

DISSERTATION

CASE STUDY OF THE USE OF INSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION FOR  
DECISION-MAKING IN THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS AT A  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

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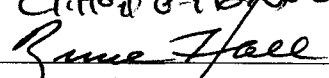
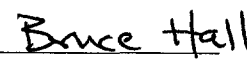
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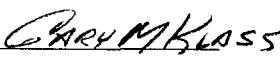
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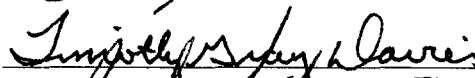
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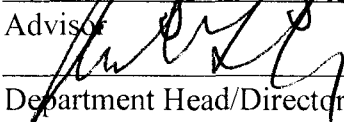
  
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## ABSTRACT OF DISSERTATION

### CASE STUDY OF THE USE OF INSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION FOR DECISION-MAKING IN THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

This case study's purpose was to better understand how one community college's leaders used institutional information when making decisions for their strategic planning process. Of particular interest was how these decision-makers used institutional information to shape their decisions while establishing strategic priorities. The study goals were to explore the strategic planning process and evaluate how institutional information was used for decision-making. The study described the strategic planning process and how it operated; discovered the institutional information types available and how leaders used this information to make strategic plan decisions; and gained insight into how using institutional information during the strategic planning process impacted the college's decision-making processes.

Higher education institutions may address accountability demands and pressures to explain how decisions are made, including those pertaining to the planning process, through institutional research.

The case study findings were presented as a strategic planning process chronology and discussions concerning the institutional information used for decision-making. First, the strategic planning process chronology was marked by four significant incidents. The significant incidents were the Planning Council creation, the Strategic Planning Council creation, gathering institutional information that was placed into two large books, and

taking the books to the Strategic Planning Retreat where the gap analysis was conducted and strategic priorities drafted. The four significant incidents mark places along the strategic planning process where institutional information was important to the strategic planning process. Second, the case study discussed using institutional information for decision-making and extended into exploring how using institutional information for decision-making during the strategic planning process impacted IICC's decision-making processes.

The study found institutional information was used by the institution studied throughout the strategic planning process. The institutional information drove strategic planning decision-making. The college wanted to use institutional information in the process, collected it, and used it to determine institutional gaps which led to drafting the strategic priorities. The strategic planning process impacted the college's decision-making processes because the institution has more sophisticated decision-making processes. Decision-making is more developed, more complex, and more refined. In order to now make decisions, institutional information is consulted.

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This work is dedicated with love and gratitude to my father and mother,

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### Background

Higher education institutions are constantly making decisions. Organizational governance models are used to study higher education institutions to explain decision-making processes. Accountability pressures drive the necessity to understand university and community college decision-making processes, resulting in an increased demand on decision-makers to support their decisions with institutional information. This research study focused on the strategic planning process at one community college while it explored using institutional information for decision-making.

Decisions are made on a continual basis within community colleges. Fryer and Lovas (1991) note with regard to decision-making:

Everyone in every community college makes decisions all the time – consciously and unconsciously, deliberately and by indecision. ... We believe that institutional governance – the organization's official processes for deciding and communicating – creates conditions and establishes a climate within which these and many other decisions are made. (p. 8)

Fryer and Lovas also point out although institutions often display organizational charts one rarely sees institutional decision-making charts. Langley, Mintzberg, Pitcher, Posada, and Saint-Macary (1995) observe researchers continue to seek answers for how decisions are made within organizations. These authors believe decision-making,

Must be studied *in toto* and *in vivo*, at the individual level to include insight and inspiration, emotion and memory, and at the collective level to include history, culture, and context in the vast network of decision making that makes up every organization. (p. 261)

In other words, one must examine how individuals within an organization and the organization itself make decisions in various contexts. Decision-making processes are important to community college functions (Lunenberg & Ornstein, 1991).

Organizational governance models are used to describe decision-making processes. These models aid in understanding how institutional research impacts higher education decision-making processes. (Levine-Donnerstein, 1988). The models used most often to describe higher education institutions are the bureaucratic, collegial, political, and organized anarchy. The models assist in understanding community college governance (Caldwell, 1981). These four models were examined in the literature review.

Some researchers believe organizational governance models often overlap; other higher education institutions often exhibit several organizational structural models operating concurrently (Benjamin & Kerchner, 1982; Giesecke, 1994). Benjamin and Kerchner (1982) assessed decision-making models and found individuals tend to bring together various pieces or overlap different models when making decisions. Giesecke (1994) believes several decision-making models may operate concurrently in large organizations that have a complex structure like higher education institutions.

Accountability pressures on higher education institutions underscore the need to understand decision-making processes. Reasons given to explain higher education accountability pressures which ultimately impact how decisions are made include: external pressures related to outcomes and effective resource management; competitive pressures created by knowledge and technology explosions; governmental agency pressures related to operational matters; population diversification pressures; increased

financial constraint pressures; and consumer expectation pressures (Delaney, 1997, Keller, 1993; Matier, Sidle & Hurst, 1994).

Since higher educational institutions have increased accountability demands, it is necessary to provide worth and value evidence (Knight, Moore & Coperthwaite, 1997). “The fact that community colleges are community-conscious and are obligated to validate their programs and services against community needs and expectations has led to a substantial need for institutional research” (Chalker, 1980, p. 49). The accountability pressures demand explanations surrounding decision-making processes that could assist institutional information.

Understanding decision-making processes is an issue for community colleges (Banks & Colby, 1989; Keller, 1993; Terrell, 1991). The success or failure of colleges in today’s volatile and competitive environment is tied to the ability of administrators to make good decisions (Mann, 2001). Cope (1987) believes “information is the heart of the decision process” (p.79). Mann (2001) points out that the importance of using data in decision-making was recognized at the federal government level in 1995 with the National Postsecondary Education Cooperative (NPEC) creation. He states, “It was created ‘to promote quality, comparability and utility of postsecondary data and information that support policy development, implementation and evaluation,’ and emphasize the need for ‘better decisions through better data,’ (NPEC, 1998)” (p. 20). Therefore, “close collaboration between decision-makers and institution research is necessary so that research can be adapted to meet the needs of the specific institution and its administrators” (Tosh, 1996, p. 38).

Research needs to be conducted by higher education institutions because it is useful in developing institutional goals and objectives, making policy decisions, and making decisions for various institutional issues (Alfred, 1976; Carter, 1986; Chalker, 1980; Lohmann, 1998; McLaughlin, Howard & McLaughlin, 1998; Matier et al., 1994; Ramsey, 1981; Saupe, 1990). Swanson (1965) states colleges are encouraged to make efforts to use research findings. "Research is a management tool that planners can use to make key decisions as well as bring the necessary change as a result of those decisions" (Ramsey, 1981, p. 26) and "planning is the framework for deciding" (Fryer & Lovas, 1991, p. 8). Therefore, research takes a key role in an institution's planning for long-range development (Ramsey, 1981; Tosh, 1996). Spencer (1995) observes, "strategic planning has become the cornerstone of college and university planning" (p. 12). The primary strategic planning purpose is linking an institution's future with anticipated changes that allow for acquiring resources more quickly than their depletion (Cope, 1987). Strategic planning is a way to achieve agreement on institutional long-range goals and provides decision-makers a recommended action plan when prioritizing resource allocation (Tosh, 1996). Information data gathering regarding both internal and external institutional operations is one requirement for strategic planning (Cope, 1981). "Strategic planning is dependent on information" (Tosh, 1996, p. 30). Institutional research in higher education and the information it generates is one way to support strategic decision-making (McLaughlin et al., 1998). This is important because those who control information and its delivery have the potential to control decision-making (Matsen, 1991). This study focused on the role institutional information played in one community college's strategic planning process.

Community colleges responded to demands to bring institutional research into decision-making processes by either establishing or strengthening the institutional research role (Banks & Colby, 1989; Nichols, 1990). New roles accepted by institutional research directors and their offices require an understanding how institutional research functions within community colleges (Delaney, 1997). Knight et al. (1997) explain most accrediting associations set forth stipulations regarding institutional research use. Therefore, the aim for institutional research, after complying with state and federal agencies, is to provide an institution with a process for introspection, validation, and evaluation. Institutional research offices gather, analyze, and integrate institutional information (Lewis & Barr, 1988). Garbinski (1982) provides a useful description of institutional research: "It is the process of gathering data, converting it into information needed for decision making, and evaluating the effects of these decisions on the mission, plans and operations of postsecondary educational institutions" (pp. 1-2). In order to accomplish these functions institutional researchers use statistical methods, institutional information, historical data, operations research and economic theory, data from questionnaires and surveys, and other methods (Saunders, 1979). The analyses and studies produced then provide the foundation for making decisions and recommendations based on this information (Lewis & Barr, 1988). The goal for the institutional researcher is to gather the information that may be used immediately for making decisions (Yancey, 1988). Delaney (1997) states that as institutional research moves into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, researchers need to be more aware of their role and contribution in the decision-making process. This study could serve to increase the understanding for using institutional research and information it supplies to decision-making processes.

The literature review demonstrates that organizational governance models have been utilized to explain decision-making in community colleges during the last 50 years. The literature suggests more than one model operates in the community college when it comes to making decisions. The literature review also explored the institutional research role as the information supplier for community college decision-making and point out is the lack of research into the strategic planning process and the use of institutional research information. This study increases the understanding of how decision-makers use institutional information while planning.

Institutional research information's role for decision-making research can be classified into four categories and are discussed here. The first institutional research studies category examines the role of institutional research in decision-making (Garbinski 1982; Matsen, 1991; Rowh, 1988; Swanson, 1965). The findings suggest institutional research is used to support some decisions made in community colleges. For example, Matsen (1991) found that qualitative information was viewed as being more important than quantitative information in the decision-making processes of three Pacific Northwest colleges. Swanson (1965) suggests that future research include examining how institutional research findings are used in the decision-making process.

The second research studies category exploring information from institutional research offices investigates kinds and sources of institutional information used for decision-making (Mann, 2001; Putnam, 1994; Sandness, 1969). These studies suggest while numerous institutional information studies are available for decision-making, decision-makers may have difficulty finding data necessary for decision-making and their decision-making may be related to their confidence level for who produced and presented

the information. Even so, colleges that were considered to be more effective used objective data while making decisions.

The third research studies category of using institutional research office information explores the availability and usefulness of institutional research information for decision-making (Green, 1988; Roueche & Boggs, 1969). Given the number of decisions made at colleges, little direction for making decisions came from institutional research and an administrator's tenure influenced how useful they found data.

The fourth research studies category for institutional research information explores the relationship between institutional research and decision-making for planning (Chalker, 1980; Tosh, 1996). Chalker (1980) and Tosh (1996) suggest institutional research offices can be more involved when decisions are made and found a weak connection between research data and planning/decision-making for a particular program on one college's campus.

To sum, previous research found institutional information: was in some way used or involved in the decision-making process (Chalker, 1980; Matsen, 1991; Putnam, 1994; Sandness, 1969; Swanson, 1965); did not supply any direction or support for decision-making (Roueche & Boggs, 1969; Rowh, 1988; Tosh, 1996); or was unclear in its role and influence (Garbinski, 1982). Research studies into using institutional information from offices of institutional research and their results are explored further in the literature review. The review found previous research studying using institutional information when making decisions by community college leaders has not examined a strategic planning process.

In conclusion, higher education institutions may address accountability demands and pressures to explain how decisions are made, including those pertaining to the planning process, through institutional research. The information generated through research and used by leaders is critical in ultimately determining the institutional effectiveness (Mann, 2001). Institutional research has become a viable higher education component and may be used in decision-making. Rice (1979) suggests a need exists to bring institutional research into decision-making processes. Understanding these processes is vital to understanding how higher educational institutions currently are managed and how these institutions plan future directions (Garbinski, 1982). The focus on accountability has led to operational procedures acceptance such as strategic planning that require research data to support decisions (Tosh, 1996). Even with all that is being done by institutional research to generate information for decision-making and use in the strategic planning process, research explaining how this information is used for strategic planning has not been reported. Garbinski's (1982) observation from over twenty years ago is still relevant: "Since little formal research about decision making in higher education and institutional research (together or separately) has been done, further research could take any direction" (p. 99). Ball (1994) suggests in-depth decision-making processes at a single community college studies since these could provide researchers and administrators with a greater processes understanding that might result in modifications to an institution's governance structure in order to arrive at the desired decision-process goal.

## Purpose Statement

The case study research project purpose was to better understand how one community college's leaders used institutional information when making decisions for their strategic planning process. Of particular interest was how these decision-makers used institutional information to shape their decisions while establishing strategic priorities. The study goals were to explore the strategic planning process and evaluate how institutional information was used for decision-making. The study described the strategic planning process and how it operated; discovered the institutional information types available and how leaders used this information to make strategic plan decisions; and gained insight into how using institutional information during the strategic planning process impacted the college's decision-making processes.

## Research Questions

This study answered four questions regarding Institutional Information Community College's (IICC's) strategic planning process. The following are the research questions:

1. How did IICC's strategic planning process develop?
2. How did IICC's strategic planning process operate?
3. What was the institutional information used by IICC's Strategic Planning Council?
4. How was the institutional information used by IICC's Strategic Planning Council?

## Definitions of Terms

The following definitions are those most relevant to the study purpose.

### *Institutional Decision-Making*

Institutional decision-making is defined as identifying concerns; implementing problem solving; establishment of missions, goals and objectives, making policy, and developing institutional plans (Lewis & Barr, 1988).

### *Institutional Research Office*

An institutional research office is that part of an higher education institution that identifies, gathers and provides information that supports planning, policy formation, and decision-making (Lewis & Barr, 1988; Saupe, 1990). The role, function, and office purpose when assisting decision-making involves information systems use, evaluating programs, designing and implementing surveys, conducting and analyzing research, critiquing research, and the forming emerging issues (Lewis & Barr, 1988).

### *Institutional Information*

Institutional information is the data and information known about an organization. Data are the measurement of items that have been extracted and analyzed and information is the presentation of the measurement as a summary and in an accessible form (Johnson & Kristovich, 2000; Lewis & Barr, 1988).

### *Strategic Planning Council*

The 18-member council appointed by IICC and designated the sole purpose to design the strategic plan.

### *Study Delimitations*

This project conducted a case study analysis of one community college, IICC, located in the United States. Within the institution, the study population was the 18 member Strategic Planning Council. Membership included faculty, executive-, and mid-

level administrators (including the Director of Institutional Research and Planning), classified staff, and Board of Trustees.

### Study Assumptions

1. The primary research study assumption was that decision-makers use institutional information for decision-making. In this case study, IICC consulted institutional information during its strategic planning process. It was assumed the council membership used institutional information given to them by the institutional research office. The underlying belief was leadership consults institutional information when making critical decisions regarding the future of their institution.

2. The secondary research study assumption was that the strategic planning council members would candidly disclose information, including their thoughts and feelings on whether and how institutional information influenced their strategic plan design decisions.

### Significance of the Study

Community colleges operate as organizations to provide higher education. Organizational governance models provide decision-making descriptions based on how an organization functions. Chester Barnard (1938) was first to place decision-making at the center of executive functions within organizations (Langley et al., 1995). Since Barnard's time, researchers continue to seek answers for how decisions are made within organizations (Langley, et al., 1995). The leaders' ability to make sound judgments in decision-making process will impact the future community colleges (Zeiss, 1986). Crucial to the decision-making process is the information decision-makers have available. This information is generated within these organizations by institutional

research offices. Delaney (1997) suggests institutional research offices role can be enhanced in decision-making. Institutional research might accomplish this goal through seeking an understanding of decision-makers' information needs and taking the initiative to provide an understanding for the data and studies relevance. Therefore, these offices may prove a great available asset to administrators (Zeiss, 1986).

Cope (1981) notes the need for research into the area of strategic planning focusing on the information used is necessary. The basic elements required for strategic planning, as described by Cope, include data on both the internal operations (especially strengths and weaknesses) and the external environment (especially threats and opportunities). Through the research conducted here, some understanding was gained regarding information necessary and practical for decision making. Understanding the strategic planning process provides insights into the institutional information used by decision-makers in determining the institution's future course and may assist other community college leaders in making decisions for their strategic planning.

#### Researcher's Perspective

I was interested in understanding how leaders utilize institutional information in strategic planning process decision-making process so that I might discover ways to encourage other leaders to consider using information generated by institutional research offices. As a former Director of Institutional Research and member of a strategic planning council for a community college, it was my responsibility to collect and generate institutional information for federal reporting, conduct surveys for the state and intra-organizational groups or individuals, answer data and information requests, and consider the future of a community college. These experiences raised questions in my

mind as to how institutional information was or could be used by leaders within the community college, particularly during planning processes. I would like to be able to assist decision-makers in using institutional information as they come to their decisions.

This project returned me to the community college I attended several decades ago and where I also was employed as an adjunct faculty member for several years. During my affiliation time, I was not actively involved in planning processes. Between August 2001 and May 2004, the time of the research study, I had no educational or employment affiliation with the study institution. I became interested in this research design after having moved from the state where this institution is located and also having served as a faculty member and on the administrative staff at another institution.

It was my hope this research study answered as well as raised new questions surrounding using institutional information by decision-makers in strategic planning.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study first explores organizational models and the decision-making processes for each model. Furthermore, the research studies examining decision-making for these models in the community college is also presented. Finally, the role institutional research takes in the decision-making process with regard to generating and supplying information will also be given. Section one defines decision-making and describes several organizational governance models and the decision-making processes used most often when studying higher education institutions. Section two presents research studies that explore organizational governance models and decision-making processes in the community college. The last section describes community college institutional research offices and the role these offices have in campus decision-making.

### Organizational Governance Models

Numerous models exist that describe the governance structure and decision making processes used in organizations (Angiello, 1997; Johnson, 1994). How decisions are made is related to an organization's structure (Angiello, 1997; Fryer & Lovas, 1991). This research focused on the decision-making process at one community college, the literature reviewed here explored organizational governance models most often used to describe higher education institutions and their decision-making processes. After an extensive organizational theories and governance in higher education review, Angiello (1997) concluded the bureaucratic, political, and collegial organizational models are most

commonly used. In addition to these models, the organized anarchy model was presented because it is commonly found in higher education institutional studies (Angiello, 1997). The four models were considered separately in this discussion. In practice, model combinations sometimes exist within higher education institutions (Benjamin & Kerchner, 1982; Giesecke, 1994). To follow is a decision-making definition and decision-making processes background information. This first section concludes with the bureaucratic, collegial, political, and organized anarchy organizational governance models and the decision-making processes as they operate within each model discussions.

### *Decision-Making Defined*

Organizational decision-making literature is consistent in defining decision-making: the process of selecting from alternatives resulting in a choice (Angiello, 1997; Baker, 1992; Feldman & Kanter, 1965; Fryer & Lovas, 1991; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1991; Taylor, 1965). It is the commitment to an action that completes the process (Langley et al., 1995). Thereby, decision-making is the process or causing of making a choice from alternatives.

### *Background to Decision-Making Processes*

When making a decision, the processes are the logical steps or methods a decision-maker employs to arrive at a choice. Decision-making processes are vital to any organization because decision-making is an important organizational function. How organizations make decisions can affect organizational objectives (Giesecke, 1994). Decision-making processes have been described as running along a continuum from the classical or rational model to the irrational or garbage can model (Langley, et al., 1995; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1991). The discussion here begins with the early classical/rational

model and describes why this model's decision-making process does not provide a realistic picture for higher education institutions.

