to develop a strong critical core of faculty, which engages in innovation – to build team learning. The ability to work in teams was identified as most important by interviewees, in order to fulfill the organizational mission. However, it is important that colleges value such efforts and provide sufficient time in employees' workloads for team learning to occur.

Schuyler (1997) re-iterates the significance and challenge posed by organizational structure too. Schuyler goes so far as to ask "whether the integrative and system-wide transformation of higher education to the learning paradigm will occur . . . since many of the traditional administrative and instructional structures are steadfast and deeply entrenched" (p. 24). Schuyler's question reveals skepticism that is not apparent with the other authors. He seems to doubt that the system of higher education can change from its bureaucratic structures. Such a transformation is a huge challenge.

McPhail (2004) echoes Schuyler's doubts as noted above, stating that changing the institution's culture is no easy task, it is not an insignificant change, and cannot occur quickly. He also recognizes that only when everyone in the institution, from the president to the custodian, "embraces the learning-centred culture does it really come to life" (p. 30).

Ruiz (1999) attributes Max Weber's ideal of the bureaucratic organization to the instruction paradigm, characterized by workers with defined roles (division of labour), hierarchical authority, and standardized rules and procedures. This clear description of bureaucracy, set against McPhail's (2004) observation that roles are blurred in the learning paradigm organization, illustrates something of the challenge faced by colleges seeking to change. Clearly, these authors agree there is no place for a bureaucratic structure in a learning-centred college. Ruiz observes, ". . . this bureaucratic system is no longer adequate to meet the learning needs of students of the information age" (p. 9).

Finally, Robles (1999) emphasizes a challenge in becoming a learning-centred college – faculty resistance. She recognizes that business terms such as total quality management (TQM), and learning paradigm terminology are difficult for faculty to embrace as they typically resist thinking of students as customers, or of satisfaction as a valid measure of success. Robles suggests that one solution is to use Senge's concept of a learning organization to approach the learning paradigm with educators. Senge (1990) defines a learning organization as one that constantly recreates itself to adapt to its constantly changing environment. O'Banion (1997, p. 26) also mentions that the concepts of a learning organization provide "a powerful foundation on which to build a learning-centred institution."

Senge identifies five disciplines that must be addressed if organizational learning is to lead to organizational change, one of which is building shared vision. Robles (1999) found for example that community college employees typically believe there is a strong, shared vision in a college, namely, to enhance student success. This shared vision would be supportive of a learning organization and organizational change. Robles noted, however, that many faculty object to the notion that focusing on student learning first, is a new concept; they believe that this is what they always do. Again, jargon associated with the corporate world and the learning college concept has negative connotations for faculty. The issue is not so much to identify the vision, but rather how to reach it.

This literature review reveals a variety of studies undertaken to look at the learning college concept, also referred to as the learning paradigm and the learning-centred college in the literature. It is evident that there are many commonalties in the definitions and explanations of these terms and in the perceived value of adopting such a paradigm at this time in community colleges. There are, however, different perspectives of how to implement the learning college paradigm, and the challenges that adopting colleges will typically face in trying to replace their bureaucratic organizations and mindsets, prevalent in most community colleges today. This leads us to next consider the challenges of organizational culture and change.

Organizational Culture and Change

In order for the College of New Caledonia to re-focus as a learning college, it will be necessary for the College to undergo a change in its collective mindset. In other words, an organizational cultural change will be required. This part of the literature review will shed some light on understanding organizational culture, the significance of

organizational culture, the need for changing organizational culture, and the processes to change organizational culture. Finally, this section considers what the literature contributes to one's understanding of the relationship between organizational culture change, the learning college paradigm, and collaboration in colleges.

An Understanding of Organizational Culture

The first consideration in understanding organizational culture is that we cannot escape the need to be aware of it, and often to alter it in the chaos of these times. Ayers (2002) reminds us that organizations are not always open to change and certainly, community colleges are no exception. He states that "in this knowledge-based society where change is radical and frequent, complacency with the status quo poses a considerable threat to modern organizations such as community colleges" (p. 183). Ayers speaks of how important it is to recognize the need to change and adapt, by citing the following words of Heifetz and Laurie (1997):

> Changes in cities, markets, customers, competition, and technology around the globe are forcing organizations to clarify their values, develop new strategies, and learn new ways of operating. . . . Adaptive work is required when our deeply held beliefs are challenged, when the values that made us successful become less relevant, and when legitimate yet competing perspectives emerge. (p. 182)

Therefore, the first thing we can understand about organizational culture is that there needs to be an openness in an organization to adapt its culture to the dictates of its environment. However, on a positive note, Lee (2004) attests "the best companies figure out how to successfully manage change" (p. 507).

Understanding organizational culture is recognized by the literature to be a challenge. Lee (2004) states that there is a "contemporary challenge of understanding organizational culture" (p. 507), and that scholars agree that organizational culture is ever evolving and difficult to define. Lee adds that the strength of an organizational culture

does seem to depend on factors such as the size of the organization, the "tightness" of the organization and the level interdependence between departments, the age of the institution and the history of the organization. The implication for CNC is that as a relatively large, siloed institution, with a history of labour unrest, and sub-cultures, it would have a relatively weak organizational culture. Would this not make CNC's culture more malleable and susceptible to change?

Smart, Kuh, and Tierney (1997) are more explicit than Lee (2004) in defining organizational culture. They characterize culture as "the patterns of interpretations people form about the manifestations of their institutions' values, formal rules and procedures, informal codes of behaviour, rituals, tasks, jargon, and so on" (p.258). They add that a college can be a host to a number of cultures or subcultures. Smart et al. refer to four types of institutional cultures developed by Cameron and Ettington (1988) used in a number of studies of effectiveness in community colleges. The four types are clan, adhocracy, bureaucratic, and market cultures. Smart et al. add some clarity to understanding organizational culture in colleges, in stating that these four culture types "differ in terms of the degree to which they emphasize the importance of: (1) people or the organization, (2) stability and control or change and flexibility, and (3) means or ends." (p. 262).

It seems there is a growing appreciation of the significance of culture to an organization and understanding what it really is. Tierney (1988) agrees with Lee's (2004) assertion that in recent years, "heightened awareness has brought with it increasingly broad and divergent concepts of culture" (p. 2). Tierney also agrees with Smart et al. (1997) in linking an understanding of organizational culture to insight into understanding

the effectiveness of management and performance in higher education institutions. Tierney explains culture in a manner similar to Smart et al., by stating culture

> has its roots in the history of the organization and derives its force from the values, processes, and goals held by those most intimately involved in the organization's workings. An organization's culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it. (p. 3)

Tierney supports Dill's (1988) description of culture in higher education institutions in these terms:

> Ironically, the organizations in Western society which most approximate the essential characteristics of Japanese firms are academic institutions. They are characterized by lifetime employment, collective decision making, individual responsibility, infrequent promotion, and implicit, informal evaluation. (p.7)

By now it should be apparent that understanding the nature of organizational culture is somewhat elusive. That it is difficult to define culture is alluded to by Lorenzo (1998): "it is not always easy to define organizational culture. Most researchers refer to factors such as values, beliefs, attitudes, norms, and expectations that are widely shared by members of the organization" (p. 9). Lorenzo says there are four components that comprise the cultural framework of most of today's community colleges: the internal status system, the patterns by which leadership functions, the central faith or the meaning of the organization and its work and ethics, and its memory and folklore. Lorenzo emphasizes that anyone who fails to consider these components in seeking to launch fundamental change will undoubtedly face resistance and probable failure.

Elwood and Leyden (2000), continue the theme that it is difficult to define culture. They concur that culture has an "almost mythical or supernatural dimension to it, and accept that it is both difficult to measure and define" (p.310). They add that culture is "the social architecture of any organization, the glue holding the organization together" (p.310). Elwood and Leyden then provide some insight into their view that academic

culture is complex. They explain academic culture in terms of a two-dimensional model. The first dimension is the tightness or looseness of policy definition. The second dimension is the degree of control over implementation of policy. Four types of academic culture manifest themselves along these two dimensions, the collegial culture, the bureaucratic culture, the corporation culture, and the enterprise culture. While CNC has a mélange of sub-cultures, the bureaucratic culture seems predominant. Controlled by policy, "the system is good at saying 'no' and emphasizes regulation" (Elwood and Leyden, p. 312).

Frost and Gillespie (1998) take a different approach to defining culture. They cite two schools of thought, cultural pragmatism and cultural purism. The former "presents organizational culture as something the organization has and therefore can change" (p. 5). The more recent concept, cultural purism, "does not separate the organization from its culture. Indeed, cultural purists regard the organization as the culture, and vice versa" (p.5). They describe academic organizations as being two organizations rather than one, namely, administrative where administrators and staff work, and academic where faculty work. The former is easier to understand with job titles that denote lines of responsibility and authority, and centralized and hierarchical bureaucracies. The latter is very different. Little attention is paid to rank or title, and organization is decentralized and collegial. Faculty often regard group membership as optional and usually choose to work quite autonomously.

Similarly, Martin, Manning, and Ramaley (2001) also endorse the thinking of Frost and Gillespie (1998) and write:

> A divide of culture and experience exists between faculty and administrative views of organizational change. Faculty often view administrators as bureaucratic,

> unscholarly, business minded, impatient with faculty concerns, and insensitive to academic values. For their part, administrators see faculty as conservative, suspicious of the administration, reluctant to change, unwilling to contribute to the daily operations of the institution, and in some cases, cynical about whether any change is either possible or desirable. (p. 96)

Given this understanding of cultures in academic organizations, Martin, Manning, and Ramaley (2001) state what is perhaps obvious but worth emphasizing: "fundamental to understanding and launching a change initiative is to recognize the differences in decision-making conventions, time frames, priorities, and constituents of faculty and administrative cultures" (p. 98). With this understanding of organizational culture, particularly in the context of an academic institution, let us now develop further, the significance of organizational culture.

The Significance of Organizational Culture

The literature is clear that organizational culture cannot be ignored, in striving to change an organization to achieve greater effectiveness. Lee (2004) speaks to the significance and relevance of organizational culture affirming that

> it is important for those involved in shaping the environments at community colleges to understand campus culture and the role it plays in institutional effectiveness . . . . Therefore, college leaders must work to shape a positive culture. (p.504)

Smart et al. (1997) also make the same link between organizational culture and effectiveness stating that "an institution's culture is thought to mediate how an institution deals with external forces and internal pressures" (p. 257). The results of their study "indicate that the organizational effectiveness of two-year colleges is a function of the interaction among the external environment, institutional culture, and preferred decision-making approach" (p.267). With respect to the latter factor, Smart et al. believe that the "rational/collegial" decision approach has the most effective results in colleges (p.263).

They explain that the rational/collegial decision approach is where "resource allocation decisions are the result of 'group discussion and consensus', based on the use of 'a standard set of procedures', and criteria reflecting 'what objectively seems best for this institution overall'" (p.263). This decision-making approach appears to be quite at odds with a bureaucratic culture, as currently exists at CNC.

A further finding of Smart et al. (1997) that is of special relevance to CNC, is that the adhocracy culture is associated with proactive and innovative leadership. This culture type is the most effective to deal with enrolment and financial difficulties, which are huge challenges at CNC at this time. Smart et al. describe adhocracy cultures as ones that "assume that change is inevitable; individuals are motivated by the importance and ideological appeal of the tasks to be addressed. A prospector-type strategic orientation is used to acquire resources too ensure institutional vitality and viability" (p. 262). Smart et al. surmise that the adhocracy culture enables colleges to adapt better to changing external conditions and internal pressures. They add that bureaucratic culture is negatively related to effectiveness in dealing with enrolment and financial challenges. These findings are food for thought for CNC.

Smart et al. (1997) summarize their study by asserting that adhocracies are more adaptive to the needs of the marketplace, whereas bureaucracies "subscribe to a singular notion of organizational reality and assume that structural responses are adequate" to deal with the changing environment (p. 272). Changing the culture is necessary to make the institution more responsive and adaptable to external forces and internal pressures, thus insuring organizational survival; merely changing organizational structure is not adequate.

Froman (1999) agrees with this assessment of Smart et al. (1997). He recognizes that many organizations "are trying to reengineer themselves away from bureaucracy toward horizontal business processes that cut across traditional functions and power hierarchies" (p.187), or what this research project refers to as cross-departmental collaboration (p.187). However, Froman agrees that "structural change needs to be aligned with changes in belief and attitudes", or in other words, change in organizational culture. He likewise recognizes the relevance and significance of culture. He also agrees with Martin, Manning and Ramalay (2001) and Frost and Gillespie (1998), in stating that "the culture of universities tends to discourage if not block attempts to create a shared vision" (p.187).

Elwood and Leyden (2000) agree that organizational culture is of great significance to any organizational change. They observe that:

> . . . given their operating environments, colleges must take account of the unique cultures already resident in those colleges *before* planning strategically . . . .For academic strategic planning to be successful attention must be paid to the definition and possible amendments to the existing college-wide culture. (p. 310)

Smart (2003) continues this theme observing that quite typically colleges faced with the need to improve their operations implement new business systems and processes, often adopting management fads such as Total Quality Management, or other management principles taken from the corporate sector. However, Smart recognizes the critical significance of organizational culture declaring that, "there is little hope of enduring improvement in organizational performance without a fundamental change in organizational culture" (p.698). This dependence of organizational success on cultural change is

> . . . due to the fact that when the values, orientations, definitions, and goals stay constant – even when procedures and strategies are altered –organizations quickly

> return to the status quo, and thus modifying organizational culture . . . is key to the successful implementation of major improvement strategies. (p. 698)

Finally, consider how Ayers (2002) emphasizes the significance of organizational culture to organizational effectiveness: "if community colleges fail to meet learner needs, they may become irrelevant in the information age, and this failure to adapt to changing conditions may lead community colleges to extinction" (p.166). He adds that the hierarchical structures and bureaucratic processes that are prevalent in community colleges are likely to resist change. "By maintaining inefficient or rigid structures and processes community colleges may fail to adjust their programs in ways that accommodate shifts in learner attitudes" (p. 166). Ayers concludes in his study that college leaders must "establish climates that foster dissatisfaction with the status quo and encourage individuals to initiate change such that organizational renewal originates at the grassroots level and positions the college to respond to needs of its learners" (p. 183).

The Need for Changing Organizational Culture

Moving more directly into the area of changing organizational culture, Carter (1998) refers to "the disequilibrium that is resulting from a never-ending series of challenges . . . significantly more turbulent and threatening than those faced in the past" (p. 3). She observes that three major forces operate in North America to drive the need to transform community colleges: changing community context, new competition, and changing student expectations. As a point of clarification, Carter refers to changing community context as the increasing need of community colleges to cope with and meet the needs of the have-nots in society. More than ever, colleges must serve the needs of those students who bring their significant personal challenges and barriers to success with them into the college. I query whether this would be a less pervasive concern in Canada,

with its more established social security and safety net compared to the one that exists in the United States. Carr (2004) concludes that "community colleges have no choice but to undergo massive changes in how they are organized, how they make their decisions, and how they deliver programs and services to compete in a tough and rapidly changing market" (p. 5).

Harris (1998) continues this theme that changing organizational culture may effectively lead an organization to achieve greater success. He discusses organizational culture in a context that resonates with this project's research question and the circumstances of CNC. Harris states that "focusing the institution on student success can be a prescription for moving a good college to even greater heights" (p. 2). He describes the scenario at Fresno City College (FCC) in California, which closely compares to CNC today. Harris comments that motivation is generally required to begin the change process, and often this coincides with the arrival of a new president, as was the case at FCC. He describes how there was no sense of purpose or common vision at FCC, and there was little motivation toward institutional improvement. At FCC, "the focus of on-campus discussions tended more toward routine issues of parking maintenance and equipment rather than substantive issues relating to the education of students" (Harris, p.3). Arguably, this statement equally describes CNC. Significantly, he declares that this student success initiative was the key to renewal of the college.

Froman (1999) agrees with the position of Harris (1998) and Carter (1998), contending that "organizations today are faced with a complex and ever-changing array of forces that require them to "reinvent" themselves. Among these forces of change are an "increasingly competitive global market, technological change, workforce diversity,

and the ongoing need for life-long learning" (p. 185). Froman poses the critical question: "How can the university become a learning community guided by human values of trust, caring, commitment, and collaboration?" (p.186) He re-iterates that "organizations of the future will need to create new cultures and ways of managing work that emphasize cross-functional teams, networks, processes, and integrative thinking" (p. 186). In other words, we need to undo bureaucratic specialization and fragmentation in the organization.

Lorenzo (1998) concurs: "the long-term viability of many traditional programs, processes, and operating practices certainly is in question. As a result, colleges must commit to change in fundamental rather than incremental ways" (p. 1). Further, Lorenzo asserts that "during times of significant societal transformation, social institutions must strive to emulate the direction, pace, and proportion of social change that surrounds them" (p.3). This includes he explains, community colleges, which must likewise transform themselves in "ways that will redefine the essence and reshape the culture of those organizations" (p. 3).

Gould and Caldwell (1998) also describe a case study of a California college, Victor Valley College, which underwent a culture change. In this College, also very similar to CNC, a new president arrived to discover

> . . . an organizational culture with rampant segmentalism, and a high level of distrust. Change was made difficult by the existing college organizational structure, which was characterized by adversarial relations between faculty, staff, and administration; territorial possessiveness over programs, services and budgets; a traditional structure with traditional roles for administrators; adversarial bargaining strategies; (p. 3)

This closely describes what CNC's new president discovered upon his arrival at CNC (R. Troschke, personal communication, February 28, 2005).

Gould and Caldwell (1998) repeat a number of the major changes that drive the need for cultural change referred to by Froman (1999), but add many others including: rapidly changing technology, declining financial resources, changing student demographics, less-prepared students, attrition rates, et cetera. Gould and Caldwell offer that in the face of these challenges

> Community colleges need to address these issues but not with the management models of the past. Like business and industry, the successful community colleges of the next millennium will radically alter their management models and foster organizational synergy. These thriving institutions will create organizational cultures symbolized by decentralized decision-making, collaborative governance, alignment of structure and systems with organizational values and goals, and the ability to thrive on chaos. (p.3)

Gould and Caldwell (1998) also refer to Thomas Kuh's paradigm shift model as fitting to describe the transformational world of the modern day community college. The assumptions about these colleges that have worked in the past have broken down, and must be re-placed by more appropriate assumptions. Now that the literature has established the imperative of changing organizational culture, let us now turn to consider the how - the processes to bring about the desired culture change.

Processes to Change Organizational Culture

The literature is prolific with suggestions on how to change organizational culture. Many of the writers present their ideas as checklists or recipes of processes and steps to follow.

Carter (1998) articulates five fundamental strategies to implement culture change:

1. Engaging the college community and raising institutional awareness,
2. Establishing stability through articulation of college values, mission, and vision, et cetera,

3. Increasing intra-college linkages, including cross-functional teams assigned to joint projects, teamwork training,
4. Creating opportunities for innovation, such as eliminating constraining policies and procedures and system redesign, and
5. Providing appropriate resources and support.

Carter identifies that these key elements and activities form the basis for an implementation framework that systematically addresses the college's transformational needs. It is satisfying to note that many of these strategies have already commenced at CNC.

Juechter, Fisher, Alford, and Randall (1998) have a different list of steps to follow for success:

1. A relevant focus tied to operations and objectives (such as in CNC's case, a re-focus on a learning college paradigm and collaboration),
2. "Driven from the top, but fueled throughout" (p. 66),
3. Leaders' commitment in a systemic, organization-wide approach,
4. Comprehensive involvement of employees at all levels to take ownership, and
5. External coaches "to infuse some objectivity and help put things in perspective" (p. 66).

Harris (1998), in discussing Fresno City College's strategic visioning process explains that the area "which became the primary area of emphasis and provided the real catalyst for cultural change on campus, was that of student success" (p.4). Harris concludes his article by suggesting a list or "a blueprint for moving an institution toward

greater student success" (p. 11) through a process of cultural change. His list is not dissimilar from those of Carter (1998) and Juechter et al. (1998), and includes:

1. Find a catalyst and reasons for change,
2. Bottom up change is desirable,
3. Reach a common definition of student success,
4. Continual communication,
5. Involvement of large numbers of people,
6. Early results are important,
7. Expect problems, and
8. Maintain focus and momentum.