The classical or rational decision-making model is an early model used to explain this phenomenon within organizations. It serves as the idealistic decision-making model. Other models that move away from the idealist circumstances for decision-making will also be presented. These have been classified as behavioral models and attempt to explain how decisions are made when the rational model is unable to explain decision-making.

As early as 1910, John Dewey introduced the decision-making concept as stages that conclude with a solution (Langley et al., 1995). Later, Simon (1960) established organizational theory research by presenting his decision-making model involving three activity phases; intelligence, design, and choice. Decision-making begins when the decision-maker uses intelligence to scan the environment in search of situations where decisions need to be made, designs and analyzes alternative activities that one might take, and finally chooses from those designs an action course.

Mintzberg (1976) used three stage phases or components to study organizational and administrative leaders' decisions. The first phase identifies where a problem or opportunity is pinpointed. The developmental phase formulates old or new designs of possible actions. Finally, the selection phase occurs when the solution is selected. Ducker (1974) designed a six step decision-making process. Defining the problem, analyzing problem, designing alternative solutions, selecting the best solution, converting the solution into an action, and monitoring and appraising the decision results. The specific steps or stages used in decision-making process assist in describing how an organization functions and are critical to understanding how organizational models function (Angiello,

1997). The underlying theme to decision-making processes is the range of rational thinking by the decision-maker(s) (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1991).

The common theme for describing decision-making is that a problem exists that needs a solution and a rational process can be used to find the solution. What varies in describing the decision-making processes within the organizational models is the amount of rationality present. Decision-making rationality has been broadly classified into two major categories, rational and behavioral (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1991).

#### *Classical/Rational Decision-Making Process*

Allison (1971) describes the classical/rational decision-making model as the rational actor model that operates under the group assumption that decisions are made rationally. Rational thought and action processes are involved during every decision-making process stage. Benjamin and Kerchner (1982) list stages a decision-maker goes through as “define common goals, select alternative means to reach those goals, weigh alternatives, assess risks, set priorities for actions, sequence tasks, and calculate probabilities for maximizing gain and minimizing losses” (p. 4). The belief is that actions result in efficient and effective decisions. The classical/rational decision-making model design assumes perfect information is known, all alternatives and their consequences are foreseen, and the decision-maker wants to maximize an objective (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 1991). Since these circumstances rarely exist within organizations, an alternative model attempts to explain situations where the decision-maker does not have an opportunity to implement rational thought and action processes during each decision-making step.

### *Behavioral Decision-Making Process*

The behavioral decision-making model describes situations when absolute rational processes are not possible, which is often the circumstance in higher education. Lunenberg and Ornstein (1991) describe this situation for school administrators by noting that they may be unaware of problems; may not seek all possible solutions; and “are limited by time constraints, cost, and the ability to process information” (p. 163). Simon (1976) used the phrase “bounded rationality” to explain what happens when a decision-maker does not have the perfect circumstances available to make the best decision. Feldman and Arnold (1983) discuss the main points of this concept. They note it is impossible to know all solutions, to know which alternative surpasses others with a favorable outcome, and to know the true nature of the problem. The consequence is that decisions are based on insufficient information. To deal with not having the ability to have perfect rational decision-making, Simon (1978) put forward the idea of “procedural rationality” where decision-makers look toward decision-making procedures. These procedures “are aimed at adequate acquisition and processing of relevant information” (Lunenberg & Ornstein, 1991, p. 165). Shaw’s (1980) behavioral model discusses the “retrospective rationality” concept with regard to decision-making. This occurs when the decision-maker justifies the decision after it has already been made. Johns (1983) notes that decision-makers tend to be defensive regarding their decisions. Furthermore, they like to take credit for good decisions and deny involvement when the outcome is not successful (Greenwald, 1980). Decision-making can also occur with small changes or “muddling through.” Lindblom (1959) calls this form of decision-making “incrementalizing.” Lunenburg and Ornstein (1991) explain this process as where a

sequence of alternatives are compared for making a decision takes place until an alternative is selected. Lastly, Cohen, March, and Olsen's (1972) garbage can model for decision-making is a part of the organized anarchy organizational governance model. This model describes situations at the opposite end of the continuum from the neatly ordered classical/rational to situations where problems and their solutions do not follow a logical steps sequence. Essentially, problems, solutions and the decision-makers are deposited and mixed into a so-called "garbage can" where these elements combine while not following a rational sequence.

Thus, decision-making processes describe the stages and the thought processes, as they fall along a continuum from rational to irrational. How these operate within an organization is a reflection of the institution's organizational structure. Relevant to this study were the decision-making processes taking place within these organizational structures. Therefore, the discussion presented defined each model, briefly discussed the model and how it has been used to describe higher education institutions, the decision-making processes operating within the model, and any critical comments found in the literature.

#### *The Bureaucratic Model*

The bureaucratic organizational governance model describes a formal organizational structure. It is also referred to as the organizational process model (Benjamin & Kerchner, 1982). A bureaucracy is generally defined as an organization that is formally and hierarchically structured that has numerous levels; this structure consists of rules and procedures; tasks, responsibilities and authority are distributed to the individuals, offices, or organization departments with the entire structure being held

together by the administration (Hirsch, Kett, & Trefil, 1988; Peabody & Rourke, 1965; Stroup, 1966).

The bureaucratic model developed from the work of Max Weber, the pioneer of bureaucratic theory. In *Economy and Society* (1922), Weber argued:

That a permanent, well-educated, conscientious, 'non-partisan,' Prussian-style bureaucracy professionally committed to implementing whatever decisions the legitimate rulers of the state might arrive at was the best organizational form yet discovered for the rational and efficient pursuit of collective social goals in a modern society with a *specialized* and highly efficient *division of labor*. (Johnson, 1994)

Even though Weber did not specifically mention higher education institutions in his work, the application of his bureaucratic theory concepts to academics evolved as these organizations became the focus of more research (Angiello, 1997). Blau (1973, 1974) and Stroup (1966) support the idea that higher education organizations operate as bureaucracies. Blau (1973) conducted research on universities and colleges comparing these organizations to government bureaus and concluded that there were similarities in their organizational structures. Stroup (1966) believes these institutions operate within a society that functions as a bureaucracy and higher education organizations mimic this structure. Furthermore, researchers argue this model operates within higher education institutions by pointing to their organizational characteristics, which define the organization as a bureaucracy.

The bureaucratic model's institutional characteristics are: having a clearly defined mission; having the underlying assumption of rational decision-making; hiring and promoting are based on an individual's qualifications; locating authority in top positions that then flows downward through the organization; and defining roles and tasks clearly (Angiello, 1997). Policy decisions are made within the upper echelon and communicated

through established channels. Angiello (1997) notes power in this model is equal to authority. The model's formal hierarchical nature is reflected in organizational tasks broken down into smaller units (Allison, 1971). Benjamin and Kerchner (1982) note specialists within the organization in smaller groups are then able to work on problem solving. The formal nature is also seen in the "roles, rules and routines as the keys to organizational actions" (Giesecke, 1994, p. 29). The decision-making processes are summarized as being rational and maximizing because

Rational decision making presumes that responsibility for a decision rests within a specific place in the organization structure and that authority commensurate with the scope of the decision has been delegated to a particular office holder or group ... the designated office holder makes the final decision. (Angiello, 1997, p. 188)

Furthermore, the bureaucratic model is based on the assumption that information is available for analysis use when determining possible alternative courses of action.

Angiello states this model is considered the most efficient and effective. Even so, critics believe the bureaucratic model does not adequately describe higher education institutions and the decision-making processes.

Coplen (1994) states although the bureaucratic organizational governance model may have dominated community colleges in the past, it is no longer appropriate for this organization. Other critics do not believe it provides the best overall decision-making description within higher education even though some institutional components operate bureaucratically. Bess (1988) states due to the variety and number of disciplines, information is unable to flow through the bureaucratic hierarchical structure. Hence, the collegial organizational governance model describes what some believe is the collective decision-making nature found within higher education organizations.

### *The Collegial Model*

The collegial model is also referred to as the “community of scholars” model. Goodman (1962) and Millet (1962, 1978, 1980) indicate no clear definition is used to describe the collegial model. Bess (1988) writes it can be a set of cultural norms and values, a decision-making structure, or the mode of interaction between faculty and administration. Baldrige (1971b, 1971c, 1977) and Baldrige, Curtis, Ecker and Riley (1977a, 1977b) interpret this model three ways. The first is a full participation in the academic organization and control is by members. Second, it is sometimes seen as an ideal educational institution that provides personalized attention. Last, the collegial model views authority not arising from one’s position within the organization but from faculty knowledge and professionalism. Even though a variety of interpretations exist, the collegial model is generally defined as scholars using consensus in the decision-making process (Angiello, 1997; Cellucci, 1989; Eastcott, 1977). The “community” consists of professionals whose roles may not always be clearly defined. Therefore, consensus is the manner faculty and administrators must use in order to make decisions. The power any one individual has within the decision-making process depends on that person’s professional competence for a particular decision (Eastcott, 1977).

The collegial model’s critics claim consensus may be difficult to reach in large and complex organizations, often the case for higher education institutions (Angiello, 1997). The inability to have consensus can make it difficult for an organization to accomplish its commonplace tasks. The collegial model received criticism from Baldrige (1971c). He believes the collegial model does not provide an adequate

decision-making process when operating in higher education institutions description.

Baldrige believes these institutions are better described using the political model.

### *The Political Model*

The political model is based on the decision-making group processes within organizations (Eastcott, 1977) and assumes complex organizations may be seen as miniature political systems (Baldrige, 1977), such as higher education institutions.

The political process model begins with the emergence of some issue which attracts the attention of various groups with competing interests. The first struggle is over where, that is, with which individual or group, the decision regarding this issue should rest. Next, the issue escalates and the question may become general question of authority as opposed to a specific issue. The interested parties may look for allies and form coalitions to work toward a common goal. Bargaining and negotiation take place; threats and coercion may be employed. Mediators may emerge. Eventually, compromise is reached and the decision is turned over to the authority structure, the bureaucracy, for implementation. (Angiello, 1997, p. 100)

This model grew from dissatisfaction with the purely classical rational model used to describe decision-making. This occurred because the rational model does not adequately explain decision-making in public institutions and does not explain power differences in organizations (Giesecke, 1994). The alternative perspective to the rational model was one that viewed the decision-making process as socially interactive. March and others in the early 1960s, collectively considered a subversive group, were the first to describe the political model (Langley, et al., 1995). Their work was the view that decision-making was collective. Emphasis was placed on how problems and solutions came out of organization parts and how these came together as decisions (Langley, et al., 1995). Baldrige (1971a), who is also considered to be one of the first to compare higher education institutions to political structures, notes that the complex organizational

structures produces sub-cultures with their own interests that use pressure, power, and force in the decision-making process. In this model,

The organization is described as a coalition of diverse interests. Organizations have multiple goals while participants are seen as having consistent, yet different goals. Behavior is purposeful and individuals act to achieve their own objectives. However, because the decision-making process involves multiple participants with conflicting objectives, decision makers may be uncertain as to how any given action will impact the process. (Giesecke, 1994, p. 33)

Therefore, power results from one's ability to influence the membership in successful decision-making groups, such as, the governing elite (Angiello, 1997; Eastcott, 1977). The result is the decision-making process is filled with negotiations and bargaining along with political influence (Angiello, 1997; Eastcott, 1977). To sum, the political model moves away from the formal and rational decision-making structures and emphasizes the active nature of individuals when decisions are made in organizations. Moving even farther away from the rational decision model is the organized anarchy organizational governance model that considers decision-making to take place in a chaotic state or "garbage can."

#### *The Organized Anarchy Model*

The organized anarchy model is based on the view that organizations have unclear goals, individuals in the organization do not know how their behavior will impact outcomes, and interests are generally fluid and changing (Giesecke, 1994). This model developed from the idea that purely rational decision-making is almost impossible for educational leaders to conduct. This model was an early attempt to understand why decision-making processes were not orderly: specifically, why some organizations lack clear goals, why ambiguity exists around objectives, why technology is unpredictable, and why there are obscure methods for evaluation and feedback (Benjamin & Kerchner,

1982). Cohen and March (1974) believe since higher education institutions do not have goals that are well defined and are inconsistent and ambiguous, authority centralization in a bureaucratic system is limited. They believe individuals pay attention part of the time to part of what is going on and this complicates decision-making. Benjamin and Kerchner (1982) agree with the view that the educational organizations operate within what Cohen et al. (1972) describe as the garbage can model.

The garbage can decision-making processes model occurs when a problem is mixing with various solutions and participants and causes chaotic decision-making (Cohen et al., 1972). Decisions come from one of four “streams” (problems, solutions, participants, and choice opportunities) that operate independently in an organization (Cohen & March, 1974). The “mixing of problems, solutions, and decision participants results in interaction patterns leading to decisions that often do not follow the classical decision-making model sequence” (Lunenberg & Ornstein, 1991, p. 166). Stress is viewed as the overriding factor influencing how decisions are made. Due to the chaotic nature of organizations, individuals pursue their own goals and decisions are made based on timing (Giesecke, 1994). Solutions attach themselves to the problems in the “garbage can” (Angiello, 1997).

The organized anarchy model is criticized because it is often used as a scapegoat to explain what cannot be explained: “Whatever researchers fail to understand using more traditional theories can be safely dumped into the garbage can” (Langley, et al., 1995, p. 262).

The organized anarchy, political, collegial, and bureaucratic organizational governance models are used often in higher education to describe organizational

structures. The other purpose for which these models are used is when studying organizations, including higher education institutions in an attempt to explain decision-making processes. Research exploring organizational governance models to explain how decisions are made in the community college are explored in the following section.

### *Decision-Making Research for the Community College*

Few studies explore organizational governance models in an attempt to explain community college decision-making. The general consensus derived from the research is that one organizational governance model alone usually does not explain community college decision-making processes. Individual studies are discussed in this section. Presented first are those studies that included both the community college and university; next are those that investigated more than one community college; and finally, those studies that focused on a single community college.

Some researchers considered the community college and university together when they investigated the decision-making process and organizational structures. Benjamin and Kerchner (1982) included participants from California higher education institutions, half of whom represented community colleges. This study explored the decision-making models individuals had in mind regarding a public policy on early childhood education. The 22 participants were given a 15 key component description of 4 decision-making models: the rational, bureaucratic, political, and garbage can. A structured Q-sort was used to collect responses. For this method, the researchers designed cards that had statements that were presorted by an expert judges panel. The participants were given the cards and asked to sort them into piles that described their decision-making experience. A score was generated for each participant for each model. These individuals participated in

a post-sort interview regarding their decision event experience, the theories, outcomes of the decisions, and their thoughts on the Q-sort technique.

Benjamin and Kerchner (1982) caution against the generalizability of their results because they believe if the organizational setting had been different, the participants' perceptions would have been different. They found state employees, office of education workers, and representatives of the university chancellor's office viewed policy decision-making as rational. Furthermore, Benjamin and Kerchner affirmed multiple decision mode research and writing that states individuals have varying ideas for what they are doing. When making decisions, individuals bring varying decision ideas to the decision-making process. Finally, they found individuals are capable of effortless integration of various decision-making models into their minds.

Dougan (1984) used both the community college and university as the setting for an investigation into decision-making processes through organizational governance models. His study focused on the political model, which he compared to the bureaucratic and collegial models. The study participants were officers from business, academic, and student affairs at private and public baccalaureate degree granting institutions and public community colleges. A randomly selected sample was mailed a survey that posed several critical incidents, each describing problems in higher education. Using two-way analysis of variance for significant differences, he found the political decision-making model was not the dominant model used for decision-making by these administrators. Dougan did find the political, bureaucratic, and collegial models were useful decision-making frameworks. Additionally, he found academic and business officers did not differ significantly with regard to using the bureaucratic model and were more likely to use this

model than the officers from the student affairs offices. The participants from the public institutions did not differ significantly when using the political model and were more likely to use this model than those participants at private institutions. Those individuals who were employed as business affairs officers were more bureaucratic in their decision-making; academic affairs officers were more bureaucratic and collegial; student affairs officers were more collegial in their decision-making.

To sum, one model alone was not able to explain the decision-making processes occurring at these higher education institutions. While the studies of Benjamin and Kerchner (1982) and Dougan (1984) included participants from the community college and university, other researchers have focused their attention on the community college. Next the studies that explore more than one community college are reviewed.

Hunn (1991) examined administrators and faculty perceptions at two Kentucky community colleges to determine the governance structure and opinions on how the institutions were managed. The political, bureaucratic, and collegial organizational governance models were the focus of her analysis. She used a survey instrument and analyzed it using a Chi-square test. Hunn concluded the two community colleges did not conform to any of the three models explored. Even so, faculty and administrators at one institution did have significant differences in their opinions on decision-making issues.

White (1991) studied decision-making and governance structures for a state mandated program review for two Florida community colleges. He applied three organizational governance models: bureaucratic, political, and organized anarchy. These along with policy implementation views were analyzed using the case study research design that included extensive interviews. He used content analysis to analyze the data

collected. The results suggest the decision-making process is complex, and it is difficult for one model to describe the behaviors of these organizations. Even so, White concluded that political and anarchic behavior rather than bureaucratic were more commonly found for how decisions were made around the state mandated review program for these colleges.

In an analysis of decision-making in community college districts in Texas, Ball (1994) designed 12 vignettes that were considered by respondents who classified the vignettes as reflecting either the collegial, political, or bureaucratic models. He designed a computer coding system to classify approximately 500 individual vignette responses as belonging to either of the models. The results indicate the decision-making processes in the community college districts were very complex. Ball did find older districts tended to use the bureaucratic model more than younger ones. Even though it was possible to assign a particular model to an individual's response to a single vignette, it was impossible to assign a model to an individual decision type.

Abungah (1996) investigated the relationship between community college culture, decision-making processes, and organizational effectiveness using the bureaucratic, collegial, political, and anarchy organizational governance models. Two-year colleges in the Houston Metropolitan Area were studied. Abungah surveyed a stratified random sample of full-time faculty and administrators. Multiple regression analyses were used to analyze the survey responses. Among other findings, Abungah found "a significant number of respondents felt that their college was not only using collegial decision models but also anarchic models to make decisions" (p. 127).

Narrowing the study site focus, Caldwell (1981) conducted an ethnographic field study at a single institution. She examined the bureaucratic, participational (collegial), and political models with regard to professional/bureaucratic interactions between the college president and the institution's board of trustees and what variables were critical to their interactions. The data collection sources included interviews, observations and document analyses to gain an understanding of the relationship between the president and board. The results indicate classical bureaucratic theory operated within the sphere of influence occupied by the board of trustees and the sphere of influence occupied by the president and administration was rational, programmed, unencumbered, and nonprescriptive.

Jackson (1983) looked at the decision-making process used in the Essex County College, New Jersey governance structure. Baldrige's political governance structure model was examined. Jackson's case study used interviews, questionnaires, document study, and participant observation. The information acquired from these sources was analyzed looking for any common threads of concerns, perceptions, and historical perspective regarding the college's governance structure. It was found that shared decision-making was able to keep tension and conflict to a minimum during turbulent times at Essex County College.

Also focusing on one community college, Cellucci (1989) conducted a decision-making processes case study for admissions placement testing procedures. The decision-making processes were compared with the bureaucratic, collegial, and political organizational governance models. She used data from key informant interviews, participant observations, and written documents. Cellucci found aspects from the three

organizational models present in the admissions placement testing procedures decision-making process. When she triangulated the research data, Cellucci concluded the bureaucratic model seemed to best describe decision-making processes at the college studied.

To sum, decision-making processes studied through organizational governance models for community colleges suggests more than one model generally functions within these institutions. Central to decision-making is the information that individuals have available for use in decision-making. Community colleges have become aware the information generated from their institutional research offices has a role in the decision-making process. This role will be examined in the next section.

#### *Institutional Research in the Community College*

The following discussion first presents a definition for institutional research. The discussion explores the historical development of community college institutional research offices. This is followed by an examination into the role of institutional research offices and the types of research conducted through these offices. The institutional research discussion concludes with an analysis of the decision-making process at the community college.

#### *Institutional Research Defined*

Those who have written about institutional research have defined it in various ways. Roueche and Boggs (1969) reflect on other researchers' works to define institutional research "as research conducted by an institution for obtaining information to use in making plans and solving its problems" (p. 107). Saupe (1990) refers to it as the research conducted by higher education institutions to provide information to support

planning, policy formation, and decision-making. Middaugh (1990) takes the perspective institutions are continually changing; therefore, institutional research must be described with a working definition. At the time of Middaugh's work, institutional research was defined as the total activities that empirically describe all colleges and universities functions (educational, administrative, and support). The research activities explore the functions from inside and outside the institution using data collection and analytical analyses to support the decision-making process. The Association for Institutional Research (AIR) supports the institutional researcher profession and operates to aid in the understanding, planning, and operation of higher education by institutional researchers, planners, and decision-makers (AIR, 2003). To sum, institutional research is information generated and analyzed then used by colleges and universities in making decisions. The next section outlines how institutional research and their offices developed in the community college.

### *Historical Development of Institutional Research*

Higher education institutions increased in number after World War II, resulting in the growth of institutional research as an administrative function. During this period, pressure was being placed upon higher education managers to provide direction for growing institutions and account for human, financial, and physical resources the institutions were receiving to justify continued support (Peterson, 1999). The pressure was evident for the community college and in the increased institutional research office responsibilities. The 1950s brought data reporting responsibilities to administrators. The 1960s saw the beginning "of state and federal reporting requirements associated with civil rights guidelines, along with accountability for financial aid and vocational program

funding, created opportunities for interpretation of the new data beyond the 'counting' activities initially carried out by registrars" (Losak, 1994, p. 302). The 1970s economic recession placed efficiency demands on these institutions where the institutional research role became more evaluative and quantitative. During this time, Alfred (1976) observed, "institutional research has become more sensitive to the need for empirical information pertaining to the characteristics of the community college as an organization responsive to community and legislative agencies" (p. 2). The demands for quality in the 1980s developed the need for analytical and comparative studies and planning and policy analyses by institutional research offices. Banks and Colby (1989) note this decade saw almost all states mandating accountability measures to assess and document educational performance. Accountability was accomplished through colleges performing any of the following research, "a longitudinal approach to measure institutional or program effects on student outcomes; assess student performance in transfer, vocational and basic skills programs; or evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the college's instructional programs and student services as they relate to the effectiveness of the institution" (Banks & Colby, 1989, p. 2). Since the 1990s, colleges have had educational challenges placed upon them that have led to institutional redesign of these institutions. Institutional research offices have become the industries analyst that is anticipatory and proactive (Peterson, 1999). Furthermore, the outcomes assessment movement has become an important higher education topic. Nichols (1990) wrote assessment continues to grow and institutional research offices will be presented with opportunities to expand their role. These offices more than likely will accomplish this when being placed in the spotlight for institutional scrutiny because of greater demands placed on their office. Nichols adds the

difficult outcomes assessment and the need for skills that may not exist within a research office, will further present opportunities for these offices to grow and develop. The need for more higher education institutional research is evidenced by the expansion of the institutional research office role. The role that these offices play within the community college's organizational structure will be discussed in the next section.

### *Role of Institutional Research Offices*

In the last 50 years community college accountability demands have forced these higher education institutions to assess and provide evidence for an educational function. Many colleges have responded by developing, expanding, and refining institutional research offices. Institutional research's role is diverse and varies from institution to institution (Losak, 1994; Matlock & Hogg, 1978). Oftentimes, the role is determined by the organizational structure (Matlock & Hogg, 1978). For example, if the office is located in the college's academic division, it will probably be more involved in research specific to academics. The institutional research role has expanded from documenting student demographics and program review to institutional assessment and evaluation of its overall effectiveness (Banks & Colby, 1989). Matier et al. (1994) provide an institutional research expanded role summary and point out the main institutional research purpose is to support decision-making.

Institutional researchers collect, compile, manipulate, analyze, synthesize, report and disseminate a vast array of vital data pertaining to a particular institution. A significant component of this function is the reporting of census and quasi-assessment data to comply with the demand of external regulatory agencies at the national and state levels that are also often of value in informing internal planning and decision making processes. In addition, voluntary data sharing consortia as well as routine and ad hoc surveys that come from hither and yon most naturally fall within the purview of institutional research offices to coordinate or complete. (p. 8)

Institutional researchers do more than gather data and design reports: they play an important role in determining which issues will be brought to the attention of the institution and “what is known – and not known – about those issues” (Nichols, 1990, p. 10). Losak (1994) believes institutional research can be more effective if it works with a college president who sees the decision-making data value. The specific types of research conducted by institutional research are discussed next.

### *Types of Research Conducted*

Quantitative and qualitative research generated through institutional research offices are conducted for numerous reasons and takes on a variety of research forms (Saupe, 1990). One form of applied research is designed to answer questions regarding planning, policy, or decision-making. Institutional research is sometimes evaluative. Under this form, information is used to review and make programs or organizational parts judgments. Another research form is basic research. This occurs when incidental findings from another project or research undertaken without a specific question or problem where general institutional information is gleaned. Institutional research may also take a problem identification form where it identifies areas that may be cause of concern. Through action research, when the institutional researcher is an integral part of the project beginning with problem identification and ending with recommendations implementation, institutional research has the ability to have an impact. Finally, it may be found in policy analysis decisions. Regardless of the institutional research form, it is considered as an introspective process to explore what is known about the different institutional parts (Losak, 1994).

Many research study types are conducted by institutional research offices. Roueche and Boggs (1969) describe these as studies conducted by institutional research offices falling into one of the following seven categories: students, faculty, instruction, curriculum and programs, student personnel services, institutional operations, and other (e.g. campus environment). Research requests may be separated into reporting and empirical research projects. Reporting projects focus on responding to federal, state, or institutional offices and/or agencies for information. For example, the Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) of the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) collects basic data that identify, describe, count students, monitor changes, and provide information for policymakers at postsecondary institutions. “The data can be used for peer analysis; for sampling postsecondary institutions; and for decision-making” (IPEDS, p. 1). Other research projects examples conducted by institutional research offices include state and institutional surveys on students and faculty.

Institutional research offices also respond to empirical research questions aimed at addressing specific informational needs. Empirical research is generally undertaken for one of two reasons. The first “is to accumulate knowledge that will apply to a particular problem in need of solution or to a condition in need of improvement.” (Johnson, Joslyn & Reynolds, 2001, pp. 2-3). For example, a data request on enrollment statistics over time to explore trends in this area. This is often referred to as applied research. Hart (2000) describes the applied research purpose and features as producing recommendations or solutions to problem(s) faced by people. Johnson et al. (2001) point to the knowledge gained as being used in altering real-world conditions or situations.

Johnson, et al. (2001) describe another reason to conduct empirical research is for intellectual curiosity. This is referred to as pure, theoretical, or recreational research. For example, research used to answer questions regarding student enrollment numbers in particular programs for an academic year.

To sum, the increasing accountability demands made on community college's from internal and external forces have led these institutions to use research-based institutional information for reporting and also when making decisions. Blai (1973) believes the effort to encourage research findings use is vital to the institutional research effort. Lewis and Barr (1988) advocate the institutional research use for colleges' to answer questions about the institution, and for trustees and administrators to use institutional research for informed decision-making and policy formation. Research studies into how institutional research information has been used in decision-making processes at community colleges will be explored in the next section.

#### *Institutional Research Information and Decision-Making in the Community College*

The community college research literature presents studies that explore institutional research, the information institutional research generates, and how institutional information is used in decision-making processes. The research literature discussed in this section has been arranged into one of four categories. The four categories describing institutional information when making decisions are: the role of institutional research decision-making; the kinds and sources of institutional information used for decision-making; the availability of institutional research information for decision-making; and the relationship between institutional research and decision-making for planning. Some studies presented explored this phenomenon not only at the

community college, but also at the university at the same time and are included in the discussion.

*The Role of Institutional Research in Decision-making*

Swanson (1965), Garbinski (1982), Rowh (1988), and Matsen (1991) each explored the role of institutional research in decision-making. Their findings suggest institutional research is used to support some community college decision-making.

The earliest study found investigating institutional research and its role in the decision-making process was Swanson (1965). His study concerned developments in and plans for junior college institutional research. He sent an inquiry form to all two-year institutional chief administrators that were listed in the 1962 American Association of Junior Colleges directory. The responses analyzed came from approximately one-half of the institutions belonging to this association. Swanson also visited six colleges to study their institutional research programs. One investigation area was into how institutional research findings were used. With regard to this study area, he found “Two out of three colleges used findings in making decisions, in improving instruction, in establishing policies and procedures, in establishing goals, in preparing for accreditation, and in planning for future needs” (p. 183). Swanson also found that institutional research findings were not well distributed, there was little use of the information at the local or interinstitutional level and little institutional research was used for long-term planning. He observed “studies were typically initiated ‘on the spur of the moment’ to provide a basis for immediate decision making” (p. 186).

Garbinski (1982) identified and analyzed the influences on decision making and institutional research services, as some of the variables affecting decision making. Chief

administrative officers from the Middle States Association (including junior and community colleges) were randomly selected to participate. A mail questionnaire asking them to describe their decision making posed hypothetical situations. Garbinski (1982) found “the role and influence of institutional research in decision making remains unclear” (p. 99).

In order to study institutional research and its role in decision-making, Rowh (1988) examined the institutional research job roles in two-year colleges accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. Surveys were sent to 326 institutions, 301 responded (92.3%). The findings supported the hypothesis that a significant difference existed in the duties performed by institutional researchers and the ones they thought they should be performing. Rowh found one factor that contributed to the difference between what institutional researchers were doing and what they thought they ought to be doing was the institutional researchers’ projects were not used often enough to support decision-making.

Similar to the research conducted by Rowh (1988), Matsen (1991) also examined the roles of information providers (institutional researchers and administrative computing professionals). This study investigated these roles at three Pacific Northwest community colleges. Surveys and in-depth interviews were included in this case study. Matsen concluded information providers role characteristics are related to the college’s culture. Additionally, some computer information systems used at these colleges might not be appropriate for some decision-making cultures. Matsen noted that most administrators wanted someone to interpret computer information systems data by turning raw data into information that could then be used when making decisions. Nevertheless, Matsen found

qualitative information was found to be more important in the decision-making process than quantitative data.

*The Kinds and Sources of Institutional Information used for Decision-making*

Sandness (1969), Putnam (1994), and Mann (2001) studied the kinds and sources of institutional information used for decision-making. Their findings suggest that while numerous institutional information studies types are available for decision-making, decision-makers may have difficulty finding the data they need to make decisions and their decision-making may be tied to their level of confidence with who produced and presented the information.

Sandness (1969) examined data kinds and sources used in decision-making processes by college and university presidents who were American Association of State Colleges and Universities members. The presidents were asked to respond to a questionnaire regarding their usual organizing and gathering data for making decisions practices. They were asked questions either regarding information types they used for decision-making or who had the responsibility for making information available. Sandness found studies using institutional data were in the areas of student studies, budget analysis, curriculum analysis, faculty characteristics, institutional projections, and space utilization were those regularly reviewed by presidents when making decisions. Reports generated from off-campus sources like state coordinating bodies were also helpful when making decisions. However, there were no set patterns for gathering data. Furthermore, Sandness found no overall pattern that would suggest who had the responsibility for providing data to the president and that they had difficulty finding data

for decisions. Even so, the institutional research office reported having the responsibility for preparing data for long-range planning.

The role of formal and informal information sources for three small private colleges' trustees over the issue of whether these institutions should close, merge, or attempt to survive as they existed, were studied by Putnam (1994). This multiple case study analysis examined minutes from meetings, interviews with trustees, and the results from a detailed survey of all board members to gain insight into how the trustees would make their decision on the fate of these institutions. Putnam found the formal and informal information sources were vital in decision-making during a crisis situation. Even so, the confidence level held by the board members for the information was tied to who produced and presented the information, the college's presidential leadership role, and the members' personal and emotional investments created the decision-making process. Putnam summarizes the decision-making processes as non-linear and unpredictable.

In 2001, Mann conducted an exploratory study to describe, compare, and analyze specific kinds of data used for decision-making by 19 community colleges, located in 4 states. He constructed a decision-making survey that was intended to identify the data types used by administrators when making decisions and calculated frequencies, descriptive statistics, factor analysis, bivariate correlations, and ANOVA. Mann used a modified version of an organizational effectiveness assessment instrument. He found administrators of more effective colleges relied upon objective data more so than subjective data for decision-making; administrators of less effective institutions relied on subjective data; both the effective and less effective colleges relied on a mix of input, process, and output data in making decisions; and that the administrator's experience,

college size and complexity, and gender had an impact on perceptions of effectiveness and data use.

*The Availability of Institutional Research Information for Decision-making*

Roueche and Boggs (1969) examined the availability of institutional research information for decision-making. The results of their study suggest that given the number of decisions made at colleges, little direction for making decisions came from institutional research. The role and influence institutional research has on decision-making is unclear. Green (1988) explored data availability and usefulness and found an administrator's tenure influenced whether data was useful.

In 1969, Roueche and Boggs created information that would indicate the institutional research studies availability for decision-making and planning, describe the emphasis of this research, and what factors influence the number of institutional research studies conducted. A stratified random sample of colleges listed in the 1967 Junior College Directory was taken based on enrollment size and control (private or public). Roueche and Boggs found the reports generated by institutional research offices were non-specific and fell into these categories; students, faculty, instruction, curriculum and programs, student personnel services, institutional operations, and other. They concluded, considering the number of decisions made at colleges for planning and problem solving, minimal direction came from institutional research.

Green (1988) surveyed Stillman College administrators to determine their perceptions on availability and usefulness of current and historic institutional data. Using a Likert-type scale, Green calculated group means on a usefulness scale and conducted an analysis of variance for significant differences among three administrative level groups.

Green found an administrator's tenure influenced whether or not data was useful. Green suggests administrators need access to data whether or not it is useful for planning and decision-making.

*The Relationship Between Institutional Research and Decision-making  
for Planning Decisions*

Chalker (1980) and Tosh (1996) studied the relationship between institutional research and decision-making focusing on planning. Their work found institutional research offices can be more involved when decisions are made and there is not a strong connection between the use of research data and planning/decision-making for a particular program on one college's campus.

Chalker (1980) surveyed rural junior colleges that were accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. This study attempted to identify the relationship between institutional research and the planning structure along with determining the role of institutional research at these colleges, among other items studied. Selected junior college presidents in the Southeast were sent a survey. The results were analyzed using totals, percentages, chi-square, and by enrollment figures. Chalker found the institutional research office was a supplier of information for decision-making and could be more involved in decision-making processes.

Focusing on one large urban community college campus in the northeast, Tosh (1996) explored research data use as the foundation for the planning/decision-making process along with what types of data were being used. This qualitative study was based on the Cooley and Bickel (Tosh, 1996) Model of Decision-Oriented Educational Research. The 12 faculty and administrators involved with the developmental education program were interviewed twice regarding their data role perceptions for the

developmental education program planning/decision-making processes. Tosh found although faculty and administrators thought the data useful and interesting, there was not a strong connection between the research data use and the planning/decision-making processes. She notes the lack of data did not prevent decisions from being made, and that decisions were based on intuition, anecdotal information, and consensus.

In conclusion, the community college literature explores the institutional research role, the institutional information it supplies for decision-making, the availability of institutional research information for decision-making, and the relationship between institutional research and decision-making for planning decisions. The findings suggest institutional research is used to support some decision-making. However, little was used for long-term planning and projects were not used often enough to support decision-making. Furthermore, although much institutional information was available for decision-making, decision-makers had difficulty locating the information necessary to make decisions. Finally, previous research has not found a strong connection between institutional information and the planning/decision-making processes at community colleges. Even so, decision-making occurs and is often based on intuition, anecdotal information, and consensus. The literature, however, has not focused on the use of information from institutional research for an entire campus' strategic planning process. This study will increase understanding of the role institutional research information plays in decision-making by exploring a single community college's use of institutional information for strategic planning decision-making.

## CHAPTER 3: METHOD

The case study research project purpose was to better understand how one community college's leaders used institutional information when making decisions for their strategic planning process. Of particular interest was how decision-makers used institutional information to shape their decisions while establishing strategic priorities. The study goals were to explore the strategic planning process and evaluate how information was used for decision-making. The study described the strategic planning process and how it operated; discovered the types of institutional information available and how leaders used this information to make strategic plan decisions; and gained insight into how using institutional information during the strategic planning process impacted the college's decision-making processes.

### Research Design

A qualitative design was chosen for several reasons. First, I entered the research process, as the instrument through which the data was collected and analyzed. I conducted the interviews and coded the data using constant comparative analysis. I incorporated the information contained in the documents into the analysis. Second, I created a field log, interview journal, and reflexive journal that were used when I interpreted the data. Third a qualitative design was selected for this particular study because I had available sufficient time and resources to complete the research project. The college being studied had not placed time restrictions on my access to campus.

Fourth, I had time available to conduct the research and financial resources for travel to the campus in order to conduct in-person interviews. The institution's receptivity allowed for a qualitative design. The college's willingness was evidenced by the fact that the institution had granted permission to pursue the study. The fifth reason a qualitative design was selected was that findings were presented from the individuals who were directly involved in the college's strategic plan development and design perspective. This research presents a complex, holistic picture based on the analysis that reports how I understood the individuals who participated in the strategic planning process views (Creswell, 1994, 1998; McMillian & Schumacher, 1997; Merriam & Simpson, 1995).

In addition to the five reasons a qualitative research approach was selected, several aspects made the case study design appropriate. A case study: is an exploration of a "bounded system" and sheds light on a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community in its real life context; it uses in-depth data collection; it results in detailed and rich information; and it provides a foundation for future research (Creswell, 1998; Gall, Borg & Gall, 1996; Leavitt, 2001; Merriam & Simpson, 1995; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). This research case study evaluated and described Institutional Information Community College's (IICC's) strategic planning process as a bounded system. The study examined the strategic planning process and how institutional information was used by individuals involved in the strategic planning process to make decisions. Adhering further to the case study design, the study used interviews, documents, and journals for in-depth data collection. As a case study, the results contain detailed and rich information about using institutional information when making decisions in the strategic planning process by IICC's leaders. The case study also

provides a foundation for future research inquiries regarding an institutions decision-making using institutional information for strategic planning processes.