Gould and Caldwell (1998) describe the process used at Victor Valley College where the president assessed the culture and climate of the organization through a survey of all employees. Interestingly, a similar survey was recently undertaken at CNC. From those results, both formal and informal efforts were aimed at building trust, improving communications, and changing the organizational culture. Gould and Caldwell endorse Schein's (1992) notion of organizational culture change by indicating that these initial change efforts were an attempt to unfreeze the organization, or create a disequilibrium or feeling of "being out of kilter" (p.4), to create the motivation to change. Gould and Caldwell adopt Schein's notion of unfreezing, which:

> is composed of three very different processes and conditions, all of which must be present to a degree before change will occur:
> 1. Enough disconfirming data to create discomfort;
> 2. The connection of the disconfirming data to important goals or ideals causing anxiety and/or guilt, and
> 3. Enough psychological safety to allow members of the organization to admit the disconfirming data rather than defensively denying it. (p. 4)

The president at Victor Valley College also planned other ways to unfreeze the culture. He planned to change the dynamics of interaction among the constituents at his college through the development of a mission statement, a strategic plan, and a set of values and beliefs by a cross-functional team representing all constituencies. “The strategic plan thus became the umbrella under which all change efforts were coordinated” (p. 5). This approach has likewise been recently initiated at CNC.

A most interesting aspect of the process used at Victor Valley College was the creation of a “process-oriented organizational structure . . . a ‘process map’” (p. 8). Factors considered included “the core processes of the college . . . the goals of the strategic plan and the organization’s stated vision, mission, and guiding beliefs” (p.8). Gould and Caldwell (1998) state that “the process map is centred around the concept that the college exists to serve its customers – the students and the community”. Moreover, “the process map reveals the importance of accountability and student success, and it provides for the . . . infrastructure of administrative processes that are support services for the rest of the organization” (p.8). Importantly, it is declared that “the process map is designed to create a ‘oneness’ in the organization where employees own their own processes and are encouraged to collaborate with others to improve the organization” (p.8). This seems a very crucial point. What must change are the organizational processes, and they are unlikely to change without a change of mindset or culture. It implies that mere changes to organizational structure for example, will not work, without an underlying cultural change in the organization. Otherwise, nothing will really change.

Finally, Carr (2004) offers a series of lessons that speak to the processes that might be used to bring about organizational culture change:

1. Change begins when people see the organization with new eyes, for example, through the eyes of a new president, or of a student,
2. Choose the appropriate leverage points, that is, where interventions are likely to have the greatest impact, for example, strategic direction, student focus, cross-departmental collaboration,
3. Reduce confusion and uncertainty by providing focus and building trust, for example re-focusing as a learning college,
4. Mobilize the management team, to operate cross-functionally and thereby eliminate the silos,
5. Change everyday work, in order to get people to think and act differently; for example, by connecting what employees do everyday, to the students' everyday experience at CNC, and
6. Communicate relentlessly, by asking questions that prompt people to think about doing their work differently.

This is just a sample of the many ways the literature suggests organizations can implement organizational culture change. Many of these processes and strategies would work at CNC and as noted, some have already been implemented and are a work-in-progress. Now, let us consider the literature of cross-departmental collaboration.

Cross-Departmental Collaboration

A learning college is the principal focus of this research project. A secondary focus is how to eliminate organizational silos while enhancing collaborative processes across all departments in CNC. Inquiry into the nature of cross-departmental collaboration and cross-functional teamwork is relevant. It would also be interesting and

relevant to inquire into whether shifting to a learning college culture might act as a catalyst in bringing about greater collaborative teamwork across the College's various departments and functions.

The Definition of Collaboration and Cross-functional Teamwork

What do we mean by collaboration and cross-functional or cross-departmental teamwork? Stone (2004) indicates that "collaboration is bringing together disparate people, thoughts, ideas and experiences, blending them together to create something of value" (p. 16). Bickford's definition (2002) goes further. She borrows a notion of collaborative teamwork from the Pygmies:

> Members respect and trust each other, protect and support each other, engage in open dialogue and communication, share a common goal, have strong shared values and beliefs, subordinate their own objectives to those of the team, and subscribe to "distributed leadership", with strong roving leaders emerging at different times from within the team. (p. 49)

Holland, Gaston, and Gomes (2000) add a deeper dimension in understanding the nature of collaboration by focusing on a cross-functional team. They define such teams as "a group of people who apply different skills, with a high degree of interdependence, to ensure the effective delivery of a common organizational objective" (p. 233). They argue that cross-functional collaboration goes beyond mere integration. Rather, there is an emphasis on shared vision, common goals, and an emphasis on relationships. Holland et al. explain this idea further, as follows:

> Collaboration is a more complex, higher intensity cross-functional linkage. While cross-functional teams are a key structural mechanism by which to achieve integration, collaboration reflects specific attributes of team members and their organizational context. Characteristics include members who feel an equal stake in outcomes, avoid hidden agendas and are mindful of each others' [sic] needs and constraints. (p. 237)

Holland et al. argue that collaboration typically requires a major shift in culture – mere

integration does not.

Holland et al. (2000) emphasize this point further with a reference to the work of Katzenbach and Smith (1993) where a distinction is raised between a working group and a real team.

> Working groups combine individual efforts into an additive output, but do not work on tasks jointly . . . a real team must be committed to a common purpose, performance goals and approach for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. (p. 234)

With collaboration, synergy results - outcomes are not merely cumulative, reflecting the capabilities of the individual participants. Truly, the whole outcome is greater than the sum of the efforts of the individuals on the team.

With this appreciation of the concepts of collaboration and cross-functional teamwork, this literature review will proceed to address the relevance and significance of cross-departmental or cross-functional collaboration.

Relevance and Significance of Cross-functional Collaboration

The American Management Association conducted a survey in 2003 in which 60% of the respondents listed lack of collaboration as one of their organization's major challenges (Stone, 2004, p.11). This survey also found that silos exist in 83% of the respondent companies. Ninety-seven percent felt that silos had a negative effect on their organizations, leading to poorer performance and a lack of cooperation (p. 11). Waife (2002) corroborates these findings with his statement that silos create poor communication and do not serve the greater good. He adds, however, that the creation of cross-functional teams "does not by wish or magic create synergy, cooperation and efficiency" (p. 32). Consistent with this caveat, Milligan (1999) points out that while cooperation and communication are the best means to bring about collaboration in an

organization, "neither attribute exists naturally in a corporate setting" (p. 24). Thomas (1999) is more specific in describing this challenge by observing that "leadership teams are a new need for many companies and most don't yet know how to create them, or how to make the best use of them" (p. 11). Thomas goes on to say that "executives must grow as leaders even as they are working to become better team players – a challenge that appears paradoxical to most (p. 11)". The common thread that seems to run through this literature is that the need for cross-functional collaboration is very real and pervasive, but it is not easily achieved without real commitment and effort, and indeed in some cases, a culture change.

Hennessey (1999) speaks to the relevance and significance of cross-functional teams in stating that

> Winning, retaining, and growing customers now depends even more on the intangibles – speed of response, creativity in customer problem solving, extraordinary post-sale support . . . . the performance of customer teams is as important as the performance of the individual sales professionals. (p. 32)

Successful selling and post-sale service go together like hand and glove, and cross-functional teams increasingly perform these functions today.

Parker's (1994) view of the significance of cross-functional collaboration relates back to the position of Holland et al. He states that

> it takes more than just putting together a diverse group of people . . . .it requires the migration from a parochial view of the world – in which one's own function, values, and goals are paramount – to a culture that says, "we are all in this together." (p. 49)

Holland et al. (2000) are in accord with Hennessey (1999) in observing that

> Competition is increasingly fought on the basis of intangible organizational competencies – it is not so much *what* firms do as *how* they do it which determines their ability to compete. Such competencies are embedded within the structure, processes and culture of the organization. The creation of cross-

> functional teams around key value-adding processes is an increasingly common organizational response to these pressures. (p. 232)

Bickford (2002) adds another voice, agreeing that while cross-functional teams are more challenging to manage effectively, they can lead to much better results. Thomas (1999) likewise identifies that organizations will undoubtedly face greater complexity in the future and a

> need for greater competitive agility will force . . . business systems to become more tightly integrated than ever. In such an environment, the ability of senior management to work effectively as a team could mean the difference between stagnation and stepwise improvement. (p. 14)

Given that the need for cross-functional teams is relevant and significant now, and even more so in the future, what are some of the challenges that organizational leaders must contend with in trying to instill greater collaboration?

Challenges in Implementing Cross-functional Teams

Stone (2004) lists a number of factors that challenge organizations implementing cross-functional teamwork. Some are particularly pertinent to CNC. These challenges include rigid organizational structures designed around functions that hinder cross-departmental work, an organizational culture that is competitive, unclear policies and procedures open to varying interpretations, and inadequate training in interpersonal skills. Archer (2004) agrees with Stone, adding that the challenge posed by divided loyalties is very significant, where people feel that the needs of their functional area conflict with those of the organization a whole.

Bickford (2002) adds to these lists of challenges: traditional hierarchical structures, viewing oneself as a specialist, ineffective listening, or not being open to new ideas all conspire against collaboration. These challenges are built upon in Hennessey's (1999) writings. He speaks of "a culture of fiefdoms" where people affiliate more closely

with their functional areas, than with the organization as a whole, or with a cross-functional team. Hennessey agrees with Parker (1994) when he notes that integrating silos, each with their divergent types of people, styles, priorities, and belief systems, does not create a team. With some understanding of the challenges to collaboration and cross-functional teamwork in an organization, one might then ask, what are some of the processes or factors that lead to successful collaboration?

Processes that Enhance Collaboration and Cross-functional Teamwork

Stone (2004) is of the view, perhaps naively, that newer technology such as the internet and intranet will facilitate communication across functional boundaries. However, the real question is whether this will enhance collaboration, not just simply communication, or as Holland et al. (2000) described it, interaction. Archer (2004) has a unique perspective in suggesting there is a distinction between conventional teaming and partnering. He states that "partnering distinguishes itself from conventional teamworking by recognizing and acknowledging the different sub-groups involved. Essentially, the need is to understand and work with these differences rather than seeking to remove them or pretend they don't exist" (p. 18). Archer feels that it is fruitless to expect cross-functional teams to operate as classic teams. The key to successful teams is building upon the right behaviours, the most efficient process, and the most effective governance structure to deal with the differences. Archer feels it is "better to recognize the differences and work with them than to try to change parties into your own likeness" (p. 18).

Chaudron (1995) echoes much of the literature where he articulates two categories of factors that enhance cross-functional collaboration – those factors inside the

team and those factors across the organization. First, the team itself must have the right people, a clear direction and purpose, connections to senior management, results, agreed-upon ground rules, and team building up front. Secondly, organizational systems need to change to enhance cross-functional collaboration. Organizational structures and systems can impact communication. Hiring, promotion, remuneration, and performance appraisal processes can be used to attract cooperative people and reward collaborative behaviour. Guttman (2004) reinforces many of these ideas. He notes that agreement must be reached in four areas to maximize cross-functional collaboration. Agreement is needed in relation to (1) clear specific strategic goals, (2) clear delineated members' roles, (3) the team's ground rules, and (4) interpersonal relationships, which must be understood and managed.

Waife (2002) further addresses the elements of an effective team. He recognizes the importance of having commitment to the team's goals, collaborative skills, a properly trained leader, clear focused goals, and a mechanism for measuring performance. Milligan (1999) is likewise consistent in stating that all employees must know the organization's common goals clearly; they must be able to work towards common goals, and avoid letting functional department goals from getting in the way. Milligan also advances the importance of having clearly articulated responsibilities, accountability for fulfilling those responsibilities, and the support of senior management. Parker (1994) also insists on the need for most of the processes discussed by Guttman (2004), Milligan, and Waife.

Thomas (1999) advocates a slightly different point of view. He believes that some attributes of team leadership can be engineered, while others can be grown. Thomas feels

that attributes like clarity of mission, aligned incentives, and common performance measures can be engineered or designed whereas attributes like productive conversation, effective decision-making, shared vision, and a sense of mutual accountability must grow over time. These two processes can occur simultaneously to create an effective team. Thomas also lists organizational characteristics that clearly point to a need for enhanced teamwork. They are most pertinent to CNC, and occur where:

1. Top management decisions require true, cross-functional . . . understanding and consensus.
2. The company faces complicated problems that no single individual fully understands . . . .
3. Senior executives spend more time managing than leading. (p.14)

Bickford (2002) adds to the discussion the concept of stakeholder as a useful framework to discuss situations involving competing interests, such as cross-functional teamwork. Bickford defines a stakeholder as anyone who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organization's purpose. It is assumed that the interests of all stakeholders have value and no one dominates the others. Bickford notes that "not taking into account the needs and perspectives of key stakeholders to the process is very risky, with serious and lasting consequences" (p. 44). This unique approach adds value to understanding cross-functional collaboration.

Finally, Holland et al. (2000) in their extensive survey of related literature, state that the evolution of cross-functional teams in organizations "is rapidly outstripping scholarly research on the topic" (p. 231). They note that "recent theory on team effectiveness has broadened from a focus on group dynamics, to acknowledge the critical

role of organizational context" (p.235). Holland et al. cite Hackman's (1987) description of two types of organizational context, in terms of:

1. Reward systems, education and training opportunities, information management, and
2. Group design, task design, group composition, and group norms.

The significance of this point with respect to organizational context, is that organizations can create or design the right conditions or context for teams to succeed, rather than simply trying to manage behaviours. Holland et al. (2000) remind us of the need to manage both of these dimensions, organizational context factors and behavioural factors, in contemplating processes that will enhance cross-functional collaboration and teamwork.

Finally, in this literature review how can these topics of the learning college paradigm, organizational culture and change, and cross-departmental collaboration be integrated together in a way that is meaningful to this research project?

The Learning College, Culture Change, and Collaboration

Of great interest to this research project is what the literature has to say about the relationship or interaction between the learning college paradigm, culture change, and cross-departmental collaboration in the community college.

Lunn (1997) raises an interesting point relating to the question of this research project: is there a connection between re-focusing CNC as a learning college, and enhancing cross-departmental collaboration in the College? While Lunn uses the objectionable term "customers" to denote what educators call "learners" or "students", he does shed light on this question:

> One important method of breaking down walls is to find a common goal – something that everyone can embrace as a universal objective. Such an objective might be pleasing our customers. Our task would then be to look at techniques that companies have used to become connected to the customer. We might . . . train all our employees to see their role in the company as it relates to the external customer. (p. 11)

At CNC, what if we were to ensure all departmental objectives and individual responsibilities relate to advancing the learning of our students? "The main point is to show that we are all connected to the customer. We each play an important role in adding value to the product . . . " (Lunn, p. 12). Hennessey (1999) also endorses the notion of focusing on a "higher business purpose" (p. 37), such as customer satisfaction and quality, as a means of breaking down silos. This focuses on a common ground, rather than polarizing around a specific department, or a "parochial position". Holland et al. (2000) also cite the importance of customer focus in building common goals that enhance cross-functional collaboration.

Lunn (1997) discusses how to modify the organizational structure to better connect to, and service customers, both internal and external to the organization. He suggests an inversion of the traditional organizational chart with the customers at the top and the entire company underneath, supporting efforts to please the customers. Bickford (2002) also endorses this notion of the inverted organization to achieve a team-oriented culture serving the customers at the apex.

Lee (2004) recognizes the intertwined relationship where she states that "a critical aspect of student development and academic success depends upon student and faculty/staff interactions outside of class" (p. 510), or in other words, learning in the college is related to collaboration in the college. Lee describes the ESPRIT program at a small Louisiana college that provides an open forum for students, staff and faculty to

converse about teaching, learning and the college environment in general. Interestingly and perhaps surprisingly, there is no participation of administrators. Lee observes that "the campus teaching and learning environment and culture becomes more dynamic, engaging, and capable of promoting cross-departmental partnerships and student success" (p. 510) when this communication and collaboration occur.

Carter (1998) recognizes that during times of transition and change there is "potential for internal fragmentation and polarization to neutralize a college's capacity to make the changes necessary to achieve its vision" (p. 53). Internal competition escalates and "it is important to build a sense of identification and connectedness with the college" (p. 53). Carter recommends cross-functional teams assigned to joint projects, training for teamwork and open book management policies. She describes their benefit: "cross-functional teams allow the college to flatten and 'decentralize the organization without changing its structure. They create a sense of a small college 'soul' within the larger institution" (pp. 53-54). In other words, collaboration facilitates change and makes it more comfortable.

Harris (1998) draws the three topics or themes together, declaring that

> the process of reorienting the institution toward greater student success has resulted in an increased level of trust between the various governance and interest groups on campus. The increased trust has made it easier for change to take place on campus even when differing factions on campus feel passionate bout their position. (p.11)

Harris's position seems consistent with the view that the process of becoming a learning college would enhance cross-departmental collaboration and trust, thereby facilitating organizational change.

Petrides (2003) agrees with Harris (1998) in a different context of strategic planning. She states " . . . the lasting value of strategic planning is the process of

communication and debate about issues that involve a variety of stakeholders who need to work toward a common goal, as opposed to the plan itself . . . " (p. 3). The implementation mirrors, if done well, open-ended, cross-functional collaboration. The real value is in the means (process), not just the ends.

Martin, Manning, and Ramaley (2001) suggest that in these times of greater complexity and multidimensional institutions, more than a common purpose or vision, such as a focus on student success, is needed to enhance collaboration. They inquire into how "unity in diversity" can be achieved and write

> . . . to transform the university, organizational leaders need to discover initiatives that are grand enough to serve as chariots that transcend faculty and disciplinary self-interests. . . . In the process, they create a new kind of commitment to an academic community in the face of the boundaries to collegiality and shared purpose that are established by disciplines, institutional complexity, and time constraints. (p.103)

Martin et al. (2001) clarify that "chariots" can also be thought of as trigger events (p.103). Some examples provided included: the appointment of a new president, a financial crisis, budget cuts, a process of institutional self-study, initiating new learner-centred curriculum, loss of public confidence, dropping enrolments, et cetera. Some of these "chariots" fit closely to the circumstances at CNC.

Frost and Gillespie (1998) highlight the incongruency of typical college cultures and the notion of collaboration or teamwork. They speculate that there is a lag in the use of teamwork on college campuses due to "the absence of a clear concept of teams, or to the seeming incongruity between the cultures of most universities and colleges and the culture of effective teams" (p. 10). Frost and Gillespie borrow from the thinking of Senge (1990), stating: ". . . teams aim to evolve from a gathering of individuals into a group that pools individual expertise and experience and functions so that the whole becomes

greater than the sum of its parts" (p. 11). In other words, collaboration and teamwork is more than merely working together – there must be a oneness that creates energy and synergy.

Frost and Gillespie (1998) argue that there are reasons based in the cultures of colleges that inhibit collaboration and teamwork. They feel people do not appreciate that a committee is not the same as a team. They explain this saying that in committees, "members too often are intent on promoting their own views and persuading other group members to align their perspectives with these views than on defining and achieving the shared goals that are routinely part of team objectives" (p. 11). Frost and Gillespie conclude their article with a clearly articulated understanding of the integral relationship between culture and collaboration. They state that " . . . success depends on understanding and using the culture – a powerful factor in determining the degree to which universities and colleges can and will use teams too meet future challenges" (p. 13).

Finally, Elwood and Leyden (2000) offer a useful perspective on the interaction of culture change, the learning college and collaboration. They state that "successful colleges are characterized by visions becoming reality and the democratization and ownership of that vision across the college" (p. 317). They go on to say "as colleges become more and more fragmented and decentralized they require some common overall objective to hold the institute together . . . " (p. 318). Elwood and Leyden propose that a vision is a combination of values and objectives. Therefore, a vision would presumably incorporate the values and objectives inherent in the learning college paradigm. One might then conclude as do Elwood and Leyden that "properly formulated visions

encourage staff to look beyond their ingrained cultures and consider the future society they will operate in" (p.318). In so many words, a re-focus on the vision of a learning college at CNC could enhance collaboration.

Appreciative Inquiry

While the learning college is the essence of the research question, Appreciative Inquiry is the essence of both the methodology and the philosophy underlying this research and perhaps a key to the establishment of a learning college culture itself. This section of the literature review will examine the definition, philosophy, and theoretical basis of Appreciative Inquiry.

The Definition and Philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry

What is Appreciative Inquiry? Bushe (n.d., What is Appreciative Process, para. 1) defines Appreciative Inquiry as "an action research process that studies something from the positive side to create a new kind of conversation among people as they work together to improve a group or organization."

Cooperrider and Whitney (1999, p. 10) enhance Bushe's definition by declaring that "summing up AI is difficult", and they continue by saying that Appreciative Inquiry is "a philosophy of knowing, a methodology for managing change, an approach to leadership and human development" (p. 10). They follow up by presenting a rather lengthy "practice-oriented definition":

> Appreciative Inquiry is the cooperative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what gives "life" when it is most effective and capable in economic, ecological, and human terms. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to heighten positive potential. It mobilizes inquiry through crafting an "unconditional positive question" . . . . In AI, intervention gives way to imagination and innovation; instead of negation, criticism, and spiraling diagnosis there is discovery, dream, and design. AI assumes that every

> living system has untapped, rich, and inspiring accounts of the positive. Link this "positive change core" directly to any change agenda, and changes never thought possible are suddenly and democratically mobilized. (p. 10)

While this definition is lengthy, it is valuable in that in its complexity, it demonstrates clearly Cooperrider's and Whitney's point that "summing up AI is difficult". This definition is also valuable in that it alludes to the underlying philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry.

Hammond (1998) bases her discussion of Appreciative Inquiry on the seminal work of Cooperrider and his associates. She highlights the contrast between traditional change management theory and Appreciative Inquiry, as did Cooperrider & Whitney (1999). The traditional change management approach is "to look for a problem, do a diagnosis, and find a solution. The primary focus is on what is wrong or broken; since we look for problems, we find them" (Hammond, p. 6). She echoes Cooperrrider & Whitney's view that the traditional approach sees "human systems as machines and parts (people) as interchangeable. We believe we can fix anything and there is a right answer or solution to any organizational problem or challenge" (p. 6).

Hammond articulates her view of Appreciative Inquiry suggesting that we look for what works in an organization. She adds the following:

> The tangible result . . . is a series of statements that describe where the organization wants to be, based on the high moments of where they have been. Because the statements are grounded in real experience and history, people know how to repeat their success. (p. 7)

Hammond (1998) addresses one of the typical criticisms of Appreciative Inquiry at this point asking, "isn't this a rather simplistic way to face an organization's incredible challenges? Isn't this a naïve approach?" (p. 8). Her retort to these challenges is to suspend judgment, and simply try it. She closes her argument by challenging us as

follows:

> It never occurs to us that we can 'fix' an organization or even our society by doing more of what works. We are obsessed with learning from our mistakes. But why not allow our success to multiply enough to crowd out the unsuccessful? (p. 9)

Watkins and Mohr (2001) articulate their definition of Appreciative Inquiry in a way that reflects much of what the previous writers have stated:

> Appreciative Inquiry is a collaborative and highly participative, system-wide approach to seeking, identifying, and enhancing the "life-giving forces" that are present when a system is performing optimally in human, economic, and organizational terms. It is a journey during which profound knowledge of a human system at its moments of wonder is uncovered and used to co-construct the best and highest of that system. (p. 14)

Bushe (n.d., What is Appreciative Inquiry, para. 1) states that Appreciative Inquiry is "a challenge to conventional methods of providing leadership and managing change." He states that Appreciative Inquiry will be of interest to the researcher who believes:

1. Organizations are not like machines – they don't have an objective reality the way a table or a rock does;
2. Organizations are a social reality and social reality is co-constructed – we are in through our interactions with each other;
3. Important human processes like communication, decision-making, conflict management are effected more by how people involved make meaning out of their interactions than by skilful application of any particular technique;
4. Attempts to find or develop the right formula for successful leadership and change are a misguided attempt to treat social reality as if it were objective reality. (Bushe, What is Appreciative

Inquiry, para. 1)

Bushe's comments here show clearly what beliefs and philosophy underpin Appreciative Inquiry. That is a good point to move onto an examination of the theoretical basis of this research methodology.

The Theoretical Framework of Appreciative Inquiry

Watkins and Mohr (2001, p. 36) describe the "DNA" or essential components of Appreciative Inquiry. They describe the theoretical framework of Appreciative Inquiry in terms of core principles that incorporate the beliefs and values inherent in this research method. Subsequently, they describe core processes to implement Appreciative Inquiry.

Watkins and Mohr (2001) first identify three theoretical and research foundations of Appreciative Inquiry from which the principles and processes of Appreciative Inquiry emerge. They cite social constructionism as one foundation, declaring that, "as the people of an organization create meaning through their dialogue together, they sow the seeds of the organization's future" (p. 26). They also cite "the 'new' sciences (quantum physics, chaos theory, complexity theory, and self-organizing systems) and research on the power of image as theoretical and research foundations of Appreciative Inquiry.

Watkins and Mohr (2001), Bushe (n.d.), Cooperrider and Whitney (1999), and Hammond (1998) all share the same views on the underlying principles and assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry. However, the assumptions underlying Appreciative Inquiry are most clearly articulated by Bushe:

1. You create more effective organizations by focusing on what you want more of, not what you want less of.
2. Whatever you want more of already exists, even if only in small

quantities.

3. It's easier to create change by amplifying the positive qualities of a group or organization than by trying to fix the negative qualities.
4. Through the act of inquiry we create the social realities we are trying to understand.
5. Getting people to inquire together into the best examples of what they want more of creates its own momentum toward creating more positive organizations. (What is Appreciative Inquiry, para. 3)

In summary, organizations grow in the direction of what they repeatedly ask questions about and focus their attention on. "AI does not focus on changing people. Instead, it invites people to engage in building the kinds of organizations they want to live in" (What is Appreciative Inquiry, para. 4). There seems to be no disagreement about these findings in the literature.

Finally, the DNA of Appreciative Inquiry includes the processes for actually implementing the methodology. Watkins and Mohr (2001, pp. 42-45) describe the "Four-D Model" of Appreciative Inquiry, which comprises a four-part cycle. The first stage is Discovery, where stakeholders engage in story-telling and sharing experiences of what has really worked well - appreciating and valuing the best of what is. The second stage is Dream - envisioning what might be. Participants craft a possibility statement or provocative proposition - a sort of vision statement to bridge the discovery of past examples of excellence, to the future dream of even greater excellence. The third stage is Design - dialoguing about what needs to be done to create an ideal organization to make the dream happen and attain greater excellence. Finally, the fourth stage is Deliver

(sometimes called Destiny) – inviting action, co-constructing the future, developing the strategy and action plan to "deliver the goods," so to speak.

Finally, Watkins and Mohr (2001), inspire hope for the potential of CNC as an organization, and corroborate the suitability of Appreciative Inquiry as a philosophy and a methodology of research for this project, and for this researcher, with their words:

> Based on the belief that human systems are made and imagined by those who live and work within them, AI leads systems to move toward the generative and creative images that reside in their most positive core – values, visions, achievements, best practices. (p. xvii-xviii)

Conclusion

This literature review addressed the three main themes: the Learning College, Organizational Culture and Change, and Cross-Departmental Collaboration. It also investigated the underlying definition, philosophy, and theoretical framework of Appreciative Inquiry. The literature establishes a firm foundation to understanding these areas of inquiry; it also provides a springboard to launch onward into an Appreciative Inquiry to hopefully formulate a response to the research question, "How might re-focusing as a learning college enhance greater cross-departmental collaboration in the College of New Caledonia?"

CHAPTER THREE: CONDUCT OF RESEARCH

Research Approach

This research project used an action research approach, which differs from traditional quantitative or positivist research methods. While the latter employs a tightly controlled scientific approach, the former is primarily "a practical tool for solving problems experienced by people in their professional, community, or private lives" (Stringer, 1999, p. 11). Stringer adds importantly, that if an action research project does not make a difference or improvement in the lives of the participants, then it has failed to meet its objectives. It is hoped that a difference will result in the life of CNC and its employees and students, by addressing the research question in this project: How might re-focusing as a learning college enhance greater cross-departmental collaboration in the College of New Caledonia?

Berg (2004) emphasizes that action research is collaborative, as it "endorses consensual, democratic, and participatory strategies to encourage people to examine reflectively their problems, or particular issues affecting them or their community" (p. 197). The participants are just that – participants– actively involved in the process of research and the implementation of any recommended courses of action. Berg also describes "the action research process as a spiral activity: plan, act, observe, and reflect" (p. 197). This process has two tasks:

> First, it is intended to uncover or produce information and knowledge that will be directly useful to a group of people and second, it is meant to enlighten and empower the average person in the group, motivating each one to take up and use the information gathered in the research. (Berg, 2004, p. 197)

It was planned and anticipated that the participant employees of CNC would work through both of these tasks, so that the objectives of the action research project would be

fulfilled: positive change, in the form of an enhanced focus on learning and on collaboration.

This project was based on a qualitative approach to research. Berg (2004) observes that a qualitative approach to research "provides a means of accessing unquantifiable facts about the actual people researchers observe and talk to" (p. 7). This allows researchers to "share in the understandings and perceptions of others and to explore how people structure and give meaning to their daily lives" (p. 7). This project sought unquantifiable facts relating to organizational culture, attitudes, values, and how people at CNC relate to one another. As such, it properly belongs in the realm of qualitative research.

The emphasis of a qualitative research approach is on participants' perceptions of reality. "We must understand those perceptions if we want to understand human behavior: what people *think* about the world influences how they *act* in it" (Palys, p. 29). A qualitative researcher acknowledges that people construct their own realties, and therefore there are actually many realities. Palys believes that to understand people and their perceptions of reality and hence, their behaviour, we must investigate the context of the behaviour, get close to the people, and not impose a theoretical framework. The researcher must be prepared to let the theory emerge from their inquiry through direct observation and contact with the people in context. Clearly, this inquiry into the perceptions of CNC employees in relation to their values, interactions, actions, and aspirations is suited to the purpose and processes of qualitative research.

Appreciative Inquiry provided the philosophical framework for this research. With this approach, participants create energy that infuses them with a "sense of

commitment, confidence and affirmation that they have been successful. They also know clearly how to make more moments of success" (Hammond, 1998, p. 7).

Appreciative Inquiry "involves systematic discovery of what gives a system 'life' when it is most effective and capable . . . ." Cooperrider and Whitney (1999, p. 10). The implementation of Appreciative Inquiry involves a four-part cycle comprised of:

1. Discovery - appreciating and valuing the best of what is,
2. Dream - envisioning what might be,
3. Design - dialoguing about what should be, and
4. Destiny – inviting action, inspired by the preceding stages. (p. 11)

Why choose the appreciative frame as a methodology? Simply put, it is congruent with who I am, with the research question, and with the context of the organization's current culture. However, a more in-depth exploration considers some research methodology design questions in the context of Systems Theory (Flood and Jackson, 1991, and Hamilton and Stevenson, 2005).

First, who am I as a researcher? I have an ISTJ preference in terms of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (Myers, 1998) and view the world in a positive, optimistic, and appreciative frame.

As a middle manager in the College, it was beneficial to approach the research with an appreciative frame, in part to gain the trust and support of the employees. While talking with the President of the faculty union, it became very apparent that there was already suspicion of the intent of the learning college initiative at CNC. Fortunately, some of this suspicion seemed to be alleviated through this conversation prior to the triad group meetings. The faculty union advocated that the College is already a centre for

learning, and that we are very good at it. What a great scenario and springboard for using Appreciative Inquiry, starting with the College's strengths and dreaming how they might shape the future. Perhaps even some enhanced collaboration would occur?

According to Flood's and Jackson's Total Systems Intervention (TSI) model (Cook and Allison, 1998), inquiry into beliefs, and relational, cultural aspects of a pluralist-complex system should appropriate a research methodology that can be described as interactive, with such tools as focus groups and interviews. Systems analysis supported my choice of a research methodology based on a qualitative approach within an appreciative frame. There was congruency between my research question, the current organizational culture, the researcher, and my research methodology.

Project Participants

This section will address who the participants in this research project were, and how they were selected. Stringer (1999) states that "the potential payoff for opening up the processes of organizational life is enormous" (p. 40), therefore it was appropriate in this action research project to strive for "maximization of the involvement of all relevant individuals" (Stringer, p. 39). In a pluralist-complex system like CNC, it was necessary to ensure that members from all relevant sub-systems were included, including the faculty union, the support staff union, management at all levels, and of course, students. Since this research originated with a member of the management team, the project would only garner broader interest and greater credibility if it involved a broad cross-section of members from the College community, or "maximum variation sampling" (Glesne, 1999, p. 29). This would not only enhance quality and quantity of participation, but it could ultimately facilitate successful implementation of any recommendations arising out of the

research. “Active participation is the key to feelings of ownership that motivate people to invest their time and energy to help shape the nature and quality of their community lives” (Stringer, 1999, p. 38).

The team for this action research included the project’s sponsor, the President of the College of New Caledonia, Mr. Ralph Troschke, and the Project Supervisor, Ms. Ann Perodeau. I acted as not only the research leader, but also as the facilitator of the Appreciative Inquiry dialogue triad groups, choosing not to ask a faculty facilitator in the College to guide the groups. There seemed little or no benefit in removing myself from the direct group interaction, to facilitate observation and note taking. Some assistance was available from my secretary to transcribe the notes from the Appreciative Inquiry dialogue triad group interaction, and two colleagues volunteered to recruit participants, one at the Prince George campus and one at the Quesnel campus. Assistance in recruitment and selection of participants was one of the conditions of the Royal Roads University ethical review approval, given my position as a manager in the College. Additionally, the Prince George campus volunteer agreed to act as a peer advisor for piloting the questions and dialogue triad group process, and any further debriefing as needed. Beyond these activities, the research leader undertook the research tasks in this project.

I planned to select my participants “purposefully” (Glesne, 1999, p. 29). Volunteers self-selected from an open invitation extended throughout the college community by e-mail, intranet and newsletter media, using the invitation letter and the e-mail invitation, which are attached as Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively. Posters were exhibited in the Prince George and Quesnel campuses where the dialogue triad

groups occurred. These were mainly intended to recruit students, who were otherwise hard to communicate with as a group. Ultimately, it was necessary to extend personal invitations by telephone or in person through my two peer research advisors, to ensure there was an adequate number of participants. With respect to student recruitment, my peer research advisor in Quesnel was successful in recruiting two student participants; however, unfortunately, neither showed up at the dialogue triad meeting. This required recruiting three students who were active student representatives on the College Board or Education Council. The ethical review concern about personally recruiting participants was reconciled with the recognition that I have no instructor-student relationship with these students. Hence, there was no possibility of undue influence or coercion.

The research opportunity was also promoted within the College with the Education Administration Team of academic managers, and also with the Presidents of both unions. It was hoped that this would build trust, communication, and ultimately, buy-in. The intent was to attract a maximum of about 24 participants and a broadly representative sample of people from across the College community and its various sub-systems.

In total, 20 participants volunteered to commit to the project. This group comprised three students, ten faculty, two managers, and five support staff. Five participants were at the Quesnel campus and 15 were at the Prince George campus. The composition of this group effectively created the broad representative sample of people from across the College community and its various sub-systems, which met the research goal.

There were a total of 10 dialogue meetings, comprising two meetings in each of Quesnel and Prince George for each of the Discover stage and the Dream stage respectively. Additionally, there were two meetings for the three students. The Discover and Dream stages were condensed into one meeting for a pair of students and one meeting with a sole student present.

Research Methods and Tools

Palys (2003) observes that qualitative research is an iterative process, one that is cyclical, "where each cycle takes us a little further in some identifiable direction" (Palys, p. 314). The first iteration in this research occurred when the first dialogue triad meeting was conducted to collect data in response to the three Appreciative Inquiry questions. This comprised the Discover stage of the Appreciative Inquiry methodology. The second iteration occurred when the dialogue triads met a second time to validate their data arising from the first meeting by identifying key themes arising therefrom, and by crafting a possibility statement or a provocative proposition. This second iteration represented the Dream stage of the Appreciative Inquiry methodology. Subsequent possible and appropriate iterations could be where the College pursues the Design and Destiny stages of Appreciative Inquiry. This would truly bring culmination and action to the action research process of this project.

Given the context of the organization, characterized by a long history of distrust, somewhat adversarial labour relations, and top down bureaucratic management, the research tool had to be carefully designed to address a number of critical contextual concerns for the researcher. The design incorporating a number of research participant triads was intended to foster an environment where there was openness, safety, equality,

and opportunity for deep listening and learning. The triad design was also intended to affirm these values, which I believe are important to the aspirations of this research, most people in the College, and to this researcher. In CNC's environment where there is vulnerability and hierarchy, it was easier to create openness, safety, and equality in a triad, than in a larger focus group or learning circle. Also, using a number of triads generated a greater quantity of readily manageable data from a diverse community such as the College, than would interviews.

Stringer (1999) stated

> The task of the community-based action researcher, therefore, is to develop a context in which individuals and groups with divergent perceptions and interpretations can formulate a construction of their situation that makes sense to them all—a joint construction. (p. 45)

In designing a research tool, for use in a community college environment in British Columbia, it was necessary to consider the impact that the organizational culture and subcultures could have on the research process and methodology and the group dynamics. Like Hood (2005), "my challenge was to create a forum and to set the context for a diverse group of individuals to feel safe enough to engage in open dialogue and to experience shared learning" (p.44).

This research tool gave participants an opportunity to experience a structured process for individuals to share stories of their experiences of effective student learning, and it offered a safe environment in which to share their experiences. The conduct of this study will next be considered to understand how this action research unfolded.

Study Conduct

To minimize anxiety among participants and to enhance the generation of trust and thoughtful and considered data, participants received the questions prior to their

meeting in triads, via the College's Intranet and where requested, via e-mail. At the beginning of the dialogue triad meetings, they were briefed with an overview of the Appreciative Inquiry approach and procedure with a PowerPoint presentation. I also reviewed the necessary protocols to create a respectful, non-judgmental, non-threatening, and open environment. These comments reinforced the protocols reviewed in the consent form which was provided to each participant and which had to be returned, duly signed prior to participation in the research meeting. To provide consistency in the conduct of the dialogue triad meetings and some support and guidance for my own use with respect to the meetings' content, I prepared some written notes which are included as Appendix E.

The proposal for this research project did not consider conducting triad groups in Quesnel; however, this opportunity was subsequently seized so as to capture data from CNC's largest regional campus. It was considered that this sample could offer data that might not be representative of data from participants at the College's main campus in Prince George. I was also concerned there would be too few participants, as this research project was competing with a number of other research activities seeking out participants on main campus. Ultimately, these relatively small groups did secure the desired safe, intimate, and comfortable environment, and they did generate an adequate and manageable amount of data.

The triads worked through the first two stages of the four stages of Appreciative Inquiry described earlier as Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny or Deliver. This model, discussed in Watkins and Mohr (2001), is referred to as the GEM Four-D model. It was developed in 1990 at the Global Excellence in Management (GEM) Initiative's

Organizational Excellence Program in Zimbabwe, as part of a joint initiative with Save the Children for building partnerships.

As the participants arrived at the first dialogue triad meeting, the Discover stage, they were randomly grouped into three, where possible. Some flexibility was required when people did not show up and groups of two, four, or five were the result. Participants took turns acting as speaker, listener, and observer roles in the dialogue triad. Participants acted as an observer for each question and wrote notes using the handout provided (see Appendix D for the dialogue triad questions and recording sheet). Participants took turns asking each other questions about situations they experienced where student learning was well served, what an excellent learning circumstances would look like, and how the discussion impacted their thoughts about a learning college and cross-departmental collaboration. They reflected by "appreciating and valuing the best of 'what is'" (Hammond, 1998, p.24). Following these triad conversations, a general discussion occurred where themes that emerged in each triad were shared, compared and discussed. This discussion was recorded on flip-chart paper by a volunteer recorder.

In the second meeting, the Dream stage, the dialogue triads re-convened to craft their possibility statements, based on the themes they had previously identified on the flip chart paper. No electronic recording devices were used, as the level of mistrust at the institution might have caused people to limit how open they were had conversations been taped.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study began immediately after working through the Discovery stage questions in the triads. Each triad discussed their data with the intent of

validating the accuracy of their notes, and identifying the major common themes emerging from the data. Spokespersons for each triad were then asked to share in the whole group the basic themes identified in their triads. This identification of themes by each of the triads was recorded on a flip chart by me and acted as a first validation by the participants of the data and its resulting themes.

Dream: At the second meeting of the triads, this Discovery data were re-introduced and the participants in triads worked to develop principles or provocative propositions (Watkins and Mohr (2001, p.135). In this stage, participants asked: "What might be?" (Hammond, 1998, p.24). These propositions should represent a stretch for the participants, and be relevant to the action research goal of re-focusing CNC as a learning college with enhanced cross-departmental collaboration. These principles provide some framework for moving these changes forward in the future.

In this Dream stage, the participants in their triads selected their provocative proposition from the data by answering the following question: "What statement could capture a principle in relation to a learning college and collaboration that emerges from the positive experiences shared around these themes?" Triads then posted their principles or provocative propositions on flip chart paper or loose-leaf paper in order for the larger group to validate the propositions. The data generated by these research meetings, both in triads and as a whole, will be destroyed immediately after the research project final report has been accepted as complete, for graduation from the MALT program (May 2006). This application of the Appreciative Inquiry method is consistent with Stringer's (1999) conception of action research as participatory, inclusive, and culturally appropriate. To keep the scope of the project manageable, the "Design" and "Destiny" stages of

Appreciative Inquiry will remain outside the scope of this study, but could be a further iteration of this research project.