The community college studied is located in the Midwestern United States. IICC's 18 Strategic Planning Council members were invited to participate, 10 agreed and were interviewed. Interview data was analyzed using constant comparative analysis. Additional research data was collected from documents.

### Research Questions

This study answered four questions regarding IICC's strategic planning process.

The following are the research questions:

1. How did IICC's strategic planning process develop?
2. How did IICC's strategic planning process operate?
3. What was the institutional information used by IICC's Strategic Planning Council?
4. How was the institutional information used by IICC's Strategic Planning Council?

### Participants

Seventy-three people, representing all staff categories, were involved in IICC's strategic plan development. Eighteen served as Strategic Planning Council members, the remaining fifty-five served on the council's work groups. The individuals invited to participate in this study were 18 Strategic Planning Council members. Representatives from faculty, executive- and mid-level administrators (including the Director of Institutional Research and Planning), classified staff, and the Board of Trustees served on the council.

The decision to invite the 18 Strategic Planning Council members to participate in the study was purposeful based on the belief that they had the information necessary to answer the study research questions (Creswell, 1994; Merriam & Simpson, 1995; Patton, 1990). The preferred purposeful sampling strategy as described by McMillan and Schumacher (1997) was chosen since it is a comprehensive sampling strategy where “every participant, group, setting, event, or other relevant information is examined” (p. 398). It was expected that this small sample size would allow for in-depth IICC strategic planning process analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The participants were invited to participate through an email or hard-copy letter describing the project sent directly from the institution. This letter was followed by an email or hard-copy letter (Appendix A) from me that described the project and asked them to contact me directly if they chose to participate. After they volunteered to participate, the participants worked with me to establish time and place for their interview. Ten Strategic Planning Council members volunteered.

#### *Site Selection*

When I began the project I had written several general questions in my reflexive journal. What is the use of statistical data in decision-making at community colleges? How is statistical data (research information) implemented for decision-making at community colleges? What is the role of research in decision-making at community colleges? Is research the basis for decision-making at community colleges?

With these questions in mind, I began the process of seeking an institution for study. I sought a community college that had an office of institutional research, was an active participant in the national scene, had received national recognition, and was

considered progressive within the community college community. I attended several national conferences where I sought nationally recognized community colleges that were considered leaders by peer institutions. Several institutions were identified that professed to use information for decision-making. By coincidence, IICC, which I attended and also taught at for several years as an adjunct faculty member fit the study site description. It was a convenient location for me to travel to and from. I decided to ask IICC if I could examine through a case study whether the college was making decisions based on institutional information. It had been nearly seven years since I had contact with the college.

I approached IICC regarding possibly conducting research on its campus. In August 2001, I telephoned the college's President and explained my interest in conducting a study regarding decision-making and using statistical data at that institution. The president was willing to meet. I followed-up our phone conversation with a letter describing my doctoral program, and educational and professional backgrounds, and a short description of my research project. I proposed that the research would include questionnaires given to formal and informal leaders at the college who would be asked to point to the five most important decisions (mostly likely limited to the academic arena) that had impacted the campus within the past three to five years. I thought several described decisions might then be explored further to understand the role research based data had in the making decisions process.

The project topic specifics developed over time through several conversations between the institution and myself. In September 2001, I traveled to the site and met with the college's President. At this meeting, we discussed my proposed project. I presented

the idea to explore important decisions made at the college in recent years. The President was concerned about how and who would be interviewed. During our meeting, the President brought in an individual, who later became the project's on-site coordinator, who the President thought might be interested in my project. This person was indeed interested in my idea to study using institutional information for decision-making and wanted more project details. The three of us then focused our discussion on perhaps my using one decision-making incident for the analysis. It was suggested that I meet at another time with the site coordinator and the college's Institutional Research and Planning Office. The college requested a copy of my dissertation proposal and we set another meeting date.

A phone conference between the site coordinator, Director of Institutional Research and Planning and myself took place in October 2001. I sent a copy of my dissertation project proposal to IICC. The college requested a one-page condensed version to present to the college's Executive Leadership Team for consideration. In December 2001, I presented the case study purpose, the proposed methodology, and potential benefits to IICC if it participated in my research project.

During the first few 2002 months, I contacted the college on several occasions with no response regarding the project. I was resigned to the fact that gaining access to the site was at a stand still and might not happen. In early April, I contacted the college's President as a follow-up and noted that the project was not moving forward. I was immediately telephoned by the site coordinator. It was suggested I change the study focus from a broad perspective on decision-making and focus my attention on IICC's recently completed strategic planning process. The college was interested in having me study its

strategic planning process and how information was used for decision-making. Since I was interested in studying using information for decision-making, we were able to agree on the project's focus. Information was an important part of IICC strategic planning process and the college wanted to know how information was used by its Strategic Planning Council.

In early April 2002 I received a confirmation letter from IICC's President that granted permission to conduct my dissertation research project on its campus. "The college is willing to examine the use of data in the decision-making that occurred during our strategic planning process, which took place over the past year" (IICC's President, personal communication, April 12, 2002). The topic area parameters and recommendation to interview IICC Strategic Planning Council were outlined.

In May 2002 an in-person meeting took place between the site coordinator, Director of Institutional Research and Planning, and myself. The project parameters were reviewed and we discussed possible interview questions. I was given general background information about the strategic planning process. The site coordinator requested an interview guide for IICC's review. I spent the next year preparing for entrance into the field. I worked with IICC on the project proposal development and interview guide design. Additionally, I sought and received dissertation project approval from my dissertation committee and Colorado State University's Human Research Committee. By June 2003 I was ready to begin field work. The case study project findings are presented in Chapter 4.

I was able to reconstruct the site selection account from my notes in my reflexive journal. I kept detailed notes for phone conversations, meetings, and my thoughts as I prepared to enter the field.

#### Data Collection

Data collection included the following techniques: interviews, document analysis, and reflexive journal (Creswell, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Patton, 1990; 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1989). Creswell (1998) points out the initial procedure for a case study is gaining access to the site. I gained access to IICC through the college's president who introduced me to the person who has been the study's site coordinator. The site coordinator's confidence was earned as we worked together to determine the study's focus and scope. The site coordinator worked on my behalf to gain permission from IICC's President for campus access. The coordinator provided continued support and assistance for my gaining access to Strategic Planning Council members. The coordinator committed and supplied relevant strategic planning process documents copies for my analysis.

Data collection continued until at least one of four criteria for ending data collection presented by Lincoln and Guba (1985) occurred. They describe these criteria as being: there is a sources exhaustion, there is category saturation, there is regularities emergence, or there is overextension. Three criteria occurred while I was studying IICC's strategic planning process. First sources exhaustion occurred when not much more relevant information to the institution's strategic planning process understanding was gained from other information sources, such as, interviews or documents. Second, category saturation occurred when coding categories were well established and additional

information collection only added small information pieces to what has already been learned about IICC's strategic planning process. Third regularities emerged when consistent information appeared in the results data analysis for the case study chronology and using institutional information for decision-making discussion.

### *Interviews*

I made three site visits to IICC's campus and conducted face-to-face interviews with 10 of the 18 Strategic Planning Council members. The visits were made in September, October, and December 2003. All but one interview took place on campus in either the participant's office or a meeting room. The off-campus interview was conducted at the participant's employment place office. I used the study's Interview Guide (Appendix B). I reviewed the guide and glanced at it casually for reminder prompts as I interviewed each participant. The interview time ranged from approximately ½ hour to 1 ½ hours. Eight of the 10 interviews lasted approximately one full hour. All interviews were voice recorded using a standard tape recorder and digital voice recorder. Compact discs (CDs) were generated from the digital voice recorder via a computer and CD burner. The tapes and CDs were then given to a professional transcriptionist. This project employed two transcriptionists who were not affiliated with the study institution. Each transcribed five interviews. The second transcriptionist was employed since the first became unavailable. The interviews were transcribed verbatim onto a word processor. I verified the transcripts by listening to the CDs and reading through each typed transcript. The occasional typographical or transcription error was noted and corrected.

## *Documents*

Documents were used as a data collection source. IICC agreed to and provided numerous documents. IICC's approximately 190 page *1996 Self-Study Report* contained a brief college history, college and community profiles, accreditation history, self-study purposes, organizational structure, responses to 1986 Evaluation Team Report, general institutional accreditation requirements, self-study group findings, and concluding statement. Also included in the Appendices were IICC's mission and purpose statement, institutional priorities, organizational charts, district demographics, and other supporting charts and tables. IICC's 117 page *1998 Facts and Figures: Past, Present and Future* book contained census data and demographics, high school information, student information, and program enrollments information. IICC's Strategic Planning Council meeting minutes containing meeting agendas, reports, and minutes. IICC's Strategic Planning Council two information books holding approximately 1000 pages contained institutional information and Strategic Planning Council work group reports. IICC's 18 page *Final Report of the Planning Council* summarized the council's activities and recommended planning activities. IICC's 33 page *Focus on the Future Strategic Plan 2002-2007* reported the college's strategic planning process results. The report summarized the process, key findings and assumptions, and the resulting documents that were approved by IICC's Board of Trustees. IICC's *2003-2005 Catalog* describing the college, its programs, and courses. IICC's web site provided general college information. IICC's 2002 institutional organizational chart illustrated its Executive Leadership Team, administrative and professional staff.

### *Journals*

I kept a field log, interview journal, and reflexive journal. These research study records were created in order to minimize researcher bias (McMillian & Schumacher, 1997). The field log recorded the date and time I spent in the field along with information on how I gained site and participant access. The field journal contained a continuous record as the research design emerged. McMillian and Schumacher (1997) point out the field journal is important because it provides information that justifies decisions made regarding any modifications or study reformulations and its strategies as well as a place where the researcher can assess data and informant trustworthiness. The reflexive journal noted thoughts or observations I made during the research study. For example, immediately after and as I reflected on each interview, I bracketed my personal thoughts and comments. The bracketing process involves “bracketing” existing notions or preconceptions in order to suspend the researcher’s meanings and interpretations for participants’ (Hycner, 1985; Tesch, 1990). This process will result in data that is uncontaminated by extraneous distractions (Patton, 1990).

### *Data Collection Phases*

The data collection involved four phases. These were document acquisition, conducting interviews, data collection conclusion, and data analysis completion. The data analysis process occurred throughout each data collection phase. The data collection fieldwork involved three visits to IICC. The visits were occurred during June, August, and December 2003.

### *Phase I Document Acquisition*

Documents determined to have some relevance for this study were acquired from the site coordinator. Most documents were copied by myself or IICC; a few study documents were report originals. These were stored with other research documents used for the study and will be returned to the coordinator at the research project conclusion. An overview document analysis was conducted before I conducted interviews to gain a general strategic planning process understanding.

### *Phase II Conducting Interviews*

Conducting interviews involved three campus visits lasting between seven to ten days. Five, four, and one interviews were conducted on each visit, respectively. Interview visit spacing was June, August, and December 2002. The spacing allowed me the opportunity to transcribe and code all previous interviews before re-entering the site for additional interviews. The small interview grouping and time lag between the visits provided an opportunity to process the information acquired from each visit, and to fine-tune the interviewing techniques, and better tailor interview questions for subsequent interviews. While visiting the campus, I was sensitive to the campus' culture and honored the participants' confidentiality.

### *Phase III Data Collection Conclusion*

Data collection concluded when all information deemed relevant was collected. McMillian and Schumacher (1997) state the researcher determines when enough data collection has taken place in order to provide the depth and richness necessary for the case analysis. Furthermore, they note at this point in the research, the researcher gives

more attention to the interpretations and findings verification as they emerge from the key informants, interviews, and documents.

#### *Phase IV Data Analysis Completion*

Data analysis completion occurred as the data I collected was blended into its analysis and resulted in the findings presentation. I asked questions about the data and used the process of induction toward arriving at themes and interpretations (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997).

#### Data Analysis

Data analysis was an inductive process. Inductive analysis in qualitative research means, “categories and patterns emerge from the data rather than being imposed on data prior to data collection” (McMillan & Schumacher, 1997, p. 502). The case study research project purpose was to better understand how one community college’s leaders used institutional information when making decisions for their strategic planning process. Inductive analysis using constant comparative analysis was conducted on collected data.

Prior to inductive analysis it was necessary to transcribe the interviews into a word processing format. The interviews were coded as each was completed and data analysis was an on-going process as other interviews were being conducted. The data from the interviews was managed by a word processing program and then transferred into the data management HyperRESEARCH program. Documents and journals were kept in their original forms and referenced during the analysis process.

Data reduction is “the process of selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming the data that appear in written-up field notes or transcriptions” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 10). This study used constant comparative analysis inductive

analysis method as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) to reduce data. This method uses three analytical processes to reduce data: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding. Open coding is the discovery and generation of categories for concepts and their properties and dimensions. Axial coding is the process of linking categories at their property or dimension level with subcategories. Finally, selective coding integrates and refines the analysis. It is at this point in the data analysis where “categories are organized around a central explanatory concept” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 161). Data analysis using this method allows data categories and patterns to emerge. Hence, providing rich information that directs patterns or theories development and result in the interpretation, description, or explanation the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1994; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997). Using constant comparative analysis as a data display process results in “an organized, compressed, assembly of information that permits conclusion drawing and action” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 11).

The 10 verified IICC Strategic Planning Council interview transcripts were prepared for data reduction and analysis. The interview data were analyzed using constant comparative analysis as described by Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Miles and Huberman (1994). HyperRESEARCH 2.0 Version data management computer software package was used to manage the data. Open coding involved coding the data using in vivo participant descriptions. Each interview transcript was organized in the software package as a separate file. Several hundred open codes were collapsed into 176 sub-category codes. These codes were placed separately onto an index card. I sorted the sub-category codes into category (axial) codes. The sub-category codes resulted in 19 axial codes associated with participants’ discussions describing using institutional information

for decision-making, participants' discussions about the campus environment, and miscellaneous information. Two axial codes were later combined.

HyperRESEARCH was used to code the sub-category codes into 19 axial codes. The resulting report listed the final 18 axial codes with corresponding sub-category codes and original interview transcript text. The remaining sub-category codes related to the strategic planning process chronological timeline and IICC's parallel project. Timeline codes were used to develop the case study chronology and parallel project codes were included in the analysis discussion.

Coding memos were written for the original 19 axial codes. I read through participant quotes and in vivo codes to create the axial code memo. Strauss and Corbin (1994) describe three memo types. First, a conceptual memos containing the following information: date, document reference, interview code number, heading, short quotes and/or phrases, memo type, and researcher's thoughts on category saturation. Second, a theoretical note is a memo where the researcher can sensitize and summarize the researcher's thoughts and ideas around how concepts vary dimensionally. Third, operational notes are memos that contain procedural directions and reminders, such as follow-up questions. I designed this study's memos to contain most information from the three memo types described by Strauss and Corbin. My memos included (in the heading) To and From reference, the Date(s) the memo was written, and the Subject which was the axial code title. Generally, the first part contained my thoughts, participant interview transcript quotes that stood out at while I was writing the memo, and follow-up questions and reminders for myself. After writing the memos, I realized two axial codes described

the same thing and combined the code “data important” with “patience process data” code. Resulting in 18 axial codes.

Once the data was analyzed, I referred to Miles and Huberman’s (1994) suggestions for conclusion drawing/verification. Conclusion drawing and verification is the decision process for what things mean and whether they are trustworthy. This data analysis component contributes to answering the question, “What is going on?” Conclusions were reached for using institutional information for strategic planning process decision-making by IICC’s leaders.

#### Trustworthiness

Research design trustworthiness or verification (Creswell, 1998) lends credibility to results. Trustworthiness is a process to confirm findings. It answers the question, “Did I get it right?” Extensive verification is necessary for a case study design (Stake, 1995). Creswell (1998) recommends qualitative research use at least two procedures to establish trustworthiness. This case study established trustworthiness through four methods: triangulation, clarifying and minimizing researcher bias, member checks, and rich thick description.

#### *Triangulation*

Triangulation in qualitative research is using multiple and different data sources to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 1998; Patton, 1990; Yin, 1994). Stake (1995) suggests when using the case study tradition, emphasis needs to be placed on the data sources and points out each study triangulates differently. This research project brought together information from many different IICC sources: 1996 Self-Study Report; 1998 Facts and Figures: Past, Present and Future book; Final Report of the Planning

Council October 2000; Strategic Planning Council meeting minutes; Strategic Planning Council two information books; Final Report of the Planning Council; Focus on the Future Strategic Plan 2002-2007; 2003-2005 Catalog; the college's web site; and 2002 institutional organizational chart. I used the documents and interview transcripts to confirm my chronology understanding. I was able to confirm between sources my findings.

### *Clarifying and Minimizing Researcher Bias*

Clarifying researcher bias as a study begins provides the reader with the researcher's position and the impact the position might have on the inquiry (Creswell, 1998). I present my researcher bias in Chapter 1 Researcher's Perspective. I wrote coding memorandums and kept logs and journals to clarify and minimize my bias. Strauss and Corbin (1994) indicate a memo as a place for the researcher to sensitize and summarize thoughts and ideas. I wrote 19 axial code memorandums where I noted my perspective for each code category. McMillan and Schumacher (1997) suggest in order to minimize researcher bias a field log and field journal be kept by the researcher. I kept a field log, interview journal, and reflexive journal. The information derived from the log and journals were used to bracket my thoughts and comments. I bracketed my thoughts and/or bias from the data that was collected from the interviews and documents. Bracketing assisted in removing my prejudices and preconceptions during data analysis.

### *Member Checks*

A member check is another strategy to establish case study trustworthiness. Member checks involve the researcher checking informally with participants on their views/opinions on the information accuracy acquired during data collection (Creswell,

1998; McMillan & Schumacher, 1997; Stake, 1995). I sent the 10 participants via email their interview transcript. I asked the participants to review their transcript. I did not receive any substance comments or transcript corrections from participants. Employing member checks in this study aided in avoiding misinterpreting data from a participant.

### *Rich Thick Description*

Rich, thick description is another procedure I used to establish study trustworthiness. The detailed participants and setting description by the researcher allows for information transfer to other settings based on similar characteristics (Creswell, 1998). I provide the reader with as much information as possible, without disclosing the site's identity, to describe the site for comparison to other institutions. I present as much data as necessary and organized it for readers to understand how I arrived at my conclusions.

## CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

### Introduction

The case study research project purpose was to better understand how Institutional Information Community College's (IICC) leaders used institutional information when making decisions for their strategic planning process. The project's findings are presented in this chapter. The findings answer the study's four research questions: How did IICC's strategic planning process develop? How did IICC's strategic planning process operate? What was the institutional information used by IICC's Strategic Planning Council? And, How was the institutional information used by IICC's Strategic Planning Council? The findings also discuss how using institutional information in the strategic planning process impacted the institution.

The case study setting is at IICC's campus. The setting is presented through a site description, including: the community profile; the college's mission, vision, purpose and values; the personnel; the committee structure; the students and instructional programs. Also presented are IICC's Strategic Planning Council members, who were invited to participate.

The case study story is presented as a chronology that traces events over time to understand why this process operated as it did (Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994). The chronology is divided into four significant incidents. The incidents indicate IICC actions taken when institutional information was in some way important to the strategic planning process.

These incidents were the Planning Council creation, the Strategic Planning Council creation, the institutional information compiled into organized books, and the two-day Strategic Planning Retreat. Together the significant incidents answer study's first three research questions. The significant incidents tell the story of how the strategic planning process developed, operated, and what institutional information was used by IICC's Strategic Planning Council during this process which ultimately led to IICC's strategic plan implementation.

The case study answers the fourth research question because it explores how institutional information was used by the Strategic Planning Council. Information was used to examine internal and external environments; to analyze the college's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats; to analyze existing gaps between where the college was and wanted to be in the future; and to make decisions when determining the college's strategic priorities.

Additionally, the case study extends its analysis beyond the four research questions and discusses how the strategic planning process impacted the institution. Using institutional information during the strategic planning process impacted IICC's decision-making processes. Since the strategic planning process, decision-making has become more sophisticated. Decision-making techniques became more developed, more complex, and more refined.

#### Site Description

IICC is an accredited, public, open-door admission policy, two-year institution created in 1967 by a local Rotary Club that organized a community referendum passage establishing the community college district.

This campus was originally purchased by a consortium that came together back in the mid to late 60's, when the Community College Act was passed in [State]. And the primary group that was responsible for this, as I've come to understand it, the driving force, was the Rotary of [City]. They were the driving force after the Community College Act was passed. ... And that Rotary, initiated Institutional Information Community College, went about getting the initial funding for the purchase of the land and went about enabling this thing to come out of ground like a Phoenix rising. (Participant 1)

IICC did rise out of the ground in 1971 when permanent college facilities were constructed. Since then, the campus' physical facilities have grown with numerous other buildings being added. It is located in a large Midwestern metropolitan suburb. The college occupies 294 acres and serves a 139 square mile district. (IICC, 1996; IICC, 2003b). IICC's 139 square mile community service area contains all or part of 26 surrounding communities. The population is nearly 400,000 (IICC, 2003b). Of the 26 communities IICC serves, nine have a per capita income in the bottom 20 percent of suburbs for the nearby city, whereas two of the 26 communities rank in the top 2 percent per capita. Local housing reflects this diverse economic base (IICC, 1996). Service industries account for almost 90 percent of business in the college's district (IICC, 1996). The college's total operating expenses for the year ending June 2002 was \$61,268,585 (IICC, 2003a).

There is available access to many major expressways, therefore, many residents do not necessarily work in the community where they reside. Many residents are second generation who exited the nearby city just after World War II. Census population data for 1990 showed that approximately 79% of the residents completed a high school diploma. Almost half (42%) were between the ages of 25 and 54. The African-American population percent was 6.3% and 5.3% Hispanic (IICC, 1996).

IICC went through a collegewide Mission and Purpose, and Core Values review and revision in Fall 2001. At the same time, the college wrote its first Vision Statement. Four open forums were held for input. After revisions, these final documents were approved by the Board of Trustees in November 2001 (IICC, 2002). IICC's revised mission statement reads,

The mission of our college is to educate the whole person in a learning-centered environment, recognizing our responsibilities to one another, to our community, and to the world we share. We value excellence in teaching, learning and service as we maintain sensitivity to our role in a global, multicultural community. We are committed to continuous improvement and dedicated to providing accessible, affordable, and diverse learning opportunities and environments. (IICC, 2003b, p. 9).

The mission is fulfilled through; General Education, Transfer Programs, Career Education, Community Enrichment, Workforce Development, Student Development and Developmental and Enrichment Education. (IICC, 2003b, p. 9).

IICC's purpose or promise statement is, "We promise to provide a student-centered environment and to focus all college staff and resources on student learning, student development and student success" (IICC, 2003b, p. 9).

The first ever vision statement for IICC reads, "We envision a world-class college that meets current and emerging community needs for education and training through excellent service and outstanding programs offered in stimulating learning environments" (IICC, 2004).

The four guiding core values for IICC's development and implementation for the mission, goals, philosophy, and operational procedures are: Integrity, Responsibility, Respect, and Fairness (IICC, 2003b). The college identified four "core values that guide the institution in the development and implementation of its mission, goals, philosophy

and operational procedures” (IICC, 2003b, p. 10). Participant 1 listed the core values and described how these are present on IICC’s campus,

They are: Integrity, Responsibility, Respect and Fairness. ... It’s funny, because even to this day we ask our self all the time at different levels, “Is this fulfilling one of those areas?” “Is it respecting one another?” “Are we doing this with integrity?” “Are we being responsible?” “Are we being fair to people in these decisions?”

The four core values help guide IICC in how it operates and treats people.

IICC is governed by a Board of Trustees that has seven elected members who serve staggered six-year terms and one nonvoting student elected student representative who serves a one-year term and may cast an advisory vote. Trustee elections are held every two years providing for leadership continuity. Within the board, a chair, vice chair and secretary are elected. The board treasurer is the college’s Vice President of Business and Finance (IICC, 1996).

An administrative Office of the President provides IICC’ executive leadership. This office, along with four divisional vice presidents, comprises the Executive Leadership Team. Participant 9 added, the college’s Chief Financial Officer (CFO) also serves on the team.

The vice presidents have executive responsibilities in the areas of Academic Affairs, Student Development, Informational Services and Planning, and Business and Finance. (IICC, 1996).

IICC faculty hold appropriate program credentials. There are 182 full-time faculty members, of which, 172 are tenured faculty and 162 are teaching faculty. Within the teaching faculty, 20 (12%) hold a doctoral degree, 117 (72%) hold a master’s degree, 18 (11%) hold a bachelor’s degree, 3 (2%) hold an associate’s degree, and 4 (2%) hold no

degree and are affiliated with occupational programs that they demonstrate the appropriate credentials. (IICC, 1996).

The current IICC president believes in participative governance and has implemented a committee structure that places each committee under the co-leadership of one faculty and one administrator who report to one of the four vice-presidents. Six standing committees are overseen by the Executive Leadership Team. Other institutional task forces may be appointed by the president for important campuswide issues. One task force the president created called for revising the college's mission, planning, and college strategic directions (IICC, 1996). Thereby, establishing IICC's initial intent to enter a strategic planning process.

Annually, more than 32,000 students study at IICC. Most of these are from the district.

The average age of students is 28; approximately 59 percent are female, and 41 percent are male. The majority of students attend classes during the day, while 35 percent attend classes in the evening or on weekends. At least 85 percent of students work either full- or part-time while attending the college. (IICC, 2003b, p. 8)

Students from other communities, states and nations also enroll. There are students from more than 45 countries.

The first IICC graduation was held in June 1969. (IICC, 1996). Today, the college offers over 100 degree and certificate programs. Transfer degrees of Associate in Arts (A.A.), Associate in Science (A.S.) and Associate in Fine Arts (A.F.A.) serve students who desire to transfer to a four-year college or university. Associate in Applied Science (A.A.S.) degrees and certificates are awarded as career programs for students whose goal

is to gain immediate employment after graduation. Enrichment programs and services offer basic skills to students in preparation for college level coursework (IICC, 2003b).

#### Participants

IICC recommended Strategic Planning Council members as most likely to provide information regarding the strategic planning process development and operation along with describing what institutional information the council used and how it used the information. With IICC's President and Executive Leadership Team approval, the 18 Strategic Planning Council members were invited to participate in this study. Ten individuals self-selected themselves to participate and did so by being interviewed about the strategic planning process.

The IICC Strategic Planning Council members were intentionally selected to serve because the college desired entire institutional representation. The membership included representatives from faculty, executive- and mid-level administrators, classified staff, and the Board of Trustees. The members were:

- Manager of Network Operations
- Director, College and Community Relations
- Director, Financial Affairs, Controller and Treasurer
- Director, Human Resources
- Director, Institutional Research and Planning
- Director, Marketing and Publications Services
- Director, Resource Development and Institutional Effectiveness
- Dean, Enrichment Programs and Services
- Dean, Enrollment Services
- Dean, Science, Business and Computing Technology
- Assistant Vice President, Educational Services and Innovations
- Vice President of Academic Affairs
- Vice President of Administrative Services and College Facilities
- Vice President for Institutional Advancement
- Vice President (Former) of Student Development
- President, College Foundation
- President, College
- Vice Chairman, College Board of Trustees (IICC, 2002)

The Vice President for Institutional Advancement and Vice President for Academic Affairs co-chaired the council. The Director of Institutional Research and Planning facilitated activities and coordinated report development for six planning work group teams. Additionally, the Secretary to the Vice President for Institutional Advancement served as the council's secretary (IICC, 2002).

The Strategic Planning Council's charge was to guide the planning process. The council was given nine planning objectives to consider when designing the Strategic Plan (Appendix C). The participants told how the strategic process developed and operated. They also described institutional information available and how it was used to make decisions in designing the college's strategic plan. These stories are woven together here to present the strategic planning process case chronology.

#### IICC's Strategic Planning Process Case Study Chronology

In their own words, the participants told IICC's strategic planning process story; how it developed, operated, and what institutional information was used to make decisions when the college designed its strategic plan. The accounts, experiences and viewpoints are presented as a collective chronological story. The chronology spans a two year period beginning December 1999 with IICC's Planning Council creation and ending November 2001 with the institutional Mission and Purpose, Strategic Priorities, Core Values, and new Vision Statement presentation. The chronology's purpose is to understand how the process operated from inception to implementation. This is done through exploring four significant incidents along the two-year strategic planning process timeline.

Four significant incidents mark events along IICC's strategic planning process chronology. The incidents demark actions taking the college from thinking about revising its planning process to the strategic plan implementation. The actions indicate events when gathering or using institutional information was important to the strategic planning process decision-making. The significant incidents along the timeline were the Planning Council creation, the Strategic Planning Council creation, the institutional information compiled into organized books, and the two-day Strategic Planning Retreat. The two councils' creation and work resulted in a great deal of information being collected. This information was organized into two books that were used at a planning retreat. The chronology presented here discusses the four significant incidents.

The college was also involved in a parallel process not examined during this research project. It is mentioned since participants occasionally refer to this parallel process and both processes involved gathering some same institutional information.

We almost had what I would call, kind of a, a parallel process here. ... Preceding the time that we began officially the strategic planning process, the college received a grant from [name of organization]. (Participant 8)

Some of the same people serving on the strategic planning process as served on the [parallel project]. ... there was a deliberate intent on the part of the administration, (i.e., the President and the Cabinet) to be sure that things were integrated and embedded into the organizational culture. To be sure that we weren't running a couple major initiatives at the same time. ... Over here [parallel project] and it was sort of the informal ad hoc body that, that fed into the strategic planning process.(Participant 8)

At the same time we were also [involved in a parallel project]. So all these things happened at the same time and the administration, instead of having three different committees all working on these separate projects, artfully blended them together, bringing in lots of people from the institution together to do these things as one kind of project. (Participant 2)

The parallel and planning processes overlapped in time and effort. The projects were occurring simultaneously and some individuals served on both projects. Institutional information gathered by either group was shared. IICC integrated these processes not to duplicate efforts.

The strategic planning process chronology begins with the Planning Council creation. The council's formation was the first significant chronology incident.

### *Planning Council*

An examination into the Planning Council provides the background and rationale for how the Strategic Planning Council developed. The Planning Council began by examining IICC's planning processes and consequently recommending the Strategic Planning Council formation.

Prior to the Strategic Planning Council creation, IICC began to evaluate the institution's planning processes. "The Planning Council met for a year and ... reviewed the planning process" (Participant 9). The college found the new president had a participative decision-making philosophy, there was the desire to gather information for strategic planning, institutional planning was outdated, and the college wanted to tie planning with other institutional operations. Therefore, IICC decided it was time to examine and develop new college planning processes.

IICC appointed a new president in 1991. This president significantly changed the way the college operated. A college governance committee structure was established that solicited college-wide input into decision-making at IICC (IICC, 1996). In Fall 1992, IICC's Advisory Council and six standing committees were created, involving all college

levels. These groups were given the charge to become actively involved through participation in planning and decision-making processes.

Additionally, the North Central Accreditation (NCA) Steering Committee along with other self-study groups was charged to conduct an in-depth study of the institution not only for NCA but also to accomplish six other activities (Appendix D). One of these activities was, "To gather data that will assist the college in strategic planning to assure continued success, and to analyze future directions for the purpose of setting goals and fiscal priorities" (IICC, 1996, p. 5). This activity is relevant because these groups began the process of gathering institutional information that was carried forward to the strategic planning process.

Along with a new president and committee structure to allow for participative governance and the desire to gather strategic planning information, IICC found itself at a point in time when it wanted and needed to examine different college planning processes.

IICC found historically planning was conducted in a rather cursory manner. Participant 9 explained that planning, prior to the studied strategic planning process, was not structured and people were not held accountable for following through.

The process started with the Planning Council which was formed. ...To review the planning processes, generally at the college, for annually planning. ... And the thought was in mind, I believe, very early out that we needed to do the strategic planning process but first we needed to update the annual planning. Planning at the college had always been done but perhaps not as formally as some other institutions and it was many times done in a rather cursory manner. People filled out a couple of forms a day or two before they had to turn them in and then they turned them in and nobody really ever checked to see if they actually did what they said they were going to do. Pretty much all we did with them was put them in a nice little booklet and hand them out. (Participant 9)

Because planning was done hastily and there was no follow-up to planning processes, IICC decided it was time to more closely examine how it planned. The college found that

planning had been neglected, the college had a desire to look to the future, the college needed to update old plans, and the college wanted to tie planning to other institutional operations.

Participant 10 explained planning was neglected because people did not like to do planning, therefore it was not done in a consistent manner.

We haven't been an organization that has been enchanted with planning. Setting goals and objectives was never fun, and nobody liked to do it and no one did it in a consistent kind of way. It was a pain in the neck and we just decided we had to confront that issue because you can't move forward as an organization if you don't set goals and if you don't achieve them and then measure their outcome. We felt as an organization that was a very serious part of our work that was neglected as so we brought a group of really good thinkers together to design a different way of planning. (Participant 10)

IICC realized that even though people did not like to do planning, the institution needed to face doing planning so it could move forward as an organization. Therefore, the institution decided the best way to confront the planning issue was to bring together people they considered good thinkers to re-design how IICC planned.

IICC also wanted and needed to update existing plans. It was the turn of the century, it had been a long time since the strategic plan was updated, and it was time to update the college's master plan.

I think as we were entering into 2000, it was time for us to look forward to where we wanted to be and where we were going. I think institutionally we are always trying to lasso or to gather in that need that we have to just go with it. We tend to put programs in place in six months rather than saying, "Okay, this is where we want to be two or three years from now." (Participant 7)

The point made by Participant 7 was the college had a history of reacting. It had also been a number of years since IICC's strategic plan had been updated and the campus had changed significantly.

[IICC] had engaged in a strategic planning process and developed a strategic plan that was then about 10 years old, so understanding that a decade had passed and that a lot had changed the college knew it was time to undertake that process again. (Participant 4)

It was also time to update IICC's master plan. "One of the things that also came out of it was some clear direction for the need for an update to our campus master facilities plan" (Participant 1).

We had come to the end of our last strategic plan and our last master plan, there had been a twenty year master plan done, we had completed the last building on the plan, and we need to look to the future. The president brought that to the Board that we needed to have a new strategic plan and a new master plan. (Participant 2)

The master facilities plan that's on my wall, ... was the original plan ... and when I first arrived, one of the things I was told was, we've got to update the master plan. (Participant 1)

IICC updated the master plan at the strategic planning process conclusion.

And so, at the completion of the planning, strategic planning process, it became obvious that now that gave us a future direction to update a new campus master plan and so much like the effort that was undertaken with cross-section of employees, coming from faculty, support staff, administrative staff and board, we defined the project that took place over the course of about six months that involved a number of people utilizing the direction that the strategic plan had given us. To design the future state of what this campus ought to grow to in the future. So, it [the strategic plan] really became the impetus around which another plan was built, and so it was kind of exciting to have a rudder in the water that would help us steer this work. (Participant 1)

And then once those things were completed, we hired our architectural firm to come in and work with that information and the Planning Council to make the master plan for the rest of the facility; another 25 year plan for buildings based on where we thought we were going to go, how we would continue to build out the campus in the master plan. (Participant 2)

The strategic planning process steered the new 25 year master plan.

IICC also wanted to tie planning and other institutional operations together better. Participant 9 discussed the desire to bring together planning, budgeting, and institutional effectiveness.

[We] talked a lot about the linkage between planning and budgeting which was on paper but never actually done very well. It was felt that most people at the college thought of planning and budgeting as two entirely different procedures. And also we wanted to tie into planning and budgeting, institutional effectiveness which was not exactly new but we had been working more and more on institutional effectiveness. And so our last NCA accreditation visit, the idea was to tie those two processes together a little better so we didn't have three entirely different tracks going on but three related things going on, so, that is as I best remember was the rationale behind the development of the Planning Council. (Participant 9)

IICC wanted to better tie together planning, budgeting, and institutional effectiveness.

The desire to bring together planning with other institutional operations, the need to update old plans, the desire to gather institutional information for strategic planning and a president who supported participative decision-making led to forming a planning council.

The first IICC Planning Council meeting took place on December 17, 1999. The group had the charge,

To research and analyze environmental issues, identify and recommend strategies and projects, and develop and recommend a planning process that will position the college as a strong, competitive institution of higher learning in the environment of the future. (IICC, 2000, p. 2)

The college intended this council would examine planning from a broad perspective.

“That group was charged with looking at the planning process in the institution, not necessarily with strategic planning” (Participant 9).

The Planning Council had seven goals and tasks (Appendix E). Many involved information collection used later in making strategic planning decisions. To sum the seven Planning Council goals and tasks were to: gather data, research, and analyze external factors; gather data, research, and analyze internal strengths and weaknesses;

analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT); develop processes to increase awareness and input; prioritize critical issues and recommend work groups to address them; prepare a report with prioritized project/strategy recommendations and recommend a new college planning process.

In January 2000, the 26-member Planning Council, representing the college's community, gathered for a planning workshop. The council's work was guided by an outside professional planning consulting team, who continued to work with the college throughout the entire strategic planning process. The two consultants assisted IICC by providing an objective view.

Part of what we did though is that we did have consultants who have helped us through some of this. ... They were here during the planning process and etc. ... And they were the ones who after we went through this with the priorities they shaped the priorities for us. ... And I kind of like that because I thought that brought some objectivity to some of this. (Participant 6)

Along with objectivity, the consultants also brought guidance to the strategic planning process.

It happened coincidental at the same time we brought in a consultant from the [university name] and the consultant sat down with us as a leadership team, spent, I don't know, the better part of half a year or so off and on or so helping us with the strategic planning process. Here's how you do it; here's some ideas; here's how it will work well, but also looking at how we conduct our meetings, and how the leadership conducts its own business. (Participant 8)

We engaged an outside consultant, a couple of them and who have expertise in planning and strategic planning, and they actually came and led a couple of different retreats and one of them very specifically was the two-day retreat related to strategic planning. And I think that they probably worked more closely with a couple of people on our campus who are specifically responsible for planning to kind of put together a design for our strategic planning process. (Participant 3)

The consultants guided IICC's planning work, brought objectivity to the process, helped the college examine how it conducts business, and led different retreats related to the

planning processes. The consultants were available throughout the process even though they were not able to attend most meetings.