We now turn our attention to the theoretical basis of organization and analysis of the data. According to Berg (2004), "data analysis can be defined as consisting of three concurrent flows of action: data reduction, data display, and conclusions and verification" (p. 39). Data reduction "directs attention to the need for focusing, simplifying, and transforming raw data into a more manageable form" (p.39). Data must be displayed in an organized and compressed manner that facilitates analysis and the drawing of conclusions (p.39). Berg states that once data reduction and display have occurred, "analytic conclusions may begin to emerge and define themselves more clearly and definitively" (p.39). Finally, conclusions must be confirmed or verified, with the procedures clearly documented to ensure the study can be replicated by other researchers.

Rigour is an important element of quantitative research. It is important to ensure that the inquiry methods have "minimized the possibility that the investigation was superficial, biased, or insubstantial" (Stringer, 1999, p. 176). The basis of trustworthiness in quantitative research according to Stringer (p. 176-177) is to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility comes from prolonged engagement with participants, triangulation of information from multiple sources, validation of data with participants and peer debriefing. The foregoing description of my Appreciative Inquiry process confirms most of these qualities are quite explicit, especially with very active participation of the participants in validating data and generating emergent themes. Additionally, two peers acted as peer advisors for further debriefing.

Some degree of transferability to other community college contexts in Canada at the very least should be readily apparent. Without losing sight of the uniqueness of each community college in the post-secondary education system, the transferability from Camosun College to CNC of the research methodology and method is evident, due to similarity in our respective contexts. Dependability and confirmability will be realized through clear descriptions of the data collection and analysis processes and the availability of raw data. Finally, in relation to trustworthiness and rigour, Glesne (1999) issues a caveat about the researcher's subjectivity:

> It is when you feel angry, irritable, gleeful, excited, or sad that you can be sure that your subjectivity is at work. The goal is to explore such feelings to learn what they are telling you about who you are in relationship to what you are learning and to what may be keeping yourself from learning. (p. 105)

I tried to be vigilant in regards to my subjectivity, especially with 15 years of "baggage" on the subject organization. This issue of researcher bias will be addressed further in the ethics section.

Ethical Issues

The eight ethical principles described in the Research Ethics Policy and Research Integrity Policy document of Royal Roads University (2000) clearly created implications for this research project. What follows is first, a brief description of these ethical principles, and their implications. Secondly, we will consider how these principles are relevant to the participants in this study. Finally, this we will identify some actions and procedures that might be needed to ensure the project uses ethical research methodology.

Respect for human dignity is referred to in the Tri-Council Policy Statement, (Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, 1998, 2000, 2002, Context of an Ethics Framework, Part C, Guiding Ethical Principles), as "the cardinal principle of modern

research ethics", and "the basis of the [other] ethical obligations in research". One relevant ethical principle to this research project is respect for free and informed consent. Participants must be accorded the right to make free and informed decisions and consent in relation to their involvement in the research. Another relevant ethical principle is respect for vulnerable persons – "those whose diminished competence and/or decision-making capacity make them vulnerable" (Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, Context of an Ethics Framework, Part C, Guiding Ethical Principles). The researcher must also respect privacy and confidentiality - to "protect the access, control and dissemination of personal information" (Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, Context of an Ethics Framework, Part C, Guiding Ethical Principles), and to ensure protection of the psychological health of the participants.

Respect for justice and inclusiveness includes consideration of both procedural justice and distributive justice. The former denotes fairness in terms of procedures, standards, and methods of ethics review, and presumably, the research itself. The latter imposes a duty not to discriminate against or exploit vulnerable people.

Finally, there are ethical principles that require the balancing of harms and benefits, minimizing of harms, and maximizing of benefits. In other words, "the foreseeable harms should outweigh anticipated benefits" (Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, 1998, 2000, 2002, Context of an Ethics Framework, Part C, Guiding Ethical Principles). A corollary of this balancing act is "the duty to avoid, prevent or minimize harm to others" (Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, Context of an Ethics Framework, Part C, Guiding Ethical Principles). Research should minimize human involvement to the greatest extent possible and still ensure valid data. A further corollary

is “the duty to benefit others and, in research ethics, a duty to maximize net benefits” (Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, Context of an Ethics Framework, Part C, Guiding Ethical Principles). This is particularly relevant in a research project such as this, which focused on the education sector. It is noted that “in most research, the primary benefits produced are for society, and for the advancement of knowledge” (Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics, Context of an Ethics Framework, Part C, Guiding Ethical Principles).

In this research project, ethical issues were always present, visibly or just under the surface. College employees were asked to share their opinions and ideas about how the College could become more learning centred in its focus and more collaborative than in the past. This was likely perceived by some as a vulnerable position to be in, as they felt the need to be critical of their employer or of other people in the College, including supervisors or others in positions of greater authority and power. This vulnerability may have been more acute for some participants, as I am a member of management. However, it was not apparent to me that any participant felt vulnerable by the project and its proceedings. No participant indicated that they felt threatened or vulnerable – indeed, most actually volunteered that they appreciated and enjoyed the experience.

The use of Appreciative Inquiry did impart a positive and non-threatening perspective to the project; however, some people may still have felt threatened. This was partly a function of the College’s past history of distrust and animosity between different employee groups, poor union-management relations, autocratic and secretive senior leadership, et cetera. Recent layoffs and program cancellations or suspensions currently aggravate this atmosphere and have created an atmosphere of fear and poor morale.

There was a need to be sensitive towards feelings of discomfort of the employees. Block (2000) indicates "when you encounter resistance, you are seeing the surface of more underlying anxieties" (p. 150). The researcher needs to recognize these feelings of discomfort and anxiety, and to understand the resistance, both to effectively manage the resistance, and for the general wellbeing of the person. My research project had to be undertaken with integrity in my relationships with the people with whom I worked as a research facilitator. This enabled collaboration, and fostered a willingness of people to actively participate and communicate in a deep meaningful way. Finally, I needed to behave in a manner that modeled and fostered authenticity, inclusiveness, harmony and a common unity. These values were compatible with the ultimate objective of this research. Interestingly, one faculty participant indicated in the dialogue triad session that the only reason she participated was her belief in my integrity.

The outcome of the inquiry could potentially lead to the re-design of jobs, new policies, and procedures, and other organizational changes. Any changes, particularly a culture change can be very threatening to employees, especially where trust is not at a high level. However, a mitigating factor to offset possible anxiety was the positive feeling that emanated from the Appreciative Inquiry process. The positive life-giving energy that is created and the sense of creating something new from the good things of the past, lessens the negative feeling that naturally arise in times of uncertainty and change.

In this study, some of the most relevant ethical principles include respect for free and informed consent, respect for vulnerable persons, and respect for privacy and confidentiality. The design and process was sensitive to the needs of participants and

build in protections for them. People were at liberty to participate and if desired, free to disengage at any point of their involvement. They also had enough information to make a fully informed decision. A signed consent form (see Appendix A) with a description of the purpose, mode, and system of inquiry was required, and mentioned they had the opportunity to see the Appreciative Inquiry questions in advance. As a middle manager, I recognized that some participants might perceive themselves to be subordinate to me in terms of power, experience, status, et cetera. This could have made them feel vulnerable as noted above, and hence special effort was made to create a non-threatening tone and environment for the inquiry. Finally, to respect the individual's right to privacy and confidentiality, there was assurance that no information would be released that could in any way identify the participant, directly or indirectly through context or characteristic phasing. Some information might have been perceived by participants as threatening to their position at the College and indeed to their psychological integrity. However, there was no evidence of this being so.

Another ethical challenge is raised by Stringer (1999), who observes that when we undertake action research, "we are likely to engage approaches to work and community life that are at odds with the general conventions of the institutions . . . " in which we are conducting our research (p. 62). We run "the risk of disturbing a carefully controlled and regulated social environment" (Stringer, p. 62). Mindful of this, the research proceeded with a solid understanding of the current organizational context, while respecting past activities and behaviours. Bellman (1990) recognizes this in stating: "Our risk as consultants is acting as if nothing worthwhile happened before our arrival on the scene. We risk showing disrespect for all that these people have spent years labouring

to create" (p. 74). This behaviour would also have been incongruent with the values and processes of Appreciative Inquiry.

One final comment in relation to ethical issues pertains to the question of researcher bias. Glesne (1999) observes that researchers must be continuously alert to their own biases and subjectivity in order to produce more trustworthy interpretations of data and findings. She suggests an audit by some outsider who can help to ensure objectivity in interpretation of data. In this research project I found myself working with friends and subordinates, having worked in the College for about 15 years. I therefore needed to be aware of the distinction between rapport, which advances research, and friendship which can compromise objectivity and cause bias. This bias could arise in relation to the selection of participants and/or in "a somewhat unconscious subjective selection process" in relation to data (Glesne, p. 102). To counteract this, a neutral party not connected with this project was responsible for the random selection of participants.

Another danger lay in the possibility that research participants might over-identify with me, the researcher. (Glesne, 1999) states that "in so doing, they may begin to act in ways that they perceive the researchers want them to act or in ways that impress them" (p. 102). The safe, transparent, and open environment I believe was created in all the triad groups counteracted any propensity to act in this way.

CNC has an informal and emerging ethical review process for research projects that involve student participants. A committee of three managers including the head Librarian, a Dean, and a regional campus director required an e-mail from the Royal Roads University Major Project Office indicating that the procedures conformed to Royal Roads University ethical standards.

Ethics is clearly an important issue to contend with in action research, as we inquire into the lives of our fellow human beings. We all share the same needs for respect of our human dignity, typically as vulnerable people who value our privacy and confidentiality, and the right to choose whether we engage in a process of inquiry or not.

With this appreciation of the action research approach, how the research was conducted, who participated, and the underlying ethical issues, one can now turn to that element of the project which offers the greatest scope for excitement and creativity - the data analysis and conclusions.

CHAPTER FOUR: PROJECT RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Study Findings

The purpose of this project was to explore the research question, "How might re-focusing as a learning college enhance greater cross-departmental collaboration in the College of New Caledonia?" Additionally, the intent was to acquire an understanding of

1. What is the meaning of a learning college?
2. What organizational changes and/or practices would enhance re-focusing as a learning college?

The findings from the data generated in the dialogue triad meetings are presented in this chapter according to an Appreciative Inquiry framework. In other words, the project's findings are structured around the three research questions, by summarizing the data's themes with illustrative comments, under the following headings:

1. The Discovery – The best of what is
2. The Dream – What might be
3. The Learning College and CNC

The possibility statements generated by the participants in the second dialogue triad meetings, proved to add little new data of value. They did, however, validate the data generated in the first dialogue triad meetings in response to the three Appreciative Inquiry questions. Therefore, the data generated by the possibility statement activity will not be included in this chapter. Finally, the chapter will present the study's conclusions, and some comments on the scope and limitations of the research.

Before reviewing the findings from the data, first consider the approach to qualitative data analysis used here, as useful background information. The approach used

here is known as "collaborative social research" (Berg, 2004). Berg proceeds to explain that

> Researchers operating in this research mode work with their subjects . . . to accomplish some sort of change or action . . . . The analysis of data gathered in such collaborative studies is accomplished with the participation of the subjects who are seen by the researcher as *stakeholders* in the situation in need of change or action. Data are collected and then reflexively considered both as feedback to craft action and as information to understand a situation, resolve a problem, or to satisfy some sort of field experiment. (p. 267)

Berg's comment effectively captures the context and approach taken in this action research project.

Glesne (1999) offers further background to this chapter with her description of how data are transformed from "organization to meaning", through three categories or means of data transformation (p. 149):

1. Description – where the data "speak for themselves" (p.149)
2. Analysis – "extends description in a systematic manner" (p. 150)
3. Interpretation – "when the researcher 'transcends factual data and cautious analysis and begins to probe into what is to made of them'" (p. 150)

Accordingly, the *findings* in this chapter are based on analysis of the data, and the conclusions are based on interpretation of the data. This chapter will now proceed to describe the project's findings in relation to the three Appreciative Inquiry questions.

The Discovery – The Best of What Is

The first Appreciative Inquiry question posed to the participants was, "Think about a time when you effectively served the learning of a student(s), where you really felt satisfaction and that your contributions were valued. Describe the situation and the role you played." The data generated from this question were analyzed and transformed into two principal patterns or themes. These themes were emotions and relationships -

and they are not, of course, mutually exclusive. The findings under each of these themes will now be discussed.

Emotions

The data in this study found that emotions figured significantly in the Discovery stage—the best of what is—in the work of CNC employees and students. The theme of emotions was immediately apparent to the researcher, both upon a reading of the data and while observing the dialogue triad meeting interactions. The findings in respect of this theme's data will be reported in order of significance, which is determined by the frequency of occurrence in the data. It was important to bear in mind while analyzing these data that emotions blend together - they do not always have discrete boundaries. For example, a feeling of being appreciated can also give rise to a feeling of pride or satisfaction. There is no intent in this data analysis to represent that data of emotions can fall into absolutely pure classifications. Subject to this qualification, the emotions that were most evident in the data fall under the sub-headings of appreciation, excitement, satisfaction, and challenge.

Appreciation

How appropriate that Appreciative Inquiry was the chosen methodology for the context of this study, since appreciation was one of the most significant emotions evident in the responses to the Discovery question. A member of support staff stated that the "student looks up to me and I feel she appreciated my encouragement". A faculty member indicated in her response to the question that "students express gratitude" on the way out of the class and this meant a lot to her. Another instructor recounted how "students often verbalize their appreciation to her, which makes her 'feel successful'". A

support staff member described a story of assisting an immigrant family who did not understand the application procedures. After she assisted them, “the family expressed their thanks in a very warm and appreciative manner (lots of hugs!)”. Another support staff member mentioned that when she helped a senior student to learn how to use the Internet, he became really excited. Her response was, “I felt appreciated”. Another support staff member reported that after assisting a student to navigate the admissions procedures, she felt appreciated when she got positive feedback not only from the student, but also from her own manager. An instructor recounted how a group of former students came back for a visit and shared with the instructor how much they appreciated after the fact, that they had been pushed by the instructor. One student expressed great appreciation for the practical learning opportunities offered at CNC, such as field trips, guest speakers from industry, and labs. He also expressed appreciation for being valued as a person, “people knowing his name”, “amazing instructors” and “administrative staff who looked after him”. He appreciated that “teachers take the time to talk to you”, are “patient” and have “open doors”. Another student expressed great appreciation for the Counselling and Advising department which he described as “unbelievably helpful”, due to being “friendly, knowledgeable and accessible”. He also reflected that he appreciated “being treated more like a person”.

Excitement

The second emotion that figured prominently in the appreciative stories was excitement. The excitement was also unmistakable in the sessions as people became animated in telling their stories of excellence. For one instructor, her excitement was a passion about what she teaches. Another found excitement when the “lights go on” or

"when you see an attitude change". A manager explained about the excitement that he felt when he took control of a situation because a prospective student had not been well served. Through the manager's intervention, the student applied to a program, and the manager was excited about being able to transform a negative situation into a positive one. An instructor shared how the excitement of the students was an important part of what she finds rewarding about being an instructor. She explained that when a student had read his first book ever, that he was very excited and her response was, "I loved it". An instructor was moved by the excitement of a student, when he understood the mathematics assignment. Two other instructors alluded to the excitement that flows out of the "ah ha" moments when students understand a new concept. The source of the instructors' excitement was the students' excitement and the realization that the instruction method had worked – and they would "do more of what worked".

Satisfaction

The third emotion that was evident in the data was satisfaction. Interestingly, many, if not most of the participants, expressed feelings of satisfaction and enjoyment with the Appreciative Inquiry dialogue triad meetings themselves. However, in terms of the data, one instructor mentioned that after one of the "ah ha" moments referred to above, he felt "rewarded, encouraged, fulfilled and proud". Another instructor was clearly proud and satisfied with his success with a struggling student who "went on to pass the darn thing (the course)". Most of the instructors recounted stories of student success which was a source of pride and satisfaction for them – not just because of the student's success, but also because of their own success in facilitating the learning. An instructor also indicated that she felt great satisfaction knowing that her students were

enjoying their classes and learning the necessary work. A support staff member expressed that she felt pride in the service she offered through the College to the community. A support worker said that she "feels a sense of satisfaction when she sees students progress year after year". She "enjoys empowering students". A manager shared the satisfaction she felt when being able to care for a distraught student by listening to and talking with her. The support staff member mentioned earlier who assisted the immigrant family also demonstrated the emotion of satisfaction, when she said that the student "seemed to be on the right track to acquiring further education". A student indicated that he derived satisfaction being involved in governance of the College, by feeling engaged in the College community and dealing with employees who know his name.

Challenged

The final emotion that was evident from the data was the feeling of being challenged. One instructor described his challenge of responding to a student's need to be able to cope with abstract concepts. The instructor's challenge was to reach this student effectively, where he was at, as a truck driver. He met that challenge as a successful instructor and the experience altered his instructional methods thereafter. Another instructor spoke with satisfaction of being "challenged to dig deeper" by the enthusiasm of one of his students. A support staff member spoke of "co-discovering" when working with students. She often had to find answers, and as she added, "you'll never be bored if you're learning every day". The challenge of learning was important to her. An instructor recounted the story of a group of five students returning for a visit after having graduated. The students offered the feedback that they were happy that the instructor had challenged them – "happy they were pushed so hard". This challenging of the students had better

prepared them and assisted them with the challenges of their future courses. This student attitude about being challenged was corroborated by a student participant, who said he liked "being pushed and exploring new ideas". This concludes the findings from the data in relation to the predominant theme of emotion. While relationship is apparent as an interconnected theme in these stories, we will now consider the theme of *relationships* as a separate finding.

Relationships

The data in this study found that relationships figured prominently in the Discovery stage—the best of what is—in the work of CNC employees and students. The theme of relationships was also immediately apparent to the reader of the data and the observer of the dialogue triad group interactions. A support worker clearly demonstrated the importance of relationships in her work as she described personal circumstances in the life of a student. She stated: "we felt quite close to her and her little boy – she was just getting over the death of her young husband and had a young five year old". This student was "not just a number". The same employee described another situation that speaks convincingly of the important role of relationships in the day-to-day work of her department. To paraphrase the employee, she described how a nervous individual came into the Admissions department; she smiled at the person, patted the person on the back and congratulated them for coming in, saying that all would be fine. This describes actions associated with caring relationships. It has been previously noted that an instructor felt successful when the student felt successful. That indicates empathy and a oneness that is fostered by relationship. This becomes clearer when this same instructor speaks of "physically getting down to their level - sitting beside them and treating them

like a friend". One student said "getting to know College staff" was something he appreciated about CNC, and another student said it was great when staff stopped to talk to him and knew his name. These are relationships. Another instructor said that making a personal connection with the students is crucially important to her. She noticed that sometimes students would connect with her, rather than with a Counsellor, because she wants to be personally involved with her students. As discussed above, a support staff person and a manager respectively, assisted an immigrant family's daughter to get registered, and a distraught foreign student to get some comfort. These are stories of relationships. Interestingly, the staff member in the former illustration noted that she was able to effectively communicate with the immigrant family, and this was a key part of her success in assisting that family. It is often said that good communication is crucially important to the success of any relationship.

An instructor argued that it is important to smile and greet students and others in the College. He added that one-on-one interaction with students is very important because "they'll ask you questions they will never ask you in the classroom". He recognized that a relaxed, friendly, approachable, and non-threatening relationship enhances learning. Another instructor declared: "It's building relationships" that matters. Collegiality was a point of importance for both an instructor and a student. The instructor said that she liked to see students build friendships in the class. The students then come to recognize that "they are all in the same boat," and that supports retention of students in her program. She allows talking in her class to assist in the development of relationships and connection between students. Another instructor recognized the importance of

students feeling comfortable, and she added that the intimacy of a small class supports student relationships and hence, learning.

Finally, there were data that related relationships to cross-departmental collaboration. A faculty member who works in a service department spoke of the effectiveness of collaborating with instructors in academic departments. She stated how those relationships allowed her to be more effective for students, in her role. Such collaboration with instructors created relationships that enhanced her credibility, effectiveness, and ultimately, benefits to students.

This concludes the review of findings from the data generated by the first appreciative question. The predominant themes that flowed from the participants' stories of excellence or the best of what is, in relation to student learning, were emotions and relationships. The next step is to review the findings from the data generated in the Dream stage of Appreciative Inquiry.

The Dream – What Might Be

The second Appreciative Inquiry question posed to the participants (in abridged form here) was "Think about the possibilities of how CNC might look, be, feel and function, if those exceptional moments you described before became the norm. Think about CNC reaching its highest potential to work collaboratively and advance learning." The data generated from this question were analyzed and transformed into four principal themes: relationships, collaboration, environment, and processes. The findings from the second Appreciative Inquiry question will now be considered utilizing the framework of these four themes, and how they relate to the best of what might be.