The intent was that he and/or [Consultant #2] would attend most of the meetings. That in fact did not happen. I'm not sure I know all of the reasons for that. Part of it was they both had health problems during that year and had some difficulty attending the meetings. [Consultant #2], as I said earlier, I think, was pretty much out of the picture. She was ill that whole year and then [Consultant #1]. ... A couple times they had intended to come and did not, so he was very prominent at the beginning as we started it. Although I think we were pretty good at organizing it ourselves. We did have the perspective of an outside person and his initial list of some of the things that we needed to look at, and then he came back towards the end. (Participant 9)

Because the consultants were not able to consistently be involved in the process, IICC needed to organize itself and keep the process moving, which it was ultimately successful at accomplishing its goals.

At the Planning Council's workshop meeting, the consultant presented IICC with higher educational national trends information. The council was also given the college's institutional demographics information by the college's Institutional Research and Planning Office. The Planning Council's work led to writing nineteen Planning Assumptions (Appendix: F). The assumptions were intended to provide college planning guidance (IICC, 2000). Thus, addressing the desire to re-design how college planning was conducted.

Many viewpoints were welcomed as IICC explored its planning processes.

People who were bringing in other industry approaches into this and offering some suggestions which I think made for a more robust type of planning, or preplanning, design phase. [Also] ... that preliminary work seemed to me to be essential in designing what steps we would go through and agree to. (Participant 1)

Viewpoints from other industries contributed to the design phase strength were fundamental to examining IICC planning.

During March and April 2000, additional information was gathered from the college community through surveys. By May, the survey results led to the Key Issues identification in six critical areas: accountability, technology, institutional resources, competitor behavior, student/customer preferences, student/academic issues. During the same time period, a four-member Planning Council ad hoc group was “commissioned to develop an enhanced annual planning process for the college” (IICC, 2000, p. 1). The group’s recommendations were further reviewed, critiqued, and approved by the Planning Council and the college’s president in June. The ad hoc group was also charged with “developing a recommended strategic planning process that would involve the greater IICC community, in addition to the college community” (IICC, 2000, p. 1). The ad hoc group’s work was completed in July and August and presented to the entire council in September. The Planning Council approved the ad hoc group’s work and made two final recommendations to the college’s president.

1. It is recommended that a new annual planning process be instituted in the college effective in August 2000, and
2. It is recommended that the college engage in a strategic planning process, following a recommended structure for planning, in the coming year (IICC, 2000, p. 1).

IICC took action on both Planning Council recommendations. The college designed and implemented a new annual planning process and engaged in a strategic planning process.

The first recommendation suggested IICC institute a new annual planning process. The recommendation was addressed by the Planning Council itself. Participant 10 discussed the Planning Council’s focus on annual planning and went on to say,

Now mostly we [Planning Council] focused on annual planning, and we focused on the college level but we also focused at the, I just call it the Unit Level whether it’s a subdivision or a division or a department or whatever, the different unit

levels in the organizational strata. But we tried to figure out how would be the best way to do it and we gathered a lot of input. I don't recall that we had open forums, but we brought a lot of people in who had a stake in the planning process- the Deans, the Vice-Presidents. ... So that was really to improve our planning, our annual planning process. As a result of that, that committee did improve the planning process. ... The planning manual that we have that has a very nice timeline in it and its' a color coded binder and all of that. It's been refined since the Planning Council developed the process. It looks a lot nicer; it has some different components to it.

The Planning Council's recommendation to institute a new annual planning process resulted in an improved planning. IICC subsequently refined its planning manual.

An annual planning process that would focus on all levels within the institution was examined through information gathering. This resulted in improving the annual planning process and a new planning manual. Additionally, Participant 2 noted the Planning Council ended with a plan for planning it was the "work that really kind of drove us into the strategic planning process. Kind of culminated with a design for the planning process." The two Planning Council recommendations interlocked. "Prior to the strategic plan we sort of refined our annual planning process...so they kind of dovetailed together" (Participant 3).

IICC's Planning Council's second recommendation to engage in a strategic planning process was also addressed. Even though the council examined planning from a broad perspective, they were aware the college's strategic planning process needed to be updated. "And the thought was in mind, I believe, very early out that we needed to do the strategic planning process but first we needed to update the annual planning" (Participant 5). Participant 3 discussed how the annual planning discussions led the college into more long range thinking.

We already had an annual planning process, we were just revisiting it and saying is it still what we need it to be and we refined it and tried to clarify it a little bit for

folks. From those planning discussions came the ultimate idea that we obviously needed to also look at strategic planning. ... So out of the planning process and revising the annual planning, came the need to look at the strategic planning process as well, the more long term kinds of stuff. (Participant 3)

In addition to the idea to revise long-term planning, IICC needed strategic planning that included shared institutional priorities.

One of the things that that group saw was the need for a strategic plan. That these annual goals are well and good. New initiatives well and good. They're wonderful but how do we decide what kind of new initiatives we are going to focus on if we don't know the institutional priorities. And it's not that we didn't have them, we did, but they were kind of old and they weren't shared and, ... I don't mean that they weren't given to people but they weren't part of our shared culture. They were just something that was stuck over there on a bookshelf. (Participant 10)

In an attempt to bring the institutional priorities off the shelf and into IICC's shared culture and the need for long range thinking, the college was ready to begin the strategic planning process.

Participant 9 summarized the two Planning Council recommendations and how these led to the Strategic Planning Council formation.

At the conclusion of the year the Planning Council recommended that we continue with the annual planning process that we developed which more or less we still follow, and at that time that we needed to call together the strategic planning group. We agreed that we hadn't done a strategic planning process in way too long, and I don't know the exact time but well over five years since it had been done. We had not reviewed the mission statement in probably ten years so we went through and looked at how many years it had been ... [IICC's President] spoke about developing a vision statement for the college at the end of the annual Planning Council, when it dissolved, it was agreed to start the strategic planning process. And then the one committee was dissolved and the other one was formed, but the members did not continue, a few did continue, but it was reformed. (Participant 9)

Participant 5 was not sure why the Strategic Planning Council was created and offered another explanation. The explanation was IICC had just completed a technology plan that may have acted the strategic planning process catalyst.

I don't [know] much about how it really developed. I was kind of just asked to be a participant in it, so I don't have any real record or knowledge of what initiated the process, or what made, you know made us say we needed a strategic plan for the entire college, other than maybe that the college's strategic plan on technology might have been a catalyst to create that strategic plan. (Participant 5)

The Planning Council's findings and recommendations were included in the final report presented in December 2000. The report included: the charge to the Planning Council, a New Annual Planning Process, Flow Chart for Objectives, Key Issues, Integrated Issues/Objectives/Institutional Priorities, Planning Assumptions, Strategic Planning Structure, and Strategic Planning Timeline. The report laid the groundwork for the Strategic Planning Council creation thus carrying out the Planning Council's second recommendation to engage in strategic planning.

Approval to engage in the strategic planning process ultimately came from IICC's Executive Leadership Team, which approved the Planning Council's work. "That work then was brought to the Executive Leadership Team where it was fine tuned and blessed" (Participant 1). "The President and our Cabinet, which is the Executive Leadership Team, determined that we needed to introduce the strategic planning process." (Participant 8).

One of the things the President was very interested in doing after the Planning Council concluded its work is developing a strategic plan for the institution, and he was equally as interested in the process of strategic planning. I believe as a way of developing a greater sense of community in the institution and a greater understanding, common understanding of the challenges before the college. And how we would act or react to the challenge that still would be ahead of us. And I think what he felt is that there were a number of really wonderful administrators here, all seeing challenges ahead of us but not all seeing it with equal importance. So, he really wanted to build consensus. What were the greatest challenges, our priorities and of course that's why we call them our strategic priorities. And he saw this as one way to do that. (Participant 10)

IICC's President was interested in the strategic plan development to foster consensus. The college formed the Strategic Planning Council, which was the second significant incident on the strategic planning process timeline.

### *Strategic Planning Council*

IICC's Strategic Planning Council was formed during Fall 2000. Its 18 person membership included some members who had served on the Planning Council along with other individuals selected because they had divergent viewpoints. Members selected would need to have the ability to gather institutional information. The council also needed someone who could assist with information analysis.

When we selected the members of the [Strategic] Planning Council per se, we did that with great forethought. We wanted to bring in some members of the original Planning Council, but we also wanted to bring in the influencers in the institution. We wanted to bring people with divergent viewpoints. We wanted to bring in people who had the skills we needed especially in the data gathering and someone able to guide use through the analysis of all of that. So, we wanted to bring in the experts; we wanted to bring in the influential, administrators and, staff members, faculty I would say. We weren't just looking for people who were believers but we also wanted to touch people who we thought might be the skeptics and people who might even be the disbelievers to see how far they were along that path.  
(Participant 10)

Bringing together the right people, as was done for the Planning Council, again was important to IICC as it selected the Strategic Planning Council members. The college wanted influential internal people. And to know the different viewpoints on campus, believers and disbelievers were purposefully chosen to serve on the Strategic Planning Council.

The individuals selected to serve on the Strategic Planning Council were chosen with forethought and intent to represent college divisions.

Now essentially the [Strategic] Planning Council was members from the various divisions of the college. People who were in key positions within the college ...

But they were key people. They were people that would automatically be on the council in any case ... they were Deans; they were Directors; they were V.P.'s. ... There was even a Board member on this. So we wanted a full input of the college community ... I call it appointment but it was almost like a selection of people in key positions around the college. (Participant 6)

A council was established and if I understand the way people were selected for it, is all the vice presidents in conjunction with the president looked at the scope of what we needed to try to do with the strategic planning process, and began to look within each of the major divisions of the college as to who some of the participants on that Strategic Planning Council should be. So, then people were selected trying to, in my way of understanding it, for the council as well as the membership of the various teams of the planning council, trying to get as much representation throughout the college as possible for the process itself. (Participant 4)

IICC sought to have college wide representation on the Strategic Planning Council. The individuals selected to serve represented the faculty, executive- and mid-level administrators, classified staff and the Board of Trustees (See Participants) (IICC, 2002).

Having campus wide representation on IICC's Strategic Planning Council was successful according to Participant 4.

In most cases, yes, I do think that they were successful in pulling together kind of a cross-functional group of people throughout the college. ... There are some people who are part of every process. So there were some familiar faces and there were some unfamiliar faces and I think that was really good because the mix of ideas and the mix of talents and perspectives that came to the table I think were very, very important.

Representation provided a mixture of people and ideas coming to the Strategic Planning Process.

Some people selected to serve on the Strategic Planning Council did not actively participate on the council's work groups. The Board of Trustee member did not serve on a work group but attended one community focus group meeting. IICC's President also did not serve on a work group but gave direction to keep the strategic planning process moving and carried the plan to the Board of Trustees for final approval.

After its formation in September 2000, the Strategic Planning Council held an orientation meeting in November and began work in December. The consultants were brought in to kick off the strategic planning process.

[Consultant #1 and Consultant #2] kicked off our strategic planning with a workshop group presentation on “What is Strategic Planning?” ... For those that hadn’t been involved in the annual, gave a presentation on that and that was the beginning. (Participant 9)

Monthly meetings were held “as far as activities, I mean it was basically meetings”

(Participant 5). “The SPC [Strategic Planning Council] will meet monthly, on the third Thursday of the month, at 3:30 p.m.” (IICC, SPC Minutes, November 28, 2000, p. 2).

The meetings were held on January 18, February 15, March 15, April 19, May 17 (held on May 31), and June 21, 2000 (IICC, SPC Minutes, December 22, 2000, Notes, pp. 4-5).

So we would meet as a [strategic] planning council usually on a monthly basis that was the main council itself. Each of our teams had the responsibility of meeting on the schedule that we thought we needed to meet on in order to handle our own responsibilities. (Participant 4)

“The task groups will meet monthly, or as needed, on the second Tuesday of the month, at 3:30 p.m.” (IICC, SPC Minutes, November 28, 2000, p. 2). The six work groups held meetings based on each group’s timeline.

The Strategic Planning Council’s work began with nine objectives (Appendix C) to guide the strategic plan construction. The objectives were: engage in a process to examine educational trends, forces and conditions, and develop projections for programs and services; review IICC’s mission and purpose statement and core values; develop a vision statement; identify sources of information for current and emerging trends; document program and services demands; document the college’s capacity to meet regional needs through analysis of internal data; review existing programs, services and

systems; identify strategic options and forge working priorities to guide institutional development and develop action plans and achievement indicators along with a strategic priority timetable for implementation as part of a five-year (2002-2007) strategic plan. With these objectives, that involved a great deal of work, the Strategic Planning Council guided the planning process and oversaw six work groups. (IICC, 2002). The work groups' membership included most Strategic Planning Council members and other individuals from the college representing every staff category.

### *Work Groups*

The work groups' formation was driven by an IICC Planning Council goal and task (Appendix E). The relevant goal and task stated the council should recommend work groups or other means to address critical issues for the college. Participant 9 explained the Strategic Planning Council would be formed around the six critical issues or existing college priority major headings. All the time, integrating its work with the parallel project "thereby benefiting fully from a single, focused approach to changes" (IICC, 2002).

Participant 9 discussed the rationale behind the work groups design.

The strategic plan was being developed and the first thing we did, of course, was to discuss how we were going to proceed. The structure of the strategic planning committee we decided was going to be based on existing priority major headings and there were...the six committees. And the headings of those committees were based loosely on two things: One was the priorities of the prior year which the ELT, the President's Council-the President and VPs-developed every year. And also they needed to tie it in with the [parallel project]. ... Initiatives that were also strategic in nature. So, one of the first decisions we made was we have things going on; we have some priorities for the next year; we don't want to have the strategic planning here and the [parallel project] initiatives. And I'm pointing my hands in entirely different directions. We didn't want to have separate groups going on so we brought those two together.

The six work groups were formed around six existing priorities. The groups and their membership numbers were Organizational Culture and Learning Environment (11);

Instructional Excellence, Learning Outcomes, Student Success (11); Underprepared Students (9); Staff Recruitment and Development (12); Enrollment and Marketing Management (15); and Technology Advancements (11). The individuals chosen to serve on the work groups were carefully selected.

Were also very thoughtfully crafted I believe to make sure that we had broad based institutional representation; all groups up and down the strata of the organization. So we ended up with I think the, some of the very best thinking, as we moved forward on this. But also the people who would make a difference; people who could carry the message. ... But we really wanted the message to get throughout the entire institution. Not just the message of these are the most important issues facing the college or we have decided that things are the things we are going to do, but this is an important way of working and we need to see the effectiveness of this kind of team work in collaboration and model it throughout the institution. So I think part of the composition of the teams and part of the purpose of the strategic planning process was all really to build a different kind of organization here at the college. And I think that has had some success. (Participant 10)

Initially we took a look at what the college had done previously with the strategic plan and we talked as a group about the various areas that we thought we needed to concentrate our efforts on. And based on coming up with some of the various areas of the college that we really would have to devote our attention, our time and attention and effort to. Then it actually went back to the Executive Leadership Team, they made some determinations and some considerations and then teams were appointed around various priorities for the institution. (Participant 4)

IICC wanted the message out to the college that the way it was proceeding with the planning process was important and wanted collaboration within the project so that it could be taken out into the institution. The six work groups concentrated on the group's responsibilities based around their timelines. Since there were so many people working on the strategic planning project, the Strategic Planning Council members who served on the work groups relayed information to the council.

Most of the people at the college were involved in, and, working with this information, adding what the college has to do to it, and then bringing it to a, a focal point...Strategic planning meetings with the people who were appointed at

the top level and they would give reports on what their work groups had done and where they were headed. (Participant 2)

It was the responsibility of the work group chairs not to overlap work that the groups were doing.

It was the responsibility of the Chairs and the Co-chairs of those groups to be aware of what the other groups were working on. And there were some that knew they had overlapped and they did meet to discuss overlap and in some cases I'm sure that they shared data. The charge to those groups to try not to duplicate the work. (Participant 9)

The work group sizes ranged from nine to fifteen (IICC, 2002). All together, 73 individuals from the college provided input through serving on the Strategic Planning Council or on one or more of the six work groups for a particular institutional function. The groups were given a list of charges, description of processes, expected outcome activities and an task timeline.

The individual work group charges varied according to the group's topic. Although customized for each individual work group, all charges began with the words, "To research, analyze and recommend strategic initiatives ..." (IICC, 2002, Attachments B1 – B6). Since all groups' charges were to research and analyze information demonstrated IICC's emphasis on using institutional information.

There were some things that every team through this process was asked to do regardless of what their area of concentration might have been, or what their focus might have been. ... But there still were some common things the council felt that each team ought to try to utilize and so a SWOT analysis was one example of that there were others. (Participant 4)

This direction demonstrated IICC's emphasis on gathering institutional information importance to the strategic planning process. One work group information gathering activity was the SWOT analyses, which are detailed below.

Work group timelines indicated when each was to complete actions. Generally, the timelines provided were for the following dates and actions:

October 2000, First organizational meeting;  
November 2000 and ongoing, Address [project name] objectives;  
November 2000 – February 2001, Complete internal/external reports;  
March – May 2001, Identify gaps and draft strategic recommendations;  
June – August 2001, Prepare reports;  
September 2001, Strategic Plan recommended to president. (IICC, 2002)

Each work group was given its respective charge, processes or task list, outcomes duties, and timeline. The work groups began the process of collecting and analyzing institutional information, “at that point the groups went off on their own to determine what data they needed and went and collected that data and analyzed the data” (Participant 9). While the Strategic Planning Council oversaw the process, the work groups were the worker bees gathering institutional information.

The goal of the council I think was to provide direction and to look at the process as it was being developed or helped develop that process that would be used. I kind of look at that as the driving force, and then 72 were the worker bees who went out and gathered information and things like that. ... And engaged in those philosophical discussions. (Participant 7)

The Strategic Planning Council and its work groups began the daunting task of collecting research and analyzing information that would be available to IICC’s five-year strategic plan development. The information collection was the third significant incident along IICC’s strategic planning timeline.

#### *IICC Institutional Information Books*

The institutional information collected into books was a significant incident along IICC’s strategic planning process chronology. The Planning Council and Strategic Planning Council conducted institutional information gathering activities. The institutional information assembled was significant for four reasons: first, because the

combined councils' institutional information gathering efforts were brought together in two large information books; second, because institutional information related to IICC had never been gathered before on such a large scale; third, because the institutional information was specifically earmarked to be used for making strategic plan decisions; fourth, because institutional information impacted the strategic planning process since the books were used at the Strategic Planning Retreat to determine institutional gaps and draft strategic priorities.

As IICC collected institutional information, Participant 5 realized just how important it and its collection was to the strategic planning process.

I started to realize "This is important stuff we should be looking at." But little bits of this were trickling in over the course of, I think it took us eight months to get to these books,. But during the first eight months when the process began they were giving us little, like you get five or six pages out of this, and a lot of that ended up getting photocopied and turned into these [information books]. (Participant 5)

It took nearly a year to collect the information IICC brought together into the information books.

In completing the assigned work, the Planning Council and Strategic Planning Council gathered a great quantity of different information (Appendices E & G).