Relationships

Not surprisingly, the theme of relationships, so important in the participants' Discovery question findings, re-appeared in their Dream question findings. After all, Appreciative Inquiry is based on constructing a future, using the excellence of the past and present. As was explained above, some of these themes tend to blend together - they do not have discrete boundaries. This seemed especially so, in relation to relationships and environment. Clearly, the former is an important part of constructing the latter, and vice versa.

The critical importance of relationships is captured, albeit implicitly, by two instructors in the following observations: "it is important to see every student as a potentially successful student, not just a number coming through the door" and we are "here for the students". Another instructor dreamed of when "all students feel valued and respected from the moment they walk in the door". A support staff person also captured the value of relationships in her Dream of CNC with her list of desired qualities for employees: "respect, caring, going the extra mile, passionate, making [people] feel comfortable, talking to them at [their] level". The relevance of relationships is also captured in an instructor's vision of CNC that would "encourage and support faculty in enhancing courses". A student also emphasized the importance of relationships to him, when he cited the value of Orientation Day activities at CNC as a chance to get to know instructors and make friends with his peers. He re-iterated how important it is to have student run events, clubs, and generally, a sense of community among students. Finally, a support staff person declared that she "tries to remember individuals' names, so that they then feel more comfortable asking questions they might have been too inhibited to ask

otherwise". She added that this is important so that "they feel connected". She understands that relationships are of critical importance. Sound relationships are of course a critical ingredient underlying collaboration, which is the next theme to consider in the data from the participants' Dreams.

Collaboration

An interesting contrast exists between the data generated from the Discovery question and the Dream question. The theme of collaboration was not present in the "best of what is" data, but it was noted in the "what might be" data. In other words, while collaboration is something the participants dreamed of for the future, it was lacking in the excellence of the past and present. Is this a missing ingredient at CNC? This question is best left to the conclusions section of this chapter.

An instructor articulated his vision for CNC: "that we all realize we're riding on the same train". A support staff person used the phrase "get everybody on board". The only way CNC could achieve this harmony and unity of purpose and vision, would be if the various constituencies and departments worked together, or collaborated. The instructor added to the statement of his vision that "you have to go past your own job description". He used the example of when students would ask for directions, he would often get up from his desk and take them to the room in question. He added that it was important "being flexible and paying attention to what really works for the student, and giving it to them".

Two instructors mentioned that it was important to liaise with other instructors, other programs, and to be involved in College decision-making. Another instructor advocated for more "cross-departmental contact". A support staff person said; "I would

like to get along and work together. When I contact others in other regions I work well with others". A support staff person saw the need for greater collaboration with other campuses of CNC to eliminate duplication of efforts on similar tasks. These data describe collaboration in the College.

A manager had a different perspective of collaboration, observing that it is important to identify barriers and hurdles that may prevent students from advancing their learning. The pursuit of this objective would necessitate having to cross boundaries of various departments. His point also related to the theme of processes, but this will be discussed later. This manager also mentioned that it was important for employees to "go above and beyond", which corroborated the instructor's point above, that it was important not to be tied to a job description, and to do whatever it took to work for the student's success. Another manager and an instructor expressed in their visions that people would work more collaboratively; however, they did not elaborate on this point except to say that the students would be the real beneficiaries. Finally, a student declared that he saw a need for greater communication and collaboration between academic departments. His focus was on building greater relevance and connection between service courses such as English, and the discipline being studied. Not unrelated to this theme of collaboration, is the theme to be developed next - the College's environment.

Environment

The word environment is a general word. As a theme, it was intended to capture data that reflected upon various dimensions of the College, including its physical dimension and its culture. While the boundaries around the physical dimension sub-theme were quite discrete, the same could not be said for the culture sub-theme where the

boundaries were blurry. Data relating to emotion, relationships, and collaboration re-appeared in these data.

Physical Dimension

Some participants focused on the physical dimension of the College in their Dream data. An instructor identified his need for smaller classes to better serve students and their success. It was also important to him that the premises were physically attractive, and that his office was large enough to accommodate student visitors seeking assistance. One instructor expressed a dissenting opinion; "the quality of the room is not important to students, it's what happens there", but he did add, "neatness is important". The students had more to say about the physical dimensions of the College than any constituent group. One student shared this concern that the College look more attractive, or in his words, "look richer". He also wanted to see greater visibility of and greater interaction with "the important people". He added the "people who have an effect on you are sheltered – the Ivory Tower effect". He wanted to move the President's office downstairs and have it surrounded by glass, to enhance the President's visibility and interaction with students. Another student identified the need in his Dream for more effective signage and also the desirability to have faculty in one department together, and not spread out. He also stated that more quiet study space would be beneficial for students. Improved access to Disability Services, which is "hidden", and access to rooms where group work with or without instructors could occur, was a vision of one student.

Culture

Another aspect of the College's environment to consider is its culture. As noted above, the findings under this theme of culture necessarily overlapped with other data

themes such as relationships, which was a function of the overall climate. Moreover, as previously noted, we should not be surprised to see themes from the Discovery data re-appearing as Dream data. A manager states that "we are here for the students – we want to make them successful". He emphasizes that this takes effort and "we need to go above and beyond". An instructor re-iterated this sentiment by saying she "believed in exceptional moments in the classroom - doing wonderful things for students". A support staff member said there is "one focus: working towards achievement for students. Student success". Likewise, an instructor believes that in order to make students successful, and because "the students are always changing . . . you always have to keep stretching . . . it's never boring". Related to this point was the statement made by another instructor that professional development activities for effective instructing were an important part of her Dream. An instructor said "the college would be a friendly place" and this sentiment was repeated frequently by other participants from all constituent groups. She added that respect, caring, and going the extra mile were part of her vision for CNC. These data clearly spoke to the importance and recognition of a student success culture at CNC.

An instructor articulated a part of his Dream as one of a major leadership effort to have people feeling positive about their work and their workplace. This comment spoke to the cultural dimension of the College too. Related to the question of leadership, one instructor envisioned a College that was more "egalitarian" and less hierarchical, where "information runs freely". A pervasive belief apparent in the data was that CNC had good people and good programs and this too formed a part of the Dream. An instructor said "we do have good programs" and "most people do good things". One instructor said, "If you give people direction, people will surprise you". Tied with this belief, however, was

the comment by this instructor that we needed to focus more on these positives. A manager said her vision was to "put positive things in the forefront". She had "always felt that high points are the norm", however, "good things go unnoticed" and we "hear more about good things from students". Another instructor expressed his feelings about his Dream for CNC as "optimism, excitement, challenged and engaged". Innovation was also an important part of this instructor's vision for the culture of the College. Clearly, these data support the finding that a positive environment/culture was an important part of the participants' Dream for CNC.

A safe environment was identified by one instructor and one support staff person as part of their Dream. The support staff person needed "to be comfortable being who she was and in her role". She resisted being put in a different role that was not who she was. The instructor wanted a safe place in the sense that it was non-threatening and respectful of individuals. In conclusion, the principal findings from the data, under the sub-theme of culture, revealed a vision for a College that focused on student learning and success and reinforced the positives of its programs and people. Next to be considered are the data findings in relation to the theme of processes.

Processes

The theme of processes obviously has some connection with the previous themes of collaboration and culture. Yet again, we are not dealing with discrete boundaries between these themes. An overlapping concern previously mentioned was the emphasis one instructor placed on "being flexible and paying attention to what really works for the student". He observed that this flexibility sometimes even demands of employees, the willingness to act outside their usual job description. This underlying principle of

flexibility and focus on student success would presumably be relevant to the College's processes. It would facilitate and provide unity of purpose across the institution. One manager observed that "recognizing what we are doing allows you to get rid of barriers and hurdles". A clear focus on a goal informs our processes. In other words, keeping your eye on the ball (an effective process) facilitates a better shot down the fairway (successful goal attainment).

Another instructor observed that "processes should not take away from the positives inside the classroom" and "barriers and hurdles are outside the classroom". She reinforces this by adding, "most negatives are not in the classroom, but in the processes". Significantly perhaps, a manager did not disagree, declaring that "we must work through regulations" and "not be bound by barriers". The manager also suggested that collaboration between different departments would be needed to effectively identify barriers and hurdles preventing students from advancing. Another manager admitted that she is "frustrated by process that stymies people" – "stupid processes are barriers to be reviewed". An instructor echoed similar sentiments: "A lot of procedures in place create an unpleasant workplace". A support staff member declared that "there are many new students who just don't get it. There are too many procedures, rules, faceless situations". You can hear her frustration in these words. Finally, a support staff worker's words caught the essence of this theme best: "Say yes more than no". The participants were united across all constituent employee groups in observing that the College has many factors in its favour – but its processes are not one of them. The next step is to review the findings from the data generated by the third Appreciative Inquiry question.

The Learning College and CNC

The third Appreciative Inquiry question posed to the participants was "How has this discussion influenced your perspective of a learning college, advancing student learning, and enhancing cross-departmental collaboration in the College of New Caledonia?" This question did not seem to resonate with the participants, who consequently focused on two sub-questions:

1. What is the first thing you think about when you hear learning college?
2. What would need to happen for you to better serve student learning?

The data generated from the first sub-question were analyzed and transformed into one principal theme, the learning college prevailing at CNC. The data generated from the second sub-question were analyzed and transformed into three principal themes: processes, collaboration, and resources. The findings from these two sub-questions will now be considered, utilizing the framework of these four themes.

The Learning College Prevailing at CNC

This theme represents data that were generated in response to the sub-question, "What is the first thing you think about when you hear learning college"? The data from this theme can be further classified under three sub-themes, semantics, status quo, and qualities of the CNC learning college.

Semantics

The label "learning college" generated passionate controversy in the dialogue triad meetings, and beyond. In response to my e-mail invitation to the College community to participate in this project, an instructor sent a College-wide e-mail reply, indicating that he was offended by the research question, and insulted by the implication

that we have not always been focused on learning. He wrote: "What have we been doing for the last 36 years? Non-learning?" Subsequent to the dialogue triad meetings, an anonymous person sent a College-wide e-mail disparaging, among other things, the expression "learning college". The sender wrote as follows:

> The jargon laden idea of "learning college" . . . has made us question as to what this all really means . . . . In an effort to shed some light as to what the mystical, modern, new-age concept of the "Learning College" means, we have reproduced (without permission) some information . . .

Participants in the dialogue triad meetings likewise expressed these concerns. An instructor said that he "finds the terms 'learning college' and 'serving student learning' almost create a barrier". He added, " . . . we don't need the language – we need to focus on what we need to improve". He also shared that he "looked up statements/definitions re: 'learning college' on the Internet and found them 'without meaning'". A support staff employee agreed with this sentiment when she observed, "learning college is like saying 'eating restaurant' or 'sleeping bed' – somewhat redundant". A manager also shared these points of view when she said she "finds the term offensive . . . and mostly inappropriate . . . the word in itself is provocative and a problem". Another faculty member argued that the word "college" means learning by default; "it doesn't need the phrase or be labeled a 'learning college'". The volume of data under this sub-theme was not great, but the intensity of feelings arising in response to it was. The next sub-theme to consider is *status quo*.

Status quo

An interesting finding in the data under the theme "the learning college prevailing at CNC" was the argument advanced by many participants, most of whom are instructors, that CNC was already a learning college. An instructor articulated this view by noting "if

you weren't putting the student first, the College wouldn't be here, therefore we are already doing most of it". Two other instructors expressed the same view, believing that a learning college is already happening at CNC, at least "for the most part", without the need of any significant change to better serve students. One argued that most already volunteer time, and give their best efforts to students. A manager said " . . . the positives are already there in terms of the 'learning college' – maybe we are already there". This point of view was clearly the root cause of the opinion held by most participants of the expression "learning college". Given that many participants believed CNC was already an authentic learning college, they were prepared to support that finding with evidence. They were also prepared to advocate what a learning college looks like in the context of CNC. That evidence from the data will now be examined.

Qualities of the CNC learning college

One instructor characterized the CNC learning college as a place where "we need to identify the things that the students want - we don't need to keep doing the same thing the same way". She had captured an idea that seemed to run through much of the data – "the richer the experience for the student, the richer the experience for us who work here. It's a reciprocal thing. Therefore we have put ourselves out . . . ". She continued:

> Somebody has to be the starting point, and it should be all of us, every day. It should be an attitude we adopt on an ongoing basis. The learning college image that we need to convey should be "we provide quality education – no matter what the course you take, you will have a quality experience".

In a similar vein, another instructor said, "We need to focus on what we need to do to improve." A support staff member argued that "a 'learning college' is recognizing that we are all here for the students." An instructor made the same point by stating, "the purpose of the College is to serve the students - they are our reason for existing and we

need to provide support for creative approaches that will enhance student learning". Another instructor recognized the centrality of the students – "remember the students are 'our bread and butter'". A manager declared that our role is to "ensure that students can be successful", and "we can always do better". An instructor's view of the learning college is "think always how things, processes help the students". These data clearly indicated that the participants had a good understanding of what it means to be focused on advancing student learning. This completes the findings from the data in relation to the first sub-question, "What is the first thing you think about when you hear learning college?". The next section will review findings in relation to the second sub-question.

You will recall that the second sub-question was "What would need to happen for you to better serve student learning?" The data generated by this question were analyzed and transformed into three principal themes, processes, collaboration, and resources. As before, these three themes are not mutually exclusive.

Processes

The theme, processes, re-appeared in response to the second sub-question. In the words of one manager, "processes should be there because they need to be", and in other words, "to do what is important for students". He challenged us to ask ourselves, "why do we do what we do". We also need to ask ourselves whether, "there are other ways to do things". An instructor reinforced this view by stating, "processes should be looked at for how they help students". Finally, an instructor advised that we need to look beyond rigid procedures and look for better ways. She cited timetabling as an example. An interesting thought that related to the theme of processes, was an instructor's statement that employees need adequate "autonomy to make decisions in the best interests of students.

These participants seem to be of the view that the problem seems to rest more with processes, than with people. The theme of processes leads us once more to collaboration.

Collaboration

The theme of collaboration also re-appeared in response to the second sub-question. Several instructors voiced their belief that an environment of trust is important at the College. I classify that data here, on the premise that trust is a pre-requisite to effective collaboration. Similarly, several employees voiced their concern that good communications and sharing of information are also pre-requisites for good collaboration. One of these, an instructor, expressed his belief that if there were greater communication, and if he had more opportunity to participate in the operation of the College, there would be more collaboration. A support staff person advocated for more frequent cross-departmental meetings to coalesce the employees from different departments and bargaining units. An instructor shared her feelings that there is good collaboration in her own department, but there is a real need for collaboration throughout the College, between departments and other academic programs. One aspect mentioned by a manager is the need to share information, especially about all the positive things that happen in the College. An instructor believed there was more cross-departmental collaboration than most people realize and that the organization is not as siloed as "administration makes it seem". She also said that her own colleagues are supportive and collaborative with each other. A manager echoed similar sentiments, and added there was a need for greater collaboration throughout the College. An instructor envisioned a College with multiple campuses that functioned as one unified College, especially the Admissions function. Another instructor did not want any campus of CNC to feel like a

"poor country cousin". Clearly, the theme of collaboration resonated with these participants – it was seen to be a necessary ingredient in a learning college. The next and last sub-theme under the second sub-question was resources.

Resources

It is perhaps surprising that the theme of resources was not more prominent in the data generated by the question, "What would need to happen for you to better serve student learning?" So often it seems, throwing money after problems and issues is the recommended solution, but not here.

One new resource that was desired by two students and one instructor, was a dedicated room for students to engage in quiet study, group work, and sometimes, work with an instructor. An instructor mentioned that more technology in classrooms would facilitate teaching. Two instructors and one student believed that more financial resources would be necessary for student programming. As a related point to the suggestion that more financial resources are needed, one support staff worker expressed a wish that the College not "be run by budgets that are not equitable". Another faculty member suggested that more resources to develop the College's web site would be a priority. One instructor and one support staff person suggested that better inter-personal relations skills are needed where there are front line staff dealing with the public, and generally in dealing with fellow employees in the College. This latter point addressed both financial and human resources. It appeared that while the participants perceived some need for greater resources to develop and sustain a learning college, resources are a lesser priority.

This now completes the report of findings from the data generated by the three Appreciative Inquiry questions. What appears evident upon standing back from the data

and the findings, is that there is a unity or interconnections among the themes. In response to the Discovery question, two themes emerged, positive emotions and positive relationships, almost exclusively between employees and students. It is clear from the data that the emotions are an outcome of the relationships. In response to the Dream question, four themes emerged, relationships, collaboration, processes, and environment. Here, there is also a unity and connections. Relationships certainly relate to collaboration, and collaboration could be the foundation of the College's processes. The relationships, collaboration, and processes are an integral part of the culture element of the environment. Alternatively, one might argue that the culture element of the environment nurtures the relationships, collaboration, and the processes. These themes form a system of inter-connected parts. The overarching theme is a needed organizational culture change, with a focus on collaborative processes. These patterns will be examined further in the study's conclusions, which follow in the next section.

Study Conclusions

The purpose of this section is to interpret the data findings in this study, and to draw some reasoned conclusions that can be supported by both the data and the literature. At the end of this section, the answers to the research question, "How might re-focusing as a learning college enhance greater cross-departmental collaboration in the College of New Caledonia?" will be clearer, as will the answers to the two sub-questions:

1. What is the meaning of a learning college?
2. What organizational changes and/or practices would enhance re-focusing as a learning college?

The first conclusion is unmistakable and significant. The expression "learning

college" is universally disliked by the participants and seen as "meaningless", and even a "barrier". Both unsolicited e-mails emphasized their objection to the term "learning college". What was especially poignant in the dialogue triad meetings was that all constituencies of employees, including managers found the term somewhat "redundant", "offensive . . . and mostly inappropriate . . . the word itself is provocative and a problem". These intense feelings were not surprising to the researcher, as they had been frequently expressed throughout the College in various settings for much of the past year. Furthermore, the literature warned of the likelihood of this reaction, particularly by faculty. Robles (1999) recognized that business terms such as "total quality management" (TQM), and learning paradigm terminology, such as "learning college", are difficult for faculty to embrace as they typically resist thinking of students as customers, or of satisfaction as a valid measure of success. Further, Robles found that community college employees typically believe there is a strong shared vision in a college to enhance student success. On the basis of this study's data, that is indeed so at CNC too. Robles noted that many faculty object to the notion that focusing on student learning first or a learning college is a new concept; they believe that this is what they always do. Therefore, to re-iterate the conclusion, jargon such as "learning college" has negative connotations for faculty, and, as we can conclude from the data in this study, for all employee groups at CNC. The issue is not so much to identify the vision with a label, but rather how to reach it.

The second conclusion that can be drawn from the study's data is that most employees at CNC already have learning college values and attitudes - they already have a learning college mindset. The data in the Discovery stage clearly articulated emotions

and relationships that were driven by the employees' focus on advancing the learning of the students. The participants shared stories of appreciation from students' gratitude, excitement from students' success when "the light went on," or excitement generated from the students' own excitement. Employees reported feeling "rewarded, encouraged, fulfilled and proud" when students succeeded. "Personal involvement" and "friendship" with students, providing care, smiles, being approachable, was all part of the Discovery. In his Dream, one instructor envisioned ". . . all students feel valued and respected from the moment they walked in the door". These data all support the conclusion that CNC employees already have a student-centred, learning college mindset.

Now there is a need to reconcile this second conclusion with some of the comments in Chapter One that suggested some CNC employees acted in a manner that was not consistent with a learning college mindset. Undoubtedly, there have always been a small number of employees at CNC who have not possessed a learning college mindset. However, in the face of this second conclusion, what is one to make of those observations in Chapter One of employees' non- learning college behaviour? Quite likely in many cases, this behaviour was driven not by an inappropriate mindset. Rather, it may well have been caused by the great frustration and even anger that the employees probably felt, as they had to contend with non-collaborative and non-student-centred processes, with did not align with their own learning college mindset.

The literature clearly articulates what is a learning college mindset. O'Banion (1996) stated that the aim of the learning college is to create learning culture "in which the learner is placed at the center of everything that occurs in the educational enterprise" (p. 4). Schuyer believes that "the primary goal of education is student achievement" (p. 1)

and he argues that “an organizational climate that fosters the belief that student learning is the central objective of all employees of a college” (p. 4) is required. These views are in accord with the mindset of most CNC employees.

The third conclusion that arises from the data is quite striking – as noted above, CNC employees already have an internalized, individual learning college mindset, but the material word is individual. In other words, the learning college mindset is only individual, and the College does not have a learning college culture. The focus of this conclusion is the scope or the reach of the learning college mindset/culture.

The emotions and relationships that were so appreciated by the participants, as expressed in both the Discovery and Dream stages of Appreciative Inquiry, were an outcome of employees own individual experiences with students. There was little or no evidence of esprit de corps, or identification of these emotions and relationship beyond their personal experiences. The collective, the department, the College as an entity, did not generally figure in the data. They were simply not mentioned. The appreciated emotions and relationships that arose out of working with a student or students seemed exclusive to that employee – it was a personal relationship and a personal emotion. The emotions expressed in the data were personal experiences – “I feel she appreciated my encouragement”, “I felt appreciated”, the student was excited to read his first book, and “I loved it”, et cetera. There was no real connection or identification with others in the College, or with the College itself.

In the literature, there were several references that provide some explanation of this divide between the learning college mindset of individual employees, and the lack of a collective organizational learning college culture. Parker (1994) states that “it takes

more than just putting together a diverse group of people . . . . It requires the migration from a parochial view of the world – in which one's own function, values, and goals are paramount – to a culture that says, 'we are all in this together'" (p. 49). Parker is alluding to the absence of a collaborative culture. Hennessey (1999) speaks of "a culture of fiefdoms" where people affiliate more closely with their functional areas, than with the organization as a whole, or with a cross-functional team. Gould and Caldwell (1998) also describe a College characterized by

> . . . an organizational culture with rampant segmentalism, and a high level of distrust . . . by adversarial relations between faculty, staff, and administration; territorial possessiveness over programs, services and budgets; a traditional structure with traditional roles for administrators; adversarial bargaining strategies; (p. 3)

These quotes describe the history and context of colleges that bear much resemblance to CNC's; they may provide some explanation why the participants' personal learning college mindsets do not find expression and are not internalized by the organizational culture of CNC. This relates to the broader issue of organizational collaboration and culture that will now be considered.

The fourth and final conclusion from the data is also striking. As noted in the discussion of the third conclusion, somehow, there is a divide – the learning college mindset internalized by most individual employees has not been internalized as an element of the organizational culture of CNC. One can conclude that the organization of CNC does not have a learning college culture in its full expression. One can further conclude that the organizational culture is wanting in terms of collaboration and student-centred processes. This was evident in the data generated by the Dream question and in response to the sub-questions:

1. What is the first thing you think about when you hear learning college?

2. What would need to happen for you to better serve student learning?

The data demonstrated the participants' frustration with the lack of collaboration and appropriate student-focused processes, and that these factors diminished individual and organizational capacity to truly focus on the students' learning first. A number of participants spoke in terms of "obstacles", "hurdles", "regulations", and "barriers", "that stymies people" and "negatives outside the classroom" – namely, the lack of collaboration and student-centred processes that impeded employees from acting and working in harmony with their learning college mindsets. Therefore, what overarching theme is suggested by these data? CNC needs a culture change. The organizational culture needs to be more congruent with the learning college mindset of the employees, one that nurtures the collaboration and student-focused processes that are envisioned in the Dreams of the participants. Figure 1 is my attempt to capture this overarching theme.

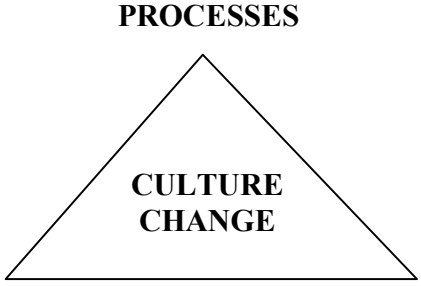

Figure 1. As revealed by participants' Dreams, CNC needs a culture change that nurtures collaboration, relationships, and student-focused processes.

This triad of processes, relationships, and collaboration captures the notion that effective trusting relationships are the foundation of collaboration, and collaboration is the foundation of effective processes that work for employees, students and the organization itself. The triad goes further, however, and suggests that each of these three

factors is contingent on each of the other two. This model is supported by the data themes and their interconnections.

As was noted earlier, an interesting contrast existed between the data generated from the Discovery, the Dream, and the sub-questions. Both the Discovery and the Dream questions generated the theme of relationships. However, the themes of collaboration and processes were not present in the "best of what is" data; they were of great significance in the "what might be" data. In other words, the themes of collaboration and processes were something the participants dreamed of for the future, but neither were a part of the excellence of the past and present.

The best quotes that reflected the Dreams of collaboration were phrases like, ". . . we all realize that we are on the same train" and "get everybody on board". These would be contingent on a unity of purpose and collaboration to achieve. Other participants mentioned that it was important to liaise with other instructors, other programs, and to be involved in College decision-making, to have more "cross-departmental contact". Others indicated that they "would like to get along and work together", and they saw the need for greater collaboration with other campuses of CNC. In regards to the themes of processes, an instructor caught the essence of the theme when she said, "processes should not take away from the positives inside the classroom" and she reinforced this by adding, "most negatives are not in the classroom, but in the processes". Finally, one manager argued, "processes should be there because they need to be", and "to do what is important for students". Clearly, there was a consensus among participants from all groups that institutional processes often get in the way of doing what is best for the students.

There was considerable support in the literature to suggest that institutional

processes and the lack of collaboration frequently get in the way of a being a learning college, and of doing what is best for the students. Schuyler (1997) believes that "the primary goal of education is student achievement" (p. 1). He believes that a change is required by way of "an organizational climate that fosters the belief that student learning is the central objective of all employees of a college – no matter if they are faculty members, financial officers, or administrative assistants" (p. 4). Schuyler focuses on the inadequacy of the learning institution to meet the needs of contemporary students due to the bureaucratic operations and structures. He states that "some believe that the goal of student learning has become incongruent with the current way higher education institutions function" (p. 1). The purpose of the learning college is to place learning first in every policy, program, and practice in higher education by overhauling the traditional architecture of education. He is speaking of processes.

Froman (1999) poses the critical question: "How can the university become a learning community guided by human values of trust, caring, commitment, and collaboration?" (p.186) He argues that "organizations . . . will need to create new cultures and ways of managing work that emphasize cross-functional teams, networks, processes, and integrative thinking" (p. 186). In other words, we need to undo bureaucratic specialization and fragmentation in the organization.

Finally, and in further support of this fourth conclusion that CNC needs to change its organizational culture, Gould and Caldwell (1998) predict that

> . . . the successful community colleges . . . will radically alter their management models and foster organizational synergy. These thriving institutions will create organizational cultures symbolized by decentralized decision-making, collaborative governance, alignment of structure and systems with organizational values and goals. (p.3)

Putting these words into the context of CNC, the College must create an organizational learning college culture, aligning its processes with its organizational learning college values and goals. Collaboration will occur when CNC focuses on a unifying learning college vision. It must avoid what Hennessey's (1999) described as "a culture of fiefdoms", where people affiliate more closely with their functional areas, than with the organization as a whole.

To summarize, the findings in this study's data have led to four conclusions, which will form the basis of a number of recommendations and organizational implications for CNC in the next chapter. First, the expression "learning college" was universally disliked by the participants and seen as "meaningless", and even a "barrier". Second, most employees at CNC already have a learning college mindset. Third, while CNC employees already have an internalized or individual learning college mindset, the College does not have a learning college culture. Fourth, the organizational culture of CNC must change to a learning college culture that incorporates greater collaboration and processes centred on student learning. Given these conclusions, the implications and recommendations for CNC will be considered in Chapter Five. But first, let us consider some limitations inherent in the scope and application of this research study.

Scope and Limitations of the Research

There are several factors that limited or will limit the application of these research findings and conclusions. These factors were mainly a function of the constraint of time – a factor that seems to play a huge role in the lives of most people, including this researcher and the study's participants. The MALT program also imposed a significant time constraint with its deadlines, and the action research project itself had to fall within

reasonable boundaries from the standpoint of what was manageable and practical. All these factors impacted the design of this research and created some limitations of the research, which will now be considered.

Lack of Representative Participation

As noted earlier, 20 participants volunteered: three students, ten faculty, two managers, and five support staff. Five participants were at the Quesnel campus and 15 were at the Prince George campus. While each constituent group is represented in this group, representation is minimal from the regional campuses, managers and more critically, from the student body. To the extent that there are constituent groups in CNC under-represented in the study, the application of this research is limited.

Lack of Participation

The target number of participants in the research proposal was 24, a number divisible by three for ease of forming dialogue triads, and a number that would create a manageable quantity of data. The rate of participation was less than contemplated, by four participants, and this lower rate of participation was only achieved after recruiting ten volunteers in Prince George and Quesnel by a personal invitation. The level of participation was likely impacted by two factors. First, concurrently with this research project there were a number of internal focus groups in the College, including a strategic planning project and an initiative to develop a College values statement. Second, I received two e-mails from individuals indicating that they were not willing to participate in one case, due to the "one-sidedness" of the Appreciative Inquiry methodology, and in the other case, due to the research question being "offensive". Therefore, there is an

argument that this measure of participation in a College community of about 500 employees limits its scope and application.

Volunteer Bias

As indicated above, there was evidence that some people chose not to participate in this research project as a result of their bias against the research topic and/or methodology. The presence of bias would not be surprising, given the context of the College at the time of this research project, as was discussed in Chapter One. The inverse of this presumably is true as well - that people chose to participate due to their bias in favour of the research topic and/or methodology. If this were so, obviously the findings and conclusions of this study would have some limitations due to bias of the participants.

Depth of Participants' Reflections

To be sensitive to the time constraints of participants and researcher alike, to limit the quantity of data to manageable proportions, and to encourage adequate levels of participation, the duration of the dialogue triad meetings were limited to 90 minutes each, for a total commitment of three hours per participant. As was indicated in Chapter Three, time ran out before dialogue triads could complete their tasks in several instances. This gives rise to the concern that not only were participants precluded from sharing all that they wished of relevance to the inquiry, but moreover, they lacked sufficient time to develop their appreciative stories and dreams in sufficient depth and richness. On the other hand, participants did have the questions to reflect upon prior to the dialogue triad meeting.

There is also a lingering suspicion that the depth of the participants' reflections might have been negatively impacted by the design of the Appreciative Inquiry questions,

which as noted earlier, were not piloted. The participants did ask for some guidance in interpreting the questions, and this might indicate some impairment in the quality and depth of the data. If this were so, again, the findings and conclusions of this study would have some limitations.

Notwithstanding these limitations to the scope and application of the research findings and conclusions, we can learn from this inquiry, and apply this insight to improve CNC as a learning college organization. With this review of the research findings, conclusions and limitations completed, it is now appropriate to consider the implications and recommendations that arise out of this research, which is the subject matter of the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

This chapter is organized into three sections. The first section will describe the study's recommendations based on the findings and conclusions presented in Chapter Four. These recommendations are the research study's responses to the question, "How might re-focusing as a learning college enhance greater cross-departmental collaboration in the College of New Caledonia?" The second section will describe and analyze the organizational implications of implementing the study recommendations, and of not implementing the recommendations. The leadership implications for organizational change that the recommendations will require will also be described. The third section will examine the implications of the project processes and results for future research, with suggestions and recommendations for further research.

Study Recommendations

Central to the recommendations are the study's findings, its conclusions, and the literature. Others have preceded the College of New Caledonia on the journey of transforming into a learning college. In particular, the case study of the learning college culture at Fleming College in Peterborough, Ontario, informed the framing of this study's recommendations (Fleming College, 2005).

The recommendations are presented and organized around the three contexts in which changes, decisions, and actions will take place: where they affect the College as a whole, where they affect our respective work areas or departments, and where they affect our daily work, as individual employees.

The College as a Whole

Recommendation #1: Use of the Expression "Learning College"

Participants from all constituent groups in the College were passionate in their dialogue triads that the expression learning college was an "obstacle", a "barrier", a "hurdle", "offensive", "inappropriate", et cetera. An executive in one of the learning colleges I visited in February 2005 warned our group not to use labels, and it is clear that this label is a lightning rod for negative energy, and indeed an impediment to positive culture change. I would recommend that the expression learning college vanish from use at CNC and not be applied to the implementation of changes. Robles (1999) recognized that learning college terminology is difficult for many college employees to embrace, as they resist thinking of students as customers, or of satisfaction as a valid measure of success. Robles suggested that one solution is to use Senge's concept of a learning organization to approach the learning paradigm with educators. Senge (1990) defined a learning organization as one that constantly recreates itself to adapt to its constantly changing environment. O'Banion (1997) also mentioned that the concepts of a learning organization provide "a powerful foundation on which to build a learning-centred institution" (p. 26). It is therefore recommended that if any expression is needed, and it may not be, learning organization is a more appropriate and neutral expression. It may also be more appropriate since this study has concluded that it is the organization, more so than the individuals, towards which action and change must be directed.

Recommendation #2: Affirmation of Individual Employees' Mindset

Given the feelings about the learning college expression and initiative enunciated above, and to begin on a positive footing the process of developing a new culture of learning-centred collaborative processes, I would recommend that the College affirm its employees. Specifically, the College needs to recognize, appreciate, and applaud the

student and learning-centred mindset that is firmly embedded in the values, practices, and priorities of its employees. This recommendation is not only congruent with the philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry, but it might motivate, energize, and help to point the compass for the employees, to move them forward with the necessary organizational changes. Hammond (1998) enthused that participants from an Appreciative Inquiry workshop are energized from the discussion of their moments of success, "creating a new energy that is positive and synergistic" (p. 7). She added, "participants walk away with a sense of commitment, confidence, and affirmation that they have been successful. They also know clearly how to make more moments of success" (p. 7).

Recommendation #3: Presentation of This Study to the College Community

Carter (1998) articulated five fundamental strategies to change an organization's culture, the first of which was to engage the college community and to raise institutional awareness. I would recommend that the findings, conclusions, and recommendations of this study be presented to the College community in a manner that will be engaging and will raise institutional awareness. This transparent sharing of information and encouragement of open, positive, future-focused dialogue could occur in a variety of meetings and forums across the spectrum of College stakeholders from gatherings of students to the College Board. A number of participants in the study dreamed of improved communications, where "information moves more freely", and they recognized the "need to train people to share more information". This would be a good time and place to move the information freely. Juechter, Fisher, Alford, and Randall (1998) emphasized the importance of continual communication, the involvement of large numbers of people, and maintaining focus and momentum in effecting culture change.

This could be started with presentations of this study to the College community. The final report of this study should also be posted on CNC's web site.

Recommendation #4: Establish a Common Block of College Meeting Time

One of the biggest obstacles to implementing collaborative processes across different departments and constituencies is the simple but basic need to have people available at a common time. In the findings, it was observed that employees wanted more frequent cross-departmental meetings to coalesce the employees from different departments and bargaining units. The data established that there was a real need for collaboration between academic programs. Even a student argued for this latter point. It is clear that these types of interaction and cross-departmental engagements, so critical to the nurturing of relationships, and ultimately better collaborative processes, are hard to arrange or schedule. With teaching schedules of faculty, the need for support staff to be on the front line serving students, and the chaotic schedules of managers, finding a common meeting time for a diverse group of people can be nearly impossible. I recommend therefore that the College designate a common block of time, a minimum of one hour, to facilitate the convening of meetings of cross-departmental and cross-constituent groups, with the ultimate objective to enhance collaborative processes and relationships in the College.

Recommendation #5: Improvement of Facilities

The College might further improve facilities and campuses to provide a healthy, supportive and attractive learning and working environment for both the students and employees of CNC. This was not a large theme in the data except for that critical segment of participants – the students. If this is important to the students, it should be a priority for

the College to address. There are many low cost projects that could enhance the appearance, comfort and utility of the premises. Student participants dreamed of more quiet study areas, drop-in rooms to work with other students and instructors, and a greater number of comfortable and inviting student lounges. These types of improvements to the physical facilities would convey a clear tangible message to the students that they are a College priority – that CNC cares about them and their well-being.

Recommendation #6: Organizational Structure

The organizational structure of the College needs to be modified to reflect and support a learning college culture and greater collaborative processes. The findings and conclusions from the data do not speak directly to this recommendation. However, the data that relate to relationships, communication, trust, and collaborative processes certainly are relevant to the issue of organizational structure, as is apparent from the literature. The literature supports the contention that the College should modify the organizational structure to reflect and support a learning college culture at CNC. Chaudron's position (1995) reflected much of the literature, articulating that organizational structures need to change to enhance cross-functional collaboration since structure impacts communication. Gould and Caldwell (1998) offered that "the successful community colleges of the next millennium will radically alter their management models . . . " and "will create organizational cultures symbolized by decentralized decision-making, collaborative governance, alignment of structure and systems with organizational values and goals . . . " (p.3). These outcomes are dependent on organizational structure changes. Gould and Caldwell described a college which possessed "an organizational culture with rampant segmentalism, and a high level of

distrust" (p.3). They added, "change was made difficult by the existing college organizational structure", which was characterized by adversarial relations between faculty, staff, and administration; territorial possessiveness over programs, services and budgets; a traditional structure with traditional roles for administrators; adversarial bargaining strategies" (p. 3). Lunn (1997) suggested an inversion of the traditional organizational chart with the customers at the top and the entire company underneath, supporting efforts to please the customers. In sum, CNC must undo bureaucratic specialization and fragmentation in the organization through structural change, if there is to be sustained, systemic support for the human side of the change.

Recommendation #7: Increase the Use of Cross-Departmental Teams

The findings and conclusions from the data have spoken overwhelmingly of the need for greater collaboration. It was a fundamental theme in relation to two of the three Appreciative Inquiry questions. Hence, I recommend that CNC take measures to increase significantly the incidence of cross-departmental teamwork and collaboration. Carter (1998) identified a fundamental strategy to implement culture change, namely, to increase intra-college linkages, by implementing cross-functional teams assigned to joint projects, and teamwork training. Parker (1994) stated that

> it takes more than just putting together a diverse group of people . . . . It requires the migration from a parochial view of the world – in which one's own function, values, and goals are paramount – to a culture that says, "we are all in this together." (p. 49)

Holland, Gaston, and Gomes (2000) observed that

> It is not so much *what* firms do as *how* they do it which determines their ability to compete. Such competencies are embedded within the structure, processes and culture of the organization. The creation of cross-functional teams around key value-adding processes is an increasingly common organizational response to these pressures. (p. 232)

Similarly, Hennessey (1999) agreed that integrating silos, each with their divergent types of people, styles, priorities, and belief systems, does not create a team. What must be eliminated is what he calls "a culture of fiefdoms" (p.32), where people affiliate more with their functional areas that with the organization as a whole.

This completes the recommendations that relate to the decisions and actions affecting the context of the College as a whole. Next, consider the recommendations that pertain to the context of the respective work areas – campuses, divisions, and departments.

Our Campuses, Divisions, and Departments

Recommendation #8: Improvement in Services to Increase Student Satisfaction

The findings in the data indicated that there is some room for improving student satisfaction. Generally, there is recognition among participants that CNC provides a high level of student satisfaction, but there is always room for improvement, especially in a competitive market. This was most evident from the student participants' data. Student data indicated a need for more connections with the "real world" with guest speakers from industry, field trips, and laboratory experiences. Also, mentioned was the difficulty in effecting transfer of credits, the poor level of service offered to a student by an employee, the need to have services available at the convenience of the student's schedule, and a drop-in room to facilitate working in groups, and with instructors. Employees' data also identified that students' satisfaction could be improved with more student-centred processes, greater use of technology in classrooms, and one faculty member said, "we can always do better". So, there is room for improving students' satisfaction.

All campuses, divisions, and departments should consider and plan for ways to improve their services, with the intended result of raising levels of student satisfaction, and indeed, employee satisfaction. This recommendation should not be read exclusively of other recommendations, particularly Recommendation #10, which follows. These recommendations need to be read together, given that student (and employee satisfaction) is a function of services that are a function of processes. Carter (1998) identified a relevant fundamental strategy to implement culture change – namely, to create opportunities for innovation, to eliminate constraining policies and procedures, to redesign systems, and to provide appropriate resources and support. Some of these measures would address the concerns raised by the participants of this study. McPhail (2004) also advocated the adoption of flexible learning options, consistent with O'Banion's (1996) notion of learning any time, any place, and any way.

Recommendation #9: Implement New Integrated Systems

Perhaps the most significant theme emerging from the data was the finding of discontentment, frustration, and even anger, of members from all constituent employee groups, with the College's systems and processes. This is therefore a critically important recommendation to the success of implementing and achieving a learning college culture at CNC. Reflecting on and learning from the Fleming College Strategic Plan 2005-2010, their strategy effectively captures what CNC must likewise strive to change. I would recommend that the College "implement integrated human resource, financial and student systems to streamline work, improve service levels, enhance the student experience and better support teaching and learning" (Fleming College Strategic Plan 2005-2010, 2005, p. 11). To achieve this objective, Fleming College is commencing a sixteen-month

project called the Fleming Systems Renewal Project. It will "comprehensively update student, financial, and human resource systems and permit enhancement of services to students and employees" (p.19). It is important to take note of the intent to enhance services to employees, the College's internal clients, as opposed to students, the College's external clients. This was one of the most significant findings in the data - the employees saw a huge need to improve services and processes internally. The existing processes were perceived as a giant negative factor. I would recommend a program similar to Fleming College's Fleming Systems Renewal Project, at CNC.