Some of the stuff that we had already developed in print and that when we had our regular Strategic Planning Council meetings, ... So there's a lot of information shared, there's a lot of stuff that went on the R: drive and a lot of material. ... When we first got them I kind of laughed and said, [name] can I get campus OPS to deliver them for me? People were saying we could use them as weights and they were very heavy. They had a lot of information. Those binders represented the work of all the teams of the Strategic Planning Council that went into those binders as well as additional information. (Participant 4)

Not only were the books heavy in weight, the institutional information contained in the books would weigh heavily when IICC conducted the gap analysis and drafted strategic priorities.

The participants described three major institutional information gathering tasks: internal/external analyses; focus group interviews; and strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analyses that are discussed next.

### *Internal/External Analyses*

From the planning process inception IICC understood it needed to look at both the internal and external organizational facts. The institution paused and asked important questions about the college's internal operations.

The very first step was to understand what we were doing, as an organization. Looking at both our internal setup, of facts about the organization, Who we are serving? Who our customers are? - excuse me, students - Who our business was serving within our district? Outside of our district? What kinds of products or services were they buying from us? ... We looked at a large amount of data that was captured by our research folks internally. (Participant 1)

We did an internal analysis. ... So that internal analysis was quite the eye opener because literally we had five to six pages of things that we were doing as individual areas, as individual departments, maybe that someone else didn't know that we were doing or that folks weren't looking at. (Participant 7)

The Institutional Research and Planning Office assisted by supplying some internal institutional information. IICC's internal analyses exposed the fact that the different parts of campus were not aware of what other areas were doing. Participant 7 discussed how each work group looked at different information based on their charge to find out what the different areas on campus were doing.

Each group looked at different things. ...In the internal analysis we literally sent individuals off and said, "Go and find out what people are doing." So, we had the critical people in the room but also sent them out to talk with other people in the classroom. So, we literally started out in the internal analysis just listing data, listing information, listing things that we did having some conversation. ... We then went out to the faculty. We hosted a panel discussion. ... Then we sent the faculty off as part of that in-service day to talk about what they saw and to define for us what they believed...and also the strategies that they had in place. ... So, that was a rich amount of information that we got, that we didn't have any before.

The internal analyses brought together IICC institutional information regarding what was happening on campus the college had not known or assembled in the past. At the same time the work groups were gathering internal information, IICC researched external environmental factors.

We also, simultaneous to that [internal analyses], our research folks had engaged a third party to do some market research on the marketplace to understand what the market thought of us. ...They went through that process of understanding how we are thought of in the marketplace. Are we the top of mind thinking? Are we the second thought for college? ...To try to understand what our market thought of us. ...So, much of the early work was in understanding the data and understanding who we serve. (Participant 1)

The external marketplace analyses were an opportunity for IICC to understand what the market thought about the college. IICC believed it was important to know who it served. IICC also believed knowing the marketplace was important to strategic planning.

It was much more market driven. While market was important in this environment. We're just on the cusp of that as an industry. I can see kind of concerning ourselves with competition from the proprietary colleges as well as other public entities. So, that external piece of planning is kind of a new phenomenon for colleges it seems; and of course, it's the mainstay in the business world. You know, knowing what your competitors are doing, understanding the external marketplace, those are all important to strategic planning. (Participant 1)

In addition to scanning the external marketplace, the external analyses were similar to a literature review.

The external analysis was a lot of literature review, a lot of discussion with other schools, reading books. ...went off to look at processes or what other schools were doing, things that may have struck somebody and we just got on the phone and started calling them. What are you doing? Why are you doing that? (Participant 7)

The internal and external information gathered provided IICC information describing who it was serving. Participant 1 provided a detailed internal and external institutional information list.

The internal data that was shared with us was shared out of our research department which keeps information about almost everything that happens here. From the number of students that have that have come to the college, graduated from the college, participated in coursework, in credit hour - by credit hour from those that were seeking full credit courses, to non-credit, to workforce development.

We looked at trend data to understand kind of what was being trended over the course of probably a five-year trend line, ... We looked at it from the standpoint of on-campus versus satellite delivery. We looked at it from the standpoint of demographics to understand who the student was or is from the standpoint of age, race, sex. We looked at completion rates. ...

It was then benchmarked against other community college data, so that we could understand how we were fairing in relationship to other community colleges like us in the [city name] area. ...

A lot of interpretive data. Understanding of that was done by the academic deans, who when seeing the data could relate to it better than a lot of support staff could. They know what's going on in the divisions better than anybody, or subdivisions, they saw trends occurring in programs themselves, but this was pretty revealing looking at a five year trend line. ...

We looked to see who our employees had become, what kind of tenure. What kind of seniority we had throughout the organization, to understand who it was that was serving our students to try and understand, had those demographics changed to reflect our student body a little bit.

IICC's internal and external analyses brought together a large amount of institutional information together about itself and the marketplace.

### *Focus Group Interviews*

When IICC began examining their planning processes, it decided to collect information from the community through several focus group interview forums. The forums required a great involvement from the college. "We were heavily involved in organizing community focus groups" (Participant 9).

Community focus groups were held in five locations around the district. "The college held five focus groups because we consider ourselves having five geographic

regions or sectors within our district” (Participant 4). “I think we had five breakfast meetings, I think we were calling them. I think there was five of them in each area of the district” (Participant 5). The Strategic Planning Council, “Led them through series of questions at small round-table discussions” (Participant 1). The focus group meetings were an opportunity for IICC to gather community perceptions information about the college.

So we went about this originally to get community input and we had breakfasts around the district in which we invited all kinds of people to get their feelings and perceptions and so forth about the planning process. What are some of the things that they saw at IICC that was wonderful? What are some of the things they think we ought to be doing that we are not doing? (Participant 6)

The executive staff as well as some of the administrative staff that were a part of the strategic planning team, led the discussions to understand What the thinking of the community was about the college? What it could do? What it needed to do differently? What we could do to better serve the community? ... We averaged 60-70 people in each of the five groups. Some were better attended than others, but I bet we get nearly 300 of the district giving us input. (Participant 1)

... And asked people questions and have them fill out informational sheets about what we did well, what we didn't do well, what those people in the community thought we needed to do. So they would take all that information then back to the college, and, that's how the committees that would work off that information plus faculty, important staff input and those kinds of things. (Participant 2)

I thought those were pretty insightful from what I was hearing at the time, most of those people were saying that, like when we were asking the question “What do you see IICC's role as being?” And most of them said, “We don't see much of IICC as far as through the district, as a central like leader or anything” - or some place where we would expect the community to go to it really never came across like that. ... The tables I went to, and actually if I recall the statistical data that came back, a lot of them did say we'd like to see more of that from the college but that was one part of the process. (Participant 5)

We just had tables of people and we had an IICC person and a recorder at each one, so somebody led the discussion to try to get people talking. Not to get them to give you information that you might skew at a certain direction but to get a question out and say, “Well how do you think we do in terms of?” “What would you recommend?” or whatever the case may be and then somebody to record the comments. I had to type up comments from one session I was at that went to

research, so all of that was compiled and we got the reports on that, so that came out of the strategic planning process. (Participant 4)

The IICC focus group breakfast meetings were designed to gather information from the outside community. The community focus groups' purpose was to find out what IICC was doing right, what it was doing wrong, and what else it should be doing. Therefore, a variety of community leaders were invited for the purpose of getting information from the five regions of the college's district. "We invited the business community, the government, school districts, municipal government employees and elected officials" (Participant 1). "We got educators, we got not-for-profit people, we got business people, we got community residents" (Participant 4). "We asked the local mayors, and village managers, state representatives, park district people, school people, the Sertomas and all those people" (Participant 2). "We were meeting with basically mayors and police and fire department officials, librarians, high school officials, grade school officials, just a whole mix of people in there, I think there were some PTA people that were there as well or something like that, parent-parent organizations" (Participant 5).

Participant 2 noted the focus group meetings involved a great deal of work in terms of getting people to attend.

It took a long time, it was a tremendous amount of work, and a lot of times the community they're not that interested, it's like pulling teeth to get them to come to these meetings sometimes you have to make phone calls and pursue some of these mayors. "Yea we know you're doing a good job out there and whatever you think you should do go ahead and do it", but that's not enough. You need to get people to talk to you and tell you what they should do, what their opinions are. ... But getting that input, from the community is always pretty difficult. (Participant 2)

Getting input from the community was an involved and difficult task. Even so, IICC was able to conduct focus group interviews and gather institutional information from the community about the college.

The institutional information gathered through the community focus groups was important and valuable for making strategic plan decisions. “The focus groups that we did with the community I think they were invaluable cause I think it was a really great for us to have that opportunity to interact one on one with the members of the community” (Participant 4). The community focus groups produced more external information about what the community was thinking about IICC.

IICC also held campus focus groups to collect institutional information from faculty, staff, and students. The institutional information from the campus focus groups was given to and reviewed by the Executive Leadership Team.

[The consultant] and [name] did also hold focus groups with staff here on campus. ... And then they also held a couple with students and gave a report to ELT about the internal, administrative environment and which I don't think they were terribly happy with. Well, there's always going to be some people who gripe and actually ELT was very up front about it, and I'm sure that we are not unique. They heard from many people that it takes them forever to make a decision. They talk everything to death and then hang out. ... Leave people waiting and waiting forever while they thinking about it. (Participant 9)

The campus focus groups reports pointed out that there was dissatisfaction for the length of time it took leadership to make decisions. Furthermore,

Issues came forward publicly that embarrassed ELT is too strong but let's say surprised them. There was a fair amount of staff resentment over the fact that salaries hadn't been renewed in a number of years and some of that spilled out at this meeting and overshadowed actually what we were trying to accomplish at the meeting. (Participant 9)

The Strategic Planning Council collected much focus group information from different group types. The information came from 5 community groups; 18 faculty and

staff groups; 2 student groups; 4 career program advisory groups, 1 group with local business leaders; 1 group with high school advisor/counselors; and 1 group with high school career program coordinators (IICC, 2002).

### *SWOT Analyses*

Work groups developed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analyses for the six critical areas. Participant 1 noted in order to understand where IICC needed to go, it was necessary to access its strengths and weaknesses, and what opportunities and possible threats existed.

Given our strengths and weaknesses and what do we need to build up internally into the organization? And then externally where the opportunities to the organization? What is it that we think isn't being served that could be based on what we've learned from our data? And then finally, What are the things that we need to keep an eye on out there that are becoming a threat to us? (Participant 1)

Participant 4 described how the Strategic Planning Council's work groups conducted SWOT analyses.

One kind of research that we conducted for each team had to do a SWOT analysis; strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. ... Based on the area that you were focusing on then you needed to look at, What were the strengths that the college had in that area? What were our weaknesses in that area? What were the opportunities that we saw as ways that we could begin to concentrate some more effort? Develop some more strategies around new tactics and that kind of thing, and then what were the threats?

The analyses were important because these would reveal which direction IICC needed to head based on the college's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats for the six work group critical strategic institutional functioning aspects. The SWOT analyses were a key work group task "So those were a lot of the things that we talked about and that came through in our SWOT analysis, so this is one document that we prepared that we thought was really important" (Participant 4).

The institutional information gathered from internal/external analyses, focus group interviews, and SWOT analyses was significant to IICC's strategic planning process. Such a large amount of information had never been collected before from such a variety of places. "It came from everywhere" (Participant 8), and was assembled into the two information books.

#### *Assembling the Institutional Information Books*

As IICC's Strategic Planning Council gathered institutional information most was stored in work group folders in the "Strategic Planning 2000-01" main folder on the college's computer network "R: drive" (IICC, SPC Minutes, December 21, 2000, p. 12).

Participant 9 discussed how the Strategic Planning Council used the R: drive.

It's a file location that anybody given permission can access from their desktop. So each of the committees had a folder. A regular folder that you'd have on your computer and under there they put all the documents related to their work. Some actually didn't put them all. If they had hard copy documents they did not scan and upload them, although actually a few folks worked pretty hard at getting all their documents out there. ...The idea is that we didn't need to have a central place where everything was in paper, that you would browse through and look at whatever interested you. (Participant 9)

The R: drive on IICC's central mainframe computer proved to be helpful as a place to store and share strategic planning work group institutional information as opposed to having it all in hard copy. The Strategic Planning Council was beginning to bring together the work groups' institutional information. Each work group had its own folder that held whatever institutional information it had collected. Not all institutional information each group collected made it onto the R: drive, even so, Participant 4 discussed why the R: drive was extremely helpful.

We set up a special drive on the our computers that everybody had to, as your respective planning council group, task group, had its meetings, as you developed material, as you did the various things that you were charged with doing, then you

were to put reports on the R: drive that could be shared by all members of the council. ... That was I thought very, very helpful. It's a situation where you can't necessarily always reach somebody when you need them to get some information, but if their reports are updated, then they're right there on the R: drive so you had access to them when you needed them. And all major research basically that was conducted that was published was also put on the R: drive. (Participant 4)

The institutional information was constantly available and accessible to Strategic Planning Council members and its work groups.

The institutional information stored on the R: drive, other Strategic Planning Council and its work groups information, and other pertinent institutional information were brought together in hard copy form in two large books just prior to the Strategic Planning Retreat. Early in the strategic planning process, putting institutional information into the books had been discussed and set aside. The institutional information was put into the books just before the retreat. When asked why the Strategic Planning Council gathered the institutional information into the books, Participant 9 said, "This was talked about early and then sort of put to one side, and then really relatively quickly at the end we decided to pull together as much of the data as we could in those components."

The core components were a list of institutional information categories that were suggested the work groups gather.

This initially came from [Consultant #1] of things that should be included, data that should be looked at in terms of strategic planning. Core components. We took his initial [list] and then we added other stuff to it and some of the stuff we never did get, so at the end of the process when we were getting ready to put all these books together. ... So that was definitely the initial list came from [Consultant #1] and [Director of Institutional Research and Planning] worked on it and added some things and may have deleted some things. ... This was available to people to use, the core components as a more complete list of data that they should be looking at. (Participant 9)

The original core components institutional information list needed for planning came from the consultant. The Director of Institutional Research and Planning distributed the

list and posted it on the R: drive. “Which includes all elements that council members should consider for strategic planning” (IICC, SPC Minutes, March 15, 2000, Notes, p. 3). The major core components categories were: an external scan that included population, economy, labor market, technology, K-12 schools, 4-year colleges and universities, social trends, community, competitor analysis and special issues data; an internal scan that included mission/vision statements, enrollment, programs and curricula, student support services, finance, facilities, faculty/staff, students, administrative organization, institutional resources, and student achievement and satisfaction data. Each category listed specific data types the Strategic Planning Council should collect.

Each Strategic Planning Council work group was asked to pull together institutional information it had gathered to be put in the information books. Each work group’s report was put in either book and given out just prior to the Strategic Planning Retreat. “Before the retreat, we were each asked to prepare and submit the information and materials from our prospective team that we felt should be reviewed before the retreat by the entire team” (Participant 4).

A lot of this information had been shared on the R: drive previously so it’s not to say that this was all new. But what we each were asked to do was to pull this ... Obviously when you’re working like this, there’s reams and reams of paper that come from it. So we were asked to give the council for the purposes of this document or the information from the work of our group that we thought was most important to share with the other teams. ... Hopefully if you had not been that familiar with the work of that team, if you looked at their various documents in their sections, you would be able to get a good sense of what it is they have been doing and how they have been doing it. (Participant 4)

The purpose for each work group submitting information was for everyone to examine institutional information other work groups had gathered. There were many different

institutional information types collected and put in the books. The participants discussed the various institutional information types, how it was gathered and where it came from.

We start with external and we read all of the higher education publications; we read the data from the federal government on higher education and community colleges. We had a librarian who was helping us with the research in all the areas ... We have the demographics that were cultivated through research, through our Director of Research so all of the demographics. ... We used that census data. We had information from our high school districts. We invited in participants from our partner institutions, from universities who partnered with us. So we invited them in and had them meet with us. They became part of the focus groups. We have, as a result to the [parallel process] have the research from the [name of organization] so any time there was a question I'd send it out and so we have all the data from the [organization] institutions, and from all the [organization] colleges. So, if you said, "Who does this and how is this performing? What does this other college do?" ... We are inundated. We love information. Love data research information. We were overwhelmed with it and then it was, you know, each sub-groups summarized it and synthesized it so we had a format for this typical strategic planning process-strengths, weaknesses-, the background information, the SWOT analysis. We did it all according to that formula. (Participant 8)

There was about five years of trend data that research had provided and any trend you can think of or any statistical information and everything from demographics throughout the district, growth population estimates and growth population, gender, traits, race. I don't think religion was in there, although it might have been - ... There's - that was one whole section, the whole population study was one thing another chunk was some internal research that we had. ... Technology a pretty small section. Research - however they got it - I don't know. I think they had finished a census then or something like that too, maybe they got a lot of it from the census that was in the process of just being finished or something like that. (Participant 5)

It [data] came from all over. ... So it's the six teams, eighteen Co-Chairs and all of the teams, the membership of the teams that developed the reports for each of their specific areas. Well, first of all it came from the Planning Council, all of that information was reviewed. It came from all of the institutional research that we have here. [Director of Institutional Research and Planning] put together data books for the Planning Council, and provided a lot of information, more than she ever had. And just started feeding it to people in a different kind of way. Previously I think we just sent out information and we all received it and maybe we read it and then we put it in our binder or we threw it out or we set it aside. But the way that it was distributed ... I'm talking about the institutional data. The way that it was distributed was in a, in a different context. The context was developed and then [Director of Institutional Research and Planning] would hand

out the research. So we would be talking about a particular topic and she was so good, she'd just say "I might have something that speaks to that." And then at the next meeting she'd come back to it and she'd review what we had discussed before and she'd roll out the research and, and really peoples' interests were peaked by the information. As much as by their discussion of it, and when you have eighteen people in a room talking about something and getting really excited by it, you really set the stage for a wonderful meal so I think that data provided that. It let us go just a little bit farther. Each of the teams of course developed their own data. Wherever they got it from-across the country, across the world, on their particular topic, whether it was technology or whatever the, the topic. (Participant 10)

All the committees. There may have been a few other areas. I would actually have to go through the data books to see where it all came from. It was primarily the committees and information from [the Office of Institutional Research and Planning] that made up the data books. (Participant 9)

Institutional information was not just being collected by or through the Office of Institutional Research and Planning. IICC was collecting information from so many sources that it had not previously seen some institutional information. This led to people becoming interested in and excited about institutional information.

The institutional information books were not bound together by the Office of Institutional Research and Planning. The Strategic Planning Council's secretary did most of the work.

Most of the data, for instance K-12, that is, was not from the committees came out of [the Office of Institutional Research and Planning]. We sent tons of that stuff to [Consultant #1] who I believe ordered ... [name]'s secretary did a fair amount of work for this. ... I know that she did the tabs. ... My best recollection is that [Consultant #1] decided the order of the books, but that I'm not positive about. (Participant 9)

Once the information was gathered, it was collected into the two information books titled, *Gap Analysis: External Forces and Trends* and *Gap Analysis: Internal Capability*.

The *Gap Analysis: External Forces and Trends* contained institutional information pertinent to IICC's strategic planning process. Articles, charts, graphics, reports, and

tables along with sections from the college's *Facts & Figures: Past Present and Future 1998* book were included. This book was a two-inch thick binder and was divided into 12 tabbed sections with around 350 document pages for the following: Population, Economy/Labor Market, Technology, K-12 Schools, 4-Year Colleges and Universities, Customer Needs and Expectations, Social Trends, Transportation, Public Policy, Accreditation/Regulation, Competitors, and Key Trends in Community Colleges. Participant 4 pointed out that there was a variety of institutional information contained in the *Gap Analysis: External Forces and Trends* book.