In the CNC context, this might comprise first and foremost the streamlining of cumbersome processes in the Admissions and Registration department. Systems renewal this department has already begun. However, there is a need to examine processes to determine whether they are in fact needed, how they impact students and staff, and how they might be improved. With respect to Human Resources, systems are paper-intensive and perhaps technology can make them more user-friendly. Often at CNC, systems require the approvals and signatures from two or three levels of managers, where in some instances this is probably not required.

In terms of systems, Ruiz (1999) declared that the " . . . bureaucratic system is no longer adequate to meet the learning needs of students of the information age" (p 9). Froman re-iterated that "organizations of the future will need to create new cultures and ways of managing work that emphasize cross-functional teams, networks, processes, and integrative thinking" (p. 186). In conclusion, CNC needs to undo bureaucratic specialization and fragmentation in the organization. The College must ensure that there

is an alignment of student and learning-centred values, with the College's systems and processes.

This completes the recommendations that relate to the decisions and actions affecting the College's respective campuses, divisions, and departments. Next, consider the recommendations that pertain to the context of the daily work of individual CNC employees.

Individual Employees

Recommendation #10: Capacity Building of Employees

The College should seek to go beyond what it is already doing in building the capabilities and capacities of our employees in the three areas of teaching/learning, leadership, and service excellence to enrich the student experience. For example, a support staff employee suggested that front line employees with student contact need to be "more sensitive" and able to "disarm nervousness", suggesting a need for sensitivity training and/or customer service training. This need was corroborated by a student's comment that "respect was missing for him as a person and for his time" in his dealings with a front line staff person. He added that his "questions were not really answered". Another support staff employee stated there was a need to work on "human relations" and a faculty member believed that colleagues needed to be "way more open towards each other". These data suggested a need for interpersonal skills training. A large number of participants indicated there is big need to improve sharing information, especially the positives. This suggested a need for communication skills training. One participant characterized this need as one of "leadership". The College's Institute of Learning and Teaching and the Professional Development Committee already address many of the

needs in the learning/teaching area. However, there has been little or no attention to building leadership capacity within the College, and service excellence to both students and fellow employees. In summary, some skills training in collaboration, team-building, and communication would be useful. The College and its employees need to develop a comprehensive understanding of service excellence, and craft plans to increase capacity to deliver consistent service excellence and enhance the overall experience for students.

The literature supported this recommendation. Lunn (1997) advocated for the need for training:

> our task would then be to look at techniques that companies have used to become connected to the customer. We might . . . train all our employees to see their role in the company as it relates to the external customer. (p. 11)

Frost and Gillespie (1998) highlight the incongruency of typical college cultures and the notion of collaboration or teamwork. They speculate that there is a lag in the use of teamwork on college campuses due to "the absence of a clear concept of teams, or to the seeming incongruity between the cultures of most . . . colleges and the culture of effective teams" (p. 11). There is therefore a need for training in the concepts of collaboration and working in teams, and for an opportunity to practise these skills with guidance and support. This re-iterates the need for capacity building.

Recommendation #11: Process to Motivate/Reward Appropriate Employee Behaviours

CNC would do well to adopt a process to appropriately motivate and reward employee behaviours that are supportive of both student learning-centred values, and more notably, collaborative behaviours. There are several reasons for this. First, an institution is more likely to generate behaviors that it rewards, and while the data show that many employees are effectively student-centred, there is as noted above, room for improvement. Second, the findings have established that there is neither a history nor an

established culture of collaboration. Notwithstanding the desire of participants to see enhanced collaboration at CNC, efforts to change organizational culture often meet resistance. Therefore, there is real value in promoting collaborative behaviors through motivational rewards. Third, this recommendation will serve to affirm the mindset and values of the individual employees, which were identified in the conclusions as already being student-centred. This affirmation as noted above in the context of Appreciative Inquiry, is motivational. Moreover, implementing this recommendation would furnish some tangible evidence that the College is indeed serious about creating a student-centred culture, and collaborative processes. This is important, given that Kouzes and Posner (2002) believe that "people cannot fully commit to an organization or a movement that does not fit their own beliefs" (p. 51).

Chaudron (1995) argued that hiring, promotion, remuneration, and performance appraisal processes could be used to attract cooperative people and reward collaborative behaviour. Gould and Caldwell (1998) advocated for a "process map . . . centred around the concept that the college exists to serve . . . the students . . . " and "the process map reveals the importance of accountability . . . " (p.8). Carr (2004) suggested a process that would likely be effective in motivating appropriate behaviours and changing the culture: changing everyday work to motivate people to think and act differently, by connecting what employees do everyday to the students' and other employees' everyday experience. Consider a specific illustration relative to CNC. What would it feel like from the perspective of a potential new student, to phone CNC only to get an automated voice and an elaborate menu connecting to a list of departments which meant little or nothing to the caller? How would this feel for the potential new student? Recently, people at the College

took the student's viewpoint in this scenario. What was the outcome of doing this? Measures were taken to have a person answer the phone. By connecting what the College and its employees do everyday to the students' everyday experience at CNC, people were motivated to behave in an appropriate student-centred way.

Recommendation #12: Use Appreciative Inquiry to Further These Recommendations

Given the enthusiasm and excitement of the participants with the method of Appreciative Inquiry, expressed both during and subsequent to the dialogue triad meetings, implementation of these recommendations may receive greater support and commitment, and enjoy greater prospects for success, if Appreciative Inquiry is used in that process. Moreover, there was ample data to support the values and philosophy of Appreciative Inquiry. One example was the Dream of an instructor for a "major leadership effort to have people feeling positive". Another instructor stated that she would "like to see the positives accentuated more" and we "have more positives than negatives". Other Dream quotes included: a "vision to put positive things in the forefront", the need to "highlight great things", and to have a "positive atmosphere". Others stated they "always felt that high points were the norm", and "most people do good things" in the College. The data also established that emotion was one of the predominant themes in the Discovery data, and one of the most apparent was being appreciated.

The literature also supports the value of using Appreciative Inquiry as a means of furthering these recommendations. Watkins and Mohr (2001) explained how

> Behavioural scientists looked at the ratio of positive as opposed to negative thought patterns in people facing major surgery. The studies demonstrated that those who approached the operation with a feeling that their doctor was the best available, the medical techniques used were proven and safe, and their chances of

> being well again were excellent recovered at a much greater rate than those who approached the operation with feelings dominated by fear and concern. In these studies, it was concluded that the desired ratio of positive thoughts to negative thoughts is approximately 2 to 1. (p. 31)

Arguably, the prospects for successful implementation of this study's recommendations at CNC would be well served through the use of Appreciative Inquiry. This concludes the enumeration of recommendations based on the findings and conclusions from the data in this study. Now, consider the organizational implications of implementing these recommendations.

Organizational Implications

This section will briefly describe and analyze the organizational implications of implementing, and of not implementing the study recommendations. The leadership implications for the organizational change that the recommendations require will also be described.

Communication has recently been identified as an area needing improvement at CNC (CNC, 2005). It is appropriate then to begin the implementation of action arising from the recommendations of this study, by communicating fully the contents of this report to everyone in the College community. This should be done face-to-face on both campuses where dialogue triad meetings occurred, and on the College's web site. A high level of awareness of the findings and conclusions of this study would hopefully enable employees to be more motivated to act on the recommendations from a position of awareness, understanding, and agreement with the study's recommendations. Further it would provide some tangible evidence of the College's commitment to honour the findings of the College of New Caledonia Employee Perceptions Survey, 2005.

Affirming the student and learning-centred mindset already possessed by

employees would help to create some distance away from the negative energy that was provoked by the early history of the learning college initiative in the College. This affirmation of employees could be enhanced too by the choice to refrain from using the expression “learning college”. This would give recognition to the employees that they were heard and respected by making this choice to bury the expression “learning college” at CNC.

There was a significant groundswell of sentiment that bureaucratic institution-centred processes constitute a negative, in contrast to the student-centred positives of what occurs in the classroom. Clear communication and involvement of as many employees as possible from all areas, will do much to collaboratively change these processes, the culture, and bring about an alignment between what is actually done in the College, with the mindset of the employees. A clear communication that processes, systems, and the culture need to change - not the people - will do much to encourage, motivate, and even inspire employees to action.

The decision to proceed with these recommendations rests primarily with senior management of the College. However, successful implementation of the recommendations, and successful achievement of a collaborative culture and student-centred processes will depend upon all employees getting on board, and being unequivocally convicted of the belief that the success of this initiative will advance the interests of everyone – students, employees, and the College. The data seems to indicate that this is not an unrealistic expectation. Consider as evidence of this the instructor’s vision “that we all realize we’re riding on the same train” and another instructor who seemed to know what needs to happen when she said, “somebody has to be the starting

point, and it should be all of us, every day. It should be an attitude we adopt on an ongoing basis". A manager showed the same awareness when he recognized that "we can always do better". These quotes seemed to reflect a positive forward-looking energy, supportive of implementing the recommendations. If the challenge is appropriately and fully presented to the College community as one where its success will be everyone's success – then it will work.

Part of the appropriate implementation of these recommendations must be the provision of training to support employees in their acquisition of new skills and knowledge. Skills in relation to leadership, communication, collaboration, and team-building are skills that have not been unconditionally honoured in the old culture. Therefore people cannot be expected to simply start exercising these skills. Some will not know how to collaborate, work in teams, et cetera. The College will need to ensure that people are equipped and supported to do what is expected in the new collaborate culture, if implementation of the recommendations is to succeed.

For successful implementation of the recommendations it is important for the College to complete its work of identifying its values, its vision, and developing a Strategic Plan. This will help to provide direction and stability, and reduce confusion and uncertainty in the chaotic time of trying to change a culture. Moreover, it is an opportunity to formalize the recognition of the College as a learning college, or more appropriately, as a student/learning-centred College that flourishes in an environment of collaborative relationships and processes. The constitution of the organization will thusly legitimize its essence as a learning organization dedicated to the success of its students and employees.

A real leadership challenge will be to establish for the long term a collaborative culture. Pervasive use of collaboration at all levels and in all areas, and opportunities to practise new collaborative skills with support, sensitivity, and encouragement will be needed. The early small successes must be recognized, celebrated, and rewarded in order to motivate people. As was apparent in the literature review, deeply rooted sub-cultures in academic organizations based on individualism and autonomy work against collaboration. Leaders will need strategies, energy, patience, and imagination to overcome these proclivities. Leaders should not rely on the promises of technology to any significant degree to facilitate implementation of the recommendations of this study. The new culture needed at CNC rests on a foundation of solid personal human relationships, which are the basis of collaboration, and which in turn are the basis of collaborative student-centred processes.

Again, consider how the process of Appreciative Inquiry might assist the College in implementing the recommendations. We are reminded by Cooperrider and Whitney (1999) of one enhancement of Appreciative Inquiry as a change process – an approach that

> . . . is intelligently involving people in changing their workplaces . . . .We have learned that creating a collective sense of purpose, sharing information traditionally know only to a few, valuing what people have to contribute, and inviting them to participate in meaningful ways positively affects outcomes. In other words, informed, engaged people can produce dramatic results. (p. 4)

The challenge is immense, but the fruits of success are even greater.

Consider now the implications of failing to face this challenge, and not implementing these recommendations. Failing to recognize and affirm the employees' feelings about the expression learning college, and their predilection to being student-centred would be losing an opportunity to "ride on the same train" - a disconnect between

the mindset of the employees and the culture of the College would continue. As noted above, failing to openly and to fully communicate with the College community about the findings, conclusions and recommendations of this study would be a lost opportunity, and serve to demonstrate that the desire to improve internal communication is not taken too seriously. Since organizational structure influences patterns and effectiveness of internal communication and interaction, failing to change the College's organizational structure would inhibit the development of collaborative processes and relationships. The recommendations to increase the use of cross-departmental teams, to improve services to students and employees and to improve processes and systems are all critical to achieving the goals of student-centredness and greater collaboration. In the absence of implementing these recommendations, the objectives will remain unachievable. Finally, if the employees are not empowered through training, motivational reward systems, and Appreciative Inquiry techniques, the objectives of student-centredness and greater collaboration will remain unachievable.

Implications for Future Research

This section will briefly examine the implications of both the research project processes, and its results for future research, with suggestions and recommendations for further research.

Alternative Research Tool

A number of limitations were identified in Chapter Four that could perhaps be successfully addressed with an alternative or modified research tool. The dialogue triads had limited success in generating data that were legible, clear, and developed in depth. This probably was a function of both inadequate time – five minutes to answer each

question, and structure, with only two or three people interacting. A dialogue circle with more people engaged might develop richer data. With the use of a tape recorder, all participants could more freely engage in the dialogue with no one having to concentrate on taking notes. Also, the researcher would not be dependent on participants writing legibly and possessing good note-taking skills.

Appreciative Inquiry Continued

As was noted in Chapter Three, there is an opportunity to continue this research by pursuing the next two stages of Appreciative Inquiry. One of the criticisms levied against the methodology of Appreciative Inquiry is that it often does not progress beyond the reflection and talking of the Discovery and Dream stages. In other words, it is fine to appreciate the excellence of the past and to dream of what might be in the future, but what is the point if no plan (Design) and no action (Destiny) are forthcoming to create the Dream of the future. With the first two steps of Appreciative Inquiry completed in this study, it is open to a researcher or the College to embark upon the steps of Design and Destiny (Cooperrider, D.L. & Whitney, D., 1999). The outcome of these stages would be a plan and implementation of action, to create the organization captured in the images of the Discoveries, Dreams, and Possibility Statements of the earlier stages of Appreciative Inquiry. This could provide a process for the College to implement the recommendations of this study.

Additional Research

There was some limitation of the research identified in Chapter Four as a result of the small number of participants relative to the number of students and employees in the College. It may be in order to continue the Discovery and Dream stages of the research,

to generate a greater volume of data by involving a greater number of participants in the study. This might also address the limitations of participant bias and lack of sufficient representation from some classifications of participants, most notably students, as identified in Chapter Four.

Further Research Topics

There are a number of topics for further research by the College in areas that fell outside the scope of this research study, or that could not be developed at a deeper level. These will be enumerated below in the form of a research question that might add to the findings and conclusions of this study, or perhaps facilitate the implementation of the recommendations.

1. What are the leverage points in the organization that would deliver the best and quickest results in terms of developing a more collaborative culture?
2. How is an academic institution's culture typically incongruent with a collaborative culture, and how can this incongruity most effectively be removed or reconciled?
3. What are some of the most effective techniques to assist a College employee to connect what they do day-to-day in the performance of their work duties, with the experience of the students at the College? How can the employee better appreciate how their role impacts the student's experience and success at the College?
4. How can Senge's notion of a learning organization inform the College's need, understanding, and processes to change its culture?

5. What techniques can effectively blur the boundaries of employee roles, and in the process, weaken a bureaucratic culture?

These suggestions for further research in terms of both research processes and subject matter are relevant and appropriate. The suggestions in regards to research processes may well address some of the limitations articulated in Chapter Four. The suggestions in regards to researching additional subject matter or topics could deepen and extend this study's findings and conclusions. It could also provide additional information to advance CNC's task of changing a resistant bureaucratic culture to a more collaborative student-centred culture that will lead the College forward to yet greater success.

CHAPTER SIX: LESSONS LEARNED

In this chapter, I will review some of the lessons learned as a researcher. Specifically, what lessons have I learned about the process of conducting and managing this applied action research project and of leading positive organizational change? What would I have done differently or better, given the chance? My aim is to contribute to smoothing the path of future MALT learners/researchers with their Major Project research – to help them use action research productively. My MALT peers have immensely aided me on this path, and so have the experiences of MALT learners who have preceded me. It is a pleasure to continue the tradition of supportive leadership established by earlier learners. Following then, are some lessons of this researcher.

Choice of Research Project Supervisor

The choice of a research supervisor is a crucially important task of the researcher. I would assess three factors worthy of consideration - experience, knowledge, and compatibility in terms of working style and personality. The research task is an easier journey when one's supervisor has already been down the road and is aware of the potholes to avoid and how to avoid them. It saves time and effort. My supervisor's knowledge of both the general research project focus, as well as the chosen methodology greatly facilitated the research, and added real value to the project. Finally, and most important – indeed the critical factor that I considered above all else, was my perception of compatibility of researcher and supervisor on two dimensions. The first question to ask is "Can I work well with this person?" in terms of degree of her availability, my need for autonomy, comfort with structure, reasonable expectations, degree of support and encouragement, et cetera. The second question to ask is "Do we have compatible

personalities or natures? Are we comfortable together? Is there a sense of harmony, community, and unity of purpose? Do we share similar values?" If these questions can be answered in the affirmative, as they were for me, the Major Project journey will be a smoother and more enjoyable one. Time and effort invested to find the right fit with a supervisor, is a good investment. I speak from a most positive experience.

Timing of Completion of Literature Review

Between the completion of the final online course and the second residency, mid-April through early July, there is a down time when there is little to do in the MALT program, other than working on the literature review. This time is well spent researching and completing as much of the writing of the literature review as the learner can accomplish. The literature review is a time- intensive task, and therefore this strategy is effective management of your scarce resource of time. I found this strategy took a lot of pressure off, when the level of activity picked up substantially after the second residency. Moreover, having a better grasp of the relevant literature better equipped me as a researcher to develop the research proposal. This foundation and background of the issues and perspectives from the literature helps to pave the way on the road ahead.

Planning a Research Break

That portion of the Major Project when the data must be analyzed, conclusions drawn, and recommendations and implications for the organization developed, is an intense time. What is helpful, if not absolutely necessary, is a concentrated time of very deliberate, focused, and uninterrupted reflection on the data. Quiet extended time, free of the usual distractions and demands of daily life is needed to listen to what the data are saying and to see the patterns and themes emerge from the chaos, into an order and a

meaning. I found this process was greatly facilitated by taking a two-week break from my employment. It was a time of great creativity and accomplishment, even to an extent I had not contemplated.

Use of a Research Journal

Contrary to the sound advice of my supervisor, I was not diligent in the keeping of a research journal. While I did make entries during the dialogue triad meetings, that was about the extent of my journaling. It would have been conducive to the analysis of the data and to the writing of Chapters Five and Six had I noted more thoughts, learning, and emotions in my journal that related to the subject matter of these two chapters.

Analysis of Data

As a left-brained, structured kind of researcher, my usual process would be to analyze the raw data by extracting tentative themes, organizing the data into final discrete themes, and writing up the analysis as soon as possible. My supervisor counseled me, "remember to let the data speak and put your own thoughts to one side for now. Let it emerge" (A. Perodeau, personal communication, November 8, 2005). I followed this advice, reflecting at length on the data and formulating its themes in my head, on flipchart paper on the wall, and then re-formulating themes, as themes shifted and emerged. It was as if the data had life, and the process of analysis of this living entity unfolded as my supervisor suggested that it would. While the data analysis was a great deal of work, I did not find it tedious as some suggested I would; it was even an enjoyable experience. I would recommend that researchers follow this advice - be open to letting the data's story and themes emerge. Do not rush the process, and indeed, enjoy the process.

Peer Support

Five researchers from my cohort all shared the same supervisor and we formed a support group. We made a point to check in every Friday to offer support and suggestions for each other. This ongoing online contact with fellow learners/researchers travelling down the same pothole filled road was very useful, as much from a psychological perspective as anything. However, it was also a source of tangible, supportive and helpful ideas. As mentioned in Chapter Three, I also found great support from Sarah Hood and her MALT Major Project in terms of identifying an appropriate methodology. Usually in the past, I have chosen to be a solitary worker; however, I have come to appreciate the value of involving others in my learning and my work.

Scope of the Project

Something that was hard to appreciate and understand at the outset was the importance of defining a research project that was capable of being carried out – that was not too broad and general and would potentially take over one's life. On a number of occasions, even right up to the data analysis stage when I eliminated consideration of the possibility statements data, it was necessary to scale back the project to ensure it was of a manageable size. Not only must one be conscious of the scope of the project from an academic and scholarly standpoint, but also one must ensure that the scope of the project is sensible from the standpoint of maintaining an appropriate balance in one's life.

A Structured Plan

As was mentioned earlier, I am a left-brained, structured kind of researcher. Consequently, a project management strategy that I found particularly helpful and supportive was the steadfast use of self-imposed objectives and associated deadlines. This

discipline assisted me greatly to accomplish most of my literature review in the down time period discussed earlier, and to complete the Major Project about three months ahead of the prescribed deadline. As part of this strategy, I used a wall calendar where one could see four months at a time.

Construction of Appreciative Inquiry Questions

One of the more significant research lessons I learned resulted from my drafting of the Appreciative Inquiry questions for my dialogue triad meetings. It quickly became apparent in the meetings that these questions could have been clearer and less unambiguous to the participants. Moreover, the questions could have been crafted or more refined, to better generate the type of information that was needed to address the research questions. This error was compounded by failing to pilot the questions with a research assistant, despite receiving plenty of advice to pilot research instruments from numerous sources.

Fear

There were few occasions when I entertained any serious doubts about being able to successfully complete this research project. There were, however, two persistent fears that dogged me most of the way, despite the tremendous support of my supervisor, peers, family and the College. The first fear was in relation to the dialogue triad meetings, and it had nothing to do with the challenge of facilitating a meeting of a group of people. As a former instructor, that was nothing to worry about. The concern with the meetings was twofold. First, there was the fear that I would not obtain sufficient or adequate data to analyze and answer the research questions. Second, there was a fear that hostile participants with an anti-learning college agenda would disrupt the meetings. These fears

proved unfounded as there were ample relevant data, and the participants were absolutely without exception, gracious, professional, and committed to improving their College. The second persistent fear was not being able to juggle the demands of a new position at the College with the demands of this research project. My support network, perseverance, and the knowledge that many learners before me had overcome greater odds and succeeded in this task, served me well. So the lesson is to manage one's fear – use your support system, and trust that most of the fear is probably unfounded anyway.

Choice of Topic

I knew from the outset, as a former instructor and as a long time employee at the College, that two ongoing themes greatly concerned me. These of course were the lack of collaboration and the lack of focus on what was best for the students. I believed that a greater understanding of these phenomena was important for the well being of our students, but also for the future of our College. As I learned about the process of Appreciative Inquiry, I became very excited about its potential in a context and environment such as CNC's. On many occasions at both residencies we were advised of the importance of choosing a research topic for which the researcher feels a real passion. That is the soundest of advice for sustaining one's interest and energy over the research journey. It is so much easier to get down to work on the project when one is tired or discouraged, if the research project is an enjoyable task and a passionate focus. When there is a vision in one's head of a better organization as a result of the applied action research being undertaken, that is real motivation and satisfaction.

Recruitment of Participants

I erred in my assumption, based on my own passion for the research project, that

it would not be difficult to recruit interested participants. This of course proved not to be the case - it was a real challenge to get participants to engage in the project. I learned that the researcher should not assume that others share his passion and excitement for the project. In a future research project, I would make a greater effort to explain the rationale and potential for positive change that the project might bring to the organization. In other words, more promotion of the potential benefits to the individual and the College would be in order to get a higher rate of participation.

Closing Comments

I have great expectations for the new understandings that this study could bring to the spirit and life of CNC. I have great hope that this research project will plant a seed that will germinate, blossom, and grow. The product of the seed will be a new organizational culture at CNC that will align with the learning college mindset of the employees. This cannot happen overnight, but one can dream of the day when collaborative processes will underpin all of the College's activities. This new culture and its collaborative processes will support and empower the employees to function true to their values and mindset of devotion to the learning and success of our students. At the very least, I believe that the high level of interest demonstrated by the participants in the methodology of Appreciative Inquiry is a hopeful sign. Perhaps this positive and appreciative framework for thinking, planning, and indeed living, may become a part of how we function at CNC.

"Be the change you want to see in the world."

-- Gandhi

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APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INVITATION

Dear Potential Participant,

I would like to invite you to be part of a research project, which I am conducting. Your name was chosen as a possible participant because of your employment status at the College of New Caledonia, my sponsoring organization. This project is part of the requirement for a Master's Degree in Leadership and Training at Royal Roads University.

I am very excited by this research opportunity - it is my hope that it will help every CNC employee to see their critical role in student learning, whatever role they play - whether an instructor, clerk, custodian, or manager. My vision is for this research to help CNC to coalesce as a unified and collaborative community around the shared value of placing the learning of students, and each other above all else. Employees and students will be able to say with pride, that CNC is a great place to work and to learn.

The research question is: *"how can re-focusing as a learning college enhance greater cross-departmental collaboration in the College of New Caledonia?"* The objective of my research project is to uncover positive information and knowledge that will empower employees at CNC, to bring about positive change in the form of an enhanced focus on learning, and on collaboration across departments in the College. Participation from all groups in the College, including students, is critical to achieving these objectives.

My research project will consist of two meetings in October, where a maximum of 24 participants will meet in triads (small groups of three), at two meetings. The meetings are likely to last between three and five hours in total. In the first meeting, three open-ended discussion questions will be discussed following a research methodology known as Appreciative Inquiry. These questions will be circulated in advance to participants. In the second meeting, participants will again work in triads. The intent of the sessions will be to generate data and extract emerging themes that will be developed into principles and a framework for re-focusing CNC as a collaborative institution of learning.

Information will be recorded in hand-written format and summarized in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. At no time will any specific comments be attributed to any individual unless your specific agreement has been obtained beforehand.

A summary of the participants' data will be developed and validated by the participants themselves before the conclusion of the meeting. In addition, a final copy of the report will be made available for participants once the project is accepted for completion of academic requirements by Royal Roads University (May 2006).

Participants should be aware that the outcome of the inquiry, based on their positive experiences and preferences could potentially lead to re-design of jobs, new policies, and

procedures, and other organizational changes if the College re-focuses as a learning college.

Although no formal debriefing session has been scheduled, please do feel free to contact me at any time should you have additional questions regarding the project and its outcomes. You are not compelled to take part in this research project. If you do elect to take part, you are free to withdraw at any time with no prejudice.

If you would like to participate in my research project, please advise xxxx xxx, who as a neutral party, will randomly select participants from the pool of volunteers.

E-mail: xxxx@cnc.bc.ca OR call at: xxx-xxx-xxxx local xxx

Sincerely,

Xxx xxxx

APPENDIX B: E-MAIL INVITATION TO COLLEGE EMPLOYEES

Employee Seeks Your Input and Assistance in Research Project for Master's Thesis

As many of you know I am engaged in a research project which I must complete to graduate with my Master's degree in the Leadership and Training (MALT) program at Royal Roads University. The research question is: *"how can re-focusing as a learning college enhance greater cross-departmental collaboration in the College of New Caledonia?"*

I am very excited by this research opportunity - it is my hope that it will help every CNC employee to see their critical role in student learning, whatever role they play - whether an instructor, clerk, custodian, or manager. My vision is for this research to help CNC to coalesce as a unified and collaborative community around the shared value of placing the learning of students, and each other above all else. Employees and students will be able to say with pride, that CNC is a great place to work and to learn.

The objective of my research project is to uncover positive information and knowledge that will empower employees at CNC, to bring about positive change in the form of an enhanced focus on learning, and on collaboration across departments in the College. Participation from all groups in the College, including students, is critical to achieving these objectives.

If you or anyone you know would be interested in participating, I have provided additional information below. I am hoping to have a wide cross section of CNC employees as participants, and I would be extremely grateful for your involvement.

Meeting times have been booked for either xxxxxxxxx, from xxx at Prince George campus in Room xxx or xxxxxxxxx from xxx in room xxx. If neither of those times works for you I can arrange another time. I need to have at least three people at each meeting to conduct a Dialogue Triad, with speaker, listener, and observer roles. The meeting will consist of the following: Introductions and outline of the process (30 minutes), Dialogue Triad Questions (30 minutes) Group discussion and debrief (30 minutes).

If you are interested in participating, please advise xxxx xxxx (xxxx@cnc.bc.ca), who as a neutral party, will randomly select participants from the pool of volunteers. Please let Peter know which time works best, or if you need another time arranged. There will be a second meeting to validate the data's themes and to develop some principles that emerge from the data. Participants must attend the second meeting, and that time and date will be arranged at a later date. I am attaching a letter of consent (a Royal Roads research requirement) which can be signed electronically by filling in your name and forwarding to xxxx. Please retain a copy for your own records.

Participants should be aware that the outcome of the inquiry, based on their positive experiences and preferences could potentially lead to re-design of jobs, new policies, and procedures, and other organizational changes if the College re-focuses as a learning college.

I have also included copies of the questions. You do not need to prepare in advance, but at least you will know what to expect and can think about it if you want to. These questions may change slightly in wording as I am piloting them with a small group this week.

I would be happy to chat with you to answer any other questions you may have about the research process. I can be reached at work at xxx-xxxx or at home at xxx-xxxx. Thank you again for your interest, and for helping me to distribute this information to anyone whom may be interested in participating.

Xxxx xxxx

APPENDIX C: LETTER OF FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT

Re-Focusing a Community College as a "Learning College" and Enhancing Cross-Departmental Collaboration

Researcher: xxxx xxxx
Organizational Sponsor: xxxxxx xxxxxx
Faculty Project Supervisor: xxx xxxxxx, xxx-xxx-xxxx

This research project is part of the requirement for a Master of Arts in Leadership and Learning at Royal Roads University.

The student concerned is xxx xxxx. His credentials with Royal Roads University can be established by telephoning xxxxx xxxxx, MALT Program Coordinator, xxx-xxx-xxxx extension xxxx.

This document constitutes an agreement to take part in a research program. The purpose of this research is to explore what it means to be a "learning college" and how re-focusing as a learning college might enhance cross-departmental collaboration at the College of New Caledonia. Through Appreciative Inquiry, participants will share their stories about advancing student learning and collaborating with people in other College departments.

The collection, analysis, and validation of the data will occur over the course of two meetings, structured with participants organized randomly into triads to elicit the data. The first meeting's triads will elicit data in response to three appreciative questions. At the second meeting, the triads will generate key principles or provocative propositions arising out of the data, and be asked to validate the identified principles or provocative propositions as truly representative of the data. The total time involved will be from three to five hours.

Information will be recorded in hand-written format by the researcher and by participant notes, and where appropriate, summarized in anonymous format, in the body of the final report. No recording devices will be used. Specific comments will not be attributed to any individual in the final report. Research data will be kept in a locked cabinet and electronic data will be kept on a password protected computer.

A copy of the final report will be housed at Royal Roads University and will be publicly accessible. The College of New Caledonia will also retain a copy of the final report. Final

results of the study may also be used during presentations on the topic of employee engagement in change and in articles on the subject. Identifying information will not be used in any of these documents or presentations.

Risk to participants is minimal, as participants will be asked to recall positive experiences. Participants will be identifiable to other group participants. The researcher cannot guarantee the conduct of other participants, but will remind all participants to respect each other's personal information and confidentiality.

Participants should be aware that the outcome of the inquiry, using their own experiences, and wishes could potentially lead to re-design of jobs, new policies, and procedures, and other organizational changes if the College re-focuses as a learning college.

I may be the manager of employees I am be inviting to be part of this research, and where this is so, it would be a conflict of interest situation. I wish to address this potential conflict of interest by advising participants of my awareness of the issue and my intent that their interests be placed first at all times, and not prejudiced.

Prospective research subjects are not compelled to take part in this research project. If an individual does elect to take part, she or he is free to withdraw at any time with no prejudice. Similarly if employees or other individuals elect not to take part in this research project, this information will also be maintained in confidence. In no way will involvement or lack of involvement in this research adversely impact a participant's employment or advancement at the College of New Caledonia. In no way will involvement or lack of involvement in this research adversely impact a participant's grades or standing as a student, at the College of New Caledonia.

Xxxx xxxxx (xxxxx@cnc.bc.ca), a neutral party, will randomly select participants from the pool of volunteers.

By signing this letter, the individual gives free, voluntary and informed consent to participating in this project.

Name: (Please Print): _____

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Researcher contact information:

Xxx xxxx
xxx-xxx-xxxx extension xxx xxxx@cnc.bc.ca

APPENDIX D: DIALOGUE TRIAD QUESTIONS AND RECORDING SHEET

Date of Session: _____

Question #1

Think about a time when you effectively served the learning of a student(s), (and if you are a student, an experience when CNC effectively served your learning), where you really felt satisfaction and that your contributions were valued, (or you were valued as a student). Describe the situation and the role you played.

Participants are strongly urged to refrain from identifying directly or indirectly any third parties in the course of these Appreciative Inquiry sessions. Thank you.

Sub questions to assist speaker if necessary:

- *Tell us more about the situation.*
- *Describe your involvement.*
- *Why did you choose to get involved in the situation?*
- *What was it that made you feel effective or satisfied?*
- *How did you know your contributions were valued?*

Speaker name: _____
Listener name: _____
Observer Name: _____

Observer Notes:

Question #2

Considering what you have discovered and appreciated from the past (from discussing the first question), think about the possibilities! How CNC might look, be, feel and function, if those exceptional moments you described before became the norm? Create in your mind some images - formulate a vision - think about CNC reaching its highest potential - doing its very best to work collaboratively and advance learning.

Participants are strongly urged to refrain from identifying directly or indirectly any third parties in the course of these Appreciative Inquiry sessions. Thank you.

Sub questions to assist speaker if necessary:

- *Describe the possibilities in greater detail.*
- *Describe your own involvement in this picture.*
- *How would the situation impact you and your role?*
- *Describe your feelings in this vision.*
- *What would the College's work look like?*

Speaker name: _____
Listener name: _____
Observer Name: _____

Observer Notes:

Question #3

How has this discussion influenced your perspective of a "learning college", advancing student learning, and enhancing cross-departmental collaboration in the College of New Caledonia?

Participants are strongly urged to refrain from identifying directly or indirectly any third parties in the course of these Appreciative Inquiry sessions. Thank you.

Sub questions to assist speaker if necessary:

- *What is the first thing you think about when you hear "learning college" or "serving student learning"?*
- *What would need to happen for you to better serve student learning and choose to volunteer time and energy to serving student learning?*
- *What do you need from your supervisor to better serve student learning? From College leaders? From your colleagues?*

Speaker name: _____
Listener name: _____
Observer Name: _____

Observer Notes:

Additional Notes from summary discussion:

APPENDIX E: APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY SESSIONS

Workshop I:

1. Once participants arrive, explain:
   - the process - three questions for each participant to answer, keep the speakers rotating every 5 minutes, I act as a timekeeper,
   - the purpose of my research,
   - my role as a researcher,
   - the issue of confidentiality, and the use, storage, and eventual destruction of the data.
   - answer any questions people have
   - at the end of the dialogue triads, participants come together to share themes that emerged within the triads in a general discussion.

2. PowerPoint presentation for an overview of Appreciative Inquiry.

3. Introduction to the **Discovery Stage**:

"Appreciative interviews differ from traditional interviews in that the questions are simply guidelines that lead the interviewee to delve into the most creative, exciting, life-giving experiences that they have had in their life and work. It is not as important to answer every question as it is to tell a complete story, evoking the situation - complete with details of what happened and the feelings involved. The goal is to help the person doing the interviewing experience as much as possible the situation being described. The interviewer's role is to listen, occasionally prompting the interviewee to be more descriptive or to enlarge the story."

> Everything we do from here on will depend on the data from these interviews, **so please listen intently and make notes of powerful direct quotes, words, phrases, and ideas that are present** when the person being interviewed is telling an exciting story of a creative and successful experience.
>
> **Instructions**: Before we start, I would like to explain a little bit about what we are going to do. This is going to be an appreciative interview. The questions ask about times when you see things working at their best. We try to find out about things at

their best so that we can find ways to infuse more of what works into the College's performance. It is also like what we do with athletes in training when they hold a positive image of themselves performing and winning, and then envision even greater possibility. The end result of the interview will help us understand those "life-giving forces" that provide vitality and distinctive competence to our organization. We want to find out what works and do more of the same to make things at their best.

In other words, we want to learn about what is happening in those moments of exceptional performance, what ingredients are present, what dynamics were operating – and then finding ways of replicating those conditions so we can consistently construct an even better future.

- participants randomly grouped into three
- each participant asked to take on the role of speaker, listener, and observer for each question.
- view each other as equals
- put aside organizational role and speak to each other as employees of CNC
- sub-questions for the listener to ask if prompting needed
- listener not to interrupt the speaker, and to only ask the follow-up questions if the speaker needs help to continue
- main job of the listener to focus his/her attention on the speaker, to listen using ears, eyes, and body, and to remain curious
- observer to take notes, so the listener can focus completely on the speaker
- triad technique designed to create a safe and simple process for employees to put aside formal organizational roles and listen to each other in small groups
- participants reminded that the stories about to be shared belong to them as individuals, and that no one should argue with or deny another's experience. Participants are cautioned that some people might hear elements in the stories of others that they find unpleasant or they do not agree with. Participants are asked to "suspend" those reactions and remain curious
- following the triad conversations, a general discussion will occur where themes that emerge in each triad are shared, compared and discussed. This discussion is recorded on flip-chart paper by a volunteer recorder. I will take detailed notes, rotating among the triads, recording by hand as much as possible
- nine rounds of 5 minutes each, so each participant in a triad is a speaker, listener, and observer for all three questions. Only the observer instructed to take notes. At the end of the nine rounds, each person has made notes on three conversations.

Workshop II:

4. **Identifying Themes** – developing the groundwork for building shared images, dreams, and visions of a preferred future. The goal is to share the data and uncover common themes of circumstances when the group performed well – to uncover these themes in order to know how to do more of what worked. Transforms this information into an applicable form-a possibility proposition.

Definition: a **theme** is an idea or concept about what is present in people's stories. Eg. In many stories you may hear that when the topic covered by the question is at its best, people report "a feeling of success" or "clarity about purpose" or "fun and excitement". These phrases are themes.

The themes become the basis for collectively imagining what the College would be like if the exceptional moments that we have uncovered in the interviews, became the norm at CNC.

5. **Dream Stage**:

Creating an image of the most desired future for the College by dialoguing around these questions:

- What are the most enlivening and exciting possibilities for our College?
- What is the inspiration that is supporting our College?
- What is our organization, CNC being called to be?

Definition: **Dream** – co-creating a shared image or vision of a preferred future directly from the stories of special moments and the resultant themes or life-giving forces previously identified. The invitation is to imagine a CNC where those special moments of exceptional vitality found in the stories, become the norm rather than the exception.

The first stage of articulating the dream usually focuses on descriptions of the College's culture, how people are relating to one another, and the overall feel of CNC, and how we want to pursue our dreams at and for CNC. (Statements of fundamental belief and aspiration). The "product of this stage is a set of expressions or visual images that describe the larger vision for the College and a written statement called a "provocative proposition" or "possibility statement" that describes this vision. Begin with a dream of a shared future. Examples on page 142.

Instructions: Guided imagery exercise (leading to a dream of a shared future):

"Get comfortable, close your eyes if you wish, and bring the interview themes we have chosen into your mind. Imagine that these themes have been implemented fully in your everyday work at CNC. Imagine that it is your first day back at work and you are excited because you know that you'll find a workplace that has more of these themes present. Wander around your workplace. As you meet people in the course of your day,

what pictures emerge that are life-giving and energizing? What are you feeling? What are people doing differently? As you head home from this day, what is life like at work, and how has it changed? What conversations do you have with those at home? What do you tell them about the changes at work? Congratulate yourself for being a part of such a healthy and meaningful change in your work at CNC and in your life. Open your eyes and return to this room at your own speed. When ready, share a few words describing your experience."

6. Create a **provocative proposition** or **possibility statement** that puts their vision from above into words. (samples on pp 136-137, Watkins & Mohr)

   A **provocative proposition** or **possibility statement** describes an ideal state of circumstances that will foster the climate that creates the possibilities to do more of what works. It bridges the best of "what is" with your own speculation of "what might be". They are symbolic statements reminding us what is best about CNC and how everyone can participate in creating more of the best – a clear direction for all of CNC's activities.

   Envision what could be done to make the extraordinary possible on a daily basis?

   Process to develop a possibility statement:

   - Find examples of the best from the interviews
   - Determine in some detail what circumstances made the best possible
   - Take the stories and envision what might be. Write an affirmative statement that describes the idealized future as if it were already happening.

Criteria for a possibility statement:

- Is it provocative? Does it stretch, challenge or innovate?
- Is it grounded in examples?
- Is it what we want? Will people defend it or get passionate about it?
- Is it stated in affirmative, bold terms and in present tense (as if it were already happening)?

- see handout (page 141 from Watkins and Mohr)

Instructions: As a group, discuss your dream image and decide how you will put it in writing. You will be creating a provocative proposition that describes what the College would look and feel like when all of the chosen themes are at their best. Write your statement on flip chart paper and be prepared to share with the group.