This particular binder was just one that had a lot of the research that they thought the various teams could use. ... This was research information that each and every team and the team - and the council as a whole used. And they broke it up into various areas. This came from the leaders of our Strategic Planning Council. ... This was a cross-section of information that had been gathered by the council and it was thought that all of this information could be very useful to the teams in the work that they were being asked to do so they just separated it based on the area. (Participant 4)

The other book, *Gap Analysis: Internal Capability* described "a full identification and assessment of current college programs and services" (IICC, 2002). It contained relevant analyses, articles, charts, graphics, reports, and tables either collected or generated by the Strategic Planning Council work groups. "That would be their [work groups] report. What you have in the front I believe is their final report and then behind it would be the data that they looked at" (Participant 9). This was a three-inch binder with 15 tabbed sections containing around 550 document pages for the following: (1) Mission/Vision, (2) Academic Programs/Services, (3) Underprepared Students, (4) Student Services, (5) Enrollment/Marketing, (6) Student Characteristics, (7) Student Success, (8) Faculty/Staff, (9) Finance, (10) Facilities, (11) Technology, (12)

Organizational Structure, (13) Systems/Processes, (14) Organizational Culture, and (15) Other.

Some information duplication occurred between the two institutional information books because work groups incorporated material from the *Gap Analysis: External Forces and Trends* book into reports. When collected together into the two binders, there was a great deal of institutional information. “We had an awful lot of research” (Participant 4).

Participant 1 thought IICC had gathered enough information.

I can't remember ever asking for more information. We may have asked for it to be stratified differently at some point we may have asked for it to be cut a little differently, I'm really, I'm just, I'm just having difficulty recalling not having enough information at any time in the process. Because the information came so early in the process, and was available to us all the way through the process, and was used all the way through the process. ... I never recalled in this process not being able to make information decisions based on lack of information, ... It seemed that we always had enough and it was often more than we would have even thought to ask for. Much of that is because of the strength of the Director of Research and Planning here ... is just good at knowing what an organization needs, setting it up into the kinds of boxes that it can be retrieved when [the director] needs it. (Participant 1)

The institutional information collection began early in the process and was enough for IICC to make strategic planning decisions.

There was so much information that some of the participants recalled feeling overwhelmed. “We were overwhelmed with it” (Participant 8).

It [books] had all the information about the community groups and the focus groups and how many students go to IICC and what districts they live and just everything you could imagine. I was just amazed at how much information was in there. ... It's a huge amount of data. I think it was – it's overwhelming. It's almost an - it is an overwhelming – I'm not gonna say it's almost - it is an overwhelming amount of information to be handing out to people that normally don't look at that data. (Participant 5)

I think a lot of people thought that we had just tons of information and certainly a few people I think have been able to go through all of it. I'm not going to say that I did but I do know it's there if I need it in the future, and I have consulted it since the time that it was first compiled, I certainly have, and will consult it again. I think it's outstanding information that we collected. (Participant 4)

The institutional data had never been pulled together or presented in a comprehensive manner to the college until this time, it had been piecemealed out.

In some ways this was interesting because from my perspective I had never been us group what [the Office of Institutional Research and Planning] does in this manner before, so we, we got information in dribs or drabs or in individual parts but this brought it all together and put it as a whole. (Participant 7)

Participants found that so much institutional information was gathered to the point that it was overwhelming, especially for those who were not accustomed to looking at institutional information. Even so, the books brought the information together so that the college could see the entire institution. And the information collected was presented in an understandable manner.

It was very clear. I'm even try to recall the time that we might have asked for it to be illustrated differently. More often than not, data was illustrated both numerically and graphically and whether it was in a pie chart, whether it was on some kind of a line graph, or whether it was in a columned approach, more often than not it was done in duplicate ways all the time. So that we had it in ways that we could use it regularly and see it in a visual way. (Participant 1)

The institutional information books were given "To those people invited to the Strategic Planning Retreat and the retreat folks included, of course, all the members of the council and a whole bunch more" (Participant 9).

The Strategic Planning Council ultimately reviewed information and documents (Appendix G) that included the Planning Council work summary, six work group reports, five community focus groups reports, eighteen faculty and staff focus groups reports,

other focus groups reports, high school seniors survey report, research survey reports, and other core component information.

The information collected into the books was the third significant incident on the IICC strategic planning process chronology. There was a great variety and large amount of institutional information that relevant to the college's operations had never before been brought together in such a manner. Furthermore, this information would be taken to the Strategic Planning Retreat and would be available for use in making decisions when developing IICC's five-year strategic plan.

#### *IICC Strategic Planning Retreat*

With the two institutional information books in hand, IICC's Strategic Planning Council held a two-day Strategic Planning Retreat in July 2001. The retreat was the last significant incident along the strategic planning process timeline because this was the meeting where the gathered institutional information was used to perform the gap analysis and draft the college's strategic priorities. The Strategic Planning Council members, other administrators, faculty, and support staff were invited. The retreat product was the gap list and the strategic priorities draft. The materials from the retreat were also used by the Strategic Planning Council to revise the college's Mission and Purpose statement (IICC, 2002). The Strategic Planning Council did not meet to review the information book contents prior to the retreat. "We did not have a meeting prior to the strategic planning council where we went through those big huge books with folks. We did not do that. That was not possible I guess in the time that we had" (Participant 9).

The institutional information books were given out close to the Strategic Planning Retreat. Many participants thought the books were not provided far enough in advance.

Most participants recalled receiving these around week before the retreat. “We received these right before the meeting began-like the week before prior to the meeting” (Participant 7). Participant 4 also recalled, “It was given to every member about a week before the meeting.”

Upon arriving at the retreat, the work groups were structured around the books sections, “Our groups were divided up according to what section of, of the book you had read” (Participant 9). The work groups were able to share information and ideas.

Well, it was very interesting, it was very, very intense, and what it did is it gave us an opportunity again from all of our various respective roles on the Strategic Planning Council to come together as a group and to begin to kind of cross pollinate a little bit more and dialog if you will. (Participant 4)

At the Strategic Planning Retreat, the Strategic Planning Council conducted the gap analysis and drafted the strategic priorities.

#### *Gap Analysis*

IICC performed the gap analysis at the Strategic Planning Retreat. “A critical stage in strategic planning is the identification of gaps or disjunctures between forces and trends in the external environment and the resources and performance required of a college to successfully respond to these forces” (IICC SPC meeting minutes, Gap Analysis Report, p. 1). Work groups brought together information to determine where and what gaps existed. Each work group was instructed to “Identify gaps between data implications and college programs and services” (IICC, 2002). The groups were given instructions for how to conduct the gap analysis using the external scan and internal review information that had already been gathered. The analysis identified the college’s current capabilities and what the institution would require to respond to outside forces and trends. A gap analysis “is an active process of determining how large a leap must be

taken from IICC's current state to its desired future state" (Gap Analysis, IICC, Instructions, handout). Four gap types community colleges generally encounter were described to the Strategic Planning Council. The types were; insufficient resources, excess capacity, inadequate response, and competitive disadvantage. IICC asked itself four questions when determining whether a gap existed.

1. What is the difference between IICC's current capability and actions it must take to respond effectively to the change driver?
2. What specific actions has IICC taken to respond to this change driver?
3. Have these actions made a difference- have they reduced or eliminated the gap?
4. What capabilities and resources does IICC have to reduce or eliminate the gap? (Gap Analysis, IICC, Instructions, handout)

Essentially, a gap was a place where links were missing in where the college was and where they wanted to be in the future. A gap analysis "is an active process of determining how large of a leap must be taken from a college's current state to a desired future state" (IICC SPC meeting minutes, Gap Analysis Report, p. 1).

The gap analysis. It's kind of like the SWOT analysis. We as a group had to sit down and we identified what a gap is and ... we had to take this and apply this to our own respective teams. So they asked each of us to use this as a model for the work of our team. (Participant 4)

The things they needed to do with that gap analysis report. They would take the information from the college and the information that they learned from the community and the things that they wanted to do from what they learned and poked holes in everything and then looked for linkages that were missing and that's, then when they got the gap analysis. That's what they used to plan the future really. All the things that were missing. They know what they did well, they know what they didn't do and what they wanted to do then was, what was left. (Participant 2)

IICC used information to determine gaps. "If this is where you are and this is where you want, ought to be, or you think you ought to be, or the community think you

ought to be there, then how do we get there?” (Participant 6). “All of those things were analyzed to see what we needed to do and how were we gonna get from where we were to where we wanted to be and what linkages were missing in between” (Participant 2). “Those were the gaps and that’s where the strategic priorities would build off of those kinds of things that was in there” (Participant 6). The gap analysis gave IICC an opportunity to see what linkages were missing between where it was and where it wanted to be. Twenty-three gaps were identified at the Strategic Planning Retreat. The gaps “represent areas in which IICC must enhance performance or direct resources to respond to forces in the external environment” (IICC SPC meeting minutes, Identified Gaps, September 14, 2001).

The gap analysis served as the information for drafting the strategic priorities.

“Yes. They [strategic priorities] came out of that [gap analysis]” (Participant 6). Once IICC had the gap analysis, it was easy to develop the strategic priorities.

It’s pretty easy once you know where you are. Where the institution is, and then knowing what the outside community is expecting and what the world is expecting. And if you know that and you know that you can fairly well identify the gaps that’s between that. And those becomes the priorities that you need. Now everything that you identified wasn’t a priority because we didn’t think we needed to go with some of the things. But we identified those things that we thought were the real institutional priorities. ... It’s a lot of work. (Participant 6)

An immense amount of work went into conducting the gap analysis. The Planning Council and Strategic Planning Council gathered an immense amount of different institutional information that was organized into two institutional information books and used at the Strategic Planning Retreat to analyze gaps and draft IICC’s strategic priorities.

### *Strategic Priorities*

The Strategic Planning Council's previous years work was coming together with the strategic priorities drafted.

I think the whole year up to that was just, Let's talk about it, Let's discuss it, Let's think about it, Let's write the mission statement and let's wordsmith that for a day and then let's look at our objectives. But really those two days is when the whole thing came together. (Participant 5)

The strategic planning process work culminated at the retreat where once again the consultant played an important role.

The consultant came back to lead the Strategic Planning Retreat. "[Consultant #1] came back and coordinated really and led our Strategic Planning Retreat in July of '01" (Participant 9). The consultant guided drafting the strategic priorities. The Strategic Planning Council used institutional information it had gathered into the books.

We worked with a consultant out of [university] ... He helped us to then assemble much of the thinking that went on in the first two days into some categorical areas, and that's how we identified the categories of our strategies that live today and actually have resulted in roughly a hundred strategic priorities. That sounds like an oxymoron, a hundred strategic priorities and yet, because we're so large as an organization, we felt like we could handle a hundred. We know the strategic priorities are not one of those things that you immediately, you prioritize them and then you take those things that are first. And we thought it was at least a five year strategy plan with the need to come back to it probably about every year and just touch it to say, Are we on the right track? Are there things that have shifted in the business? Are there things that we need to add to the strategies? And realizing full and well that it's a moving target, that there are times when, in the course of it, there were certain things we missed. (Participant 1)

That was a combination of us as a team and our consultant who was there the two days, kind of - he would kind of bounce stuff off of us and say, it kind of sounds like you have a whole group of issues related to student success, kind of looks like a whole group of issues related to marketing yourselves to the community. ... I think when we walked away from there we had more than what we have now, we sort of after the fact combined and distilled it down to six or seven, I think maybe we had eight or nine at the time and - I do remember that we walked away from there with maybe 26 activities that sit under those that were all sort of strategic kinds of activities, and part of what made them more strategic than annual was

that ... it was something that was gonna overlap into multiple areas of the college and you were going to need input from a lot of folks before you could move forward on that initiative. ... So after we went through the retreat, then we did exchanges back and forth with consultant and ourselves met as a planning, strategic planning group and kind of distilled it down to what we ended up with our strategic plan. (Participant 3)

Then what we were asked to do there then is to say, okay if we had to identify the six or eight top areas that IICC needs to be concentrating its efforts on at this time, What would they be? And that is how the strategic priorities were then developed. Because we did have a leader who helped us at the retreat, somebody who has a - a consultant who has expertise in leading strategic planning at colleges. We used a consultant. And so we had our various SWOT analysis. And we had to sit and we just kind of talked among ourselves and then we had somebody writing on the board, what were the things, what were the areas that IICC needed to concentrate on. So, we came up with common things that got culled down ... That's why it was a two-day process, so from all of the thinking and the ideas of the teams about where we need to concentrate our efforts, emphasizing and promoting student success was the number one thing. And so, what are some of the things that we need to do in order to emphasize and promote student success. And that's how we came up with what IICC would then do in order to emphasize and promote student success. (Participant 4)

We sat at individual groups and worked. We each were assigned a different area and we sketched out and turned in various different areas of concern, really, for the college, what, of recommendations of, of broad areas we need to work on. The consultant determined, And then everybody went away at the end of the day ... He organized them into the six broad categories which we now have, and then put those together in the evening and the next day brought them back in the form of the major headings and then all of the things that we had discussed, and then we did some prioritizing and arguing, Is this really important? A couple of things snuck in there because they were of interest of one person that later were thrown out. A couple ended up in there that probably shouldn't have because enough people argued for them. And then we brought this out to the college community for input. And actually we did not do a whole lot of massaging of the work of that, the Strategic Planning Retreat other than the work we did that day to toss things out. There are, if you look at the strategic priorities, a fair amount of duplications of ideas that come under more than one heading and we deliberately left those in there. We cleaned up the language so that we had full sentences, and, and not half bullets, but we did not clean up duplications. I believe we ordered them but made a point of not trying to order them in the order in which we thought they would be done more if there was a logic order. We didn't, we did not do a whole lot of rewriting of those and left them in a rough form. And there were, I believe, although you would have to ask the ELT folks this one, some things that came out in there that we probably will not do because there was a very vocal minority that insisted that something be put in. (Participant 9)

The consultant played an important role in guiding the drafting of the strategic priorities. Participant 7 summarized the consultant's role at the retreat, "homogenized and massaged ideas" (Participant 7). The consultant assisted them in distilling down the work of the work groups into several strategic priorities.

The strategic priorities were developed from the top areas that needed attention.

The top areas needing attention did not surprise Participant 3.

It didn't surprise anybody what our top six or seven were ... I think that as a group we probably already could have guessed that those would be important items to us, nothing surfaced and we went "Oh, gee, we should have been paying attention to recruiting or marketing." ... I think what happened was that we were able to use the data to reinforce what we already kind of do in our gut, but we probably never had hard facts at our fingertips to support it. (Participant 3)

IICC probably had an inclination as to the top strategic priorities. The institutional information was used to reinforce and support what the institution thought was happening. Participant 3 went on to discuss whether the college's drafted strategic priorities were unique to IICC or whether they were usual for a community college.

I would say yes to both of those. They aren't unique to IICC, I think that they probably have little twists and turns that might be unique to IICC, but if you look at our strategic direction, they deal with things like making sure that student learning and student success is paramount. ... Would some other school look at those and say, "Yea those are our directions also?" Could very well happen. That's why I guess I'm thinking that anybody kind of is in the community college and thinking about issues and trends could come up with a list like that. But the data kinda reinforced what we probably already knew was true. (Participant 3)

While the drafted priorities may not have been totally unique to IICC, it did use institutional information to reinforce what it thought was true. At the Strategic Planning Retreat conclusion, there were eight working draft strategic priorities (IICC SPC meeting minutes, IICC Working Priorities, 9/5/01, p. 1).

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The strategic priorities, mission statement, vision statement and core values were presented to the college through the college's newspaper and open forums. The open forums were held in September and October 2001 (IICC SPC meeting minutes, Notes, August 30, 2001).

The strategic priorities were drafted and presented to the Executive Leadership Team. "With those priorities, we then even went through in kind of a global form, developed some action steps to go with those priorities. And then the Executive Leadership Team then looked at those various action steps" (Participant 4). The final six priorities were:

1. Emphasizing and Promoting Student Success
2. Enhancing Community Connections and Partnerships
3. Increasing Community Awareness
4. Embracing Diversity
5. Planning, Achieving and Managing Growth
6. Building Organizational Capability through Continuous Improvement (IICC, 2002).

Newly formed action teams took over after the Strategic Planning Council's planning objectives (Appendix C) were completed. "So we kept our team, where some other teams were reformed, renamed or just transitioned out. There was no need at on a priority basis for the college to concentrate its effort there at this particular time" (Participant 4). The detail work would be taken over by the action teams to follow the strategic priorities.

Once the planning was over and we came up with our strategic priorities, we essentially closed that part down. So that planning group is no longer in existence and those smaller groups were no longer in existence. What we went to was essentially here are the strategic priorities, and there were several of them. We have appointed task groups in each one of those areas. (Participant 6)

IICC's six strategic priorities and accompanying action steps provided IICC with a blueprint for the institution's educational and training programs (IICC, 2002). After additional revisions to Strategic Planning Council documents, the final documents were presented to the Board of Trustees in November 2001.

The final action of the council was to operationalized the strategic Priorities by developing specific action steps to be taken. The action steps will became part of the college's annual planning process as areas or groups develop specific details, including resources and timelines. (IICC, 2002, p. 4)

IICC's strategic plan reflected where the college was at that point in time and where it wanted to head in the future.

And that's really what our strategic plan was, it was point of our thinking in time. ... The tail end of the process is this review that's done kind of annually to ask - or at least bi-annually to ask - Does it reflect what we really need to be focused on? What have we done with it? What needs to come off of it because now it has been operationalized? What is an opportunity passed that no longer makes sense that we need to take off the list?; and we think all those steps are things that we do and will continue to do during the course that we use that strategic plan. (Participant 1)

Next, IICC took the plan to the college.

The next step in planning is to disseminate the Strategic Plan to all units and staff in the institution and to convert strategic priorities into operational plans. The approach to implementation should include the following components: specific actions for achieving each priority at the unit level, identification of the persons accountable for achievement, timeline for completion, success indicators/expected results, and resource requirements. Academic program and administrative unit plans will need to be developed by faculty, staff and unit managers to support the Strategic Plan with an emphasis on the objectives for FY2003. In addition, individual performance plans for faculty and staff will need to be written to support the strategic priorities. (IICC, 2002, p. 24)

Working closely with the executive officers, unit managers will need to consider the resources necessary to carry out unit plans and submit requests for funding through the budget process. Progress toward completion of first year objectives will need to be assessed on a regular basis, and status reports developed for presentation. Results from the first year implementation plan will provide data that need to be taken into consideration in planning for the second year. This continuous cycle of planning, budgeting and evaluation will occur in a similar

manner in the remaining four years of the Plan. Through continuous monitoring and planning, the Strategic Plan will be amended by the college to ensure its ongoing relevance and success. (IICC, 2002, p. 24)

One IICC Action Steps reads, “Develop and implement collegewide and divisional plans to encourage data-driven decision-making and to expedite the conversion of information into action” (IICC, 2002, p. 21).

The strategic plan was given final approval by the Board of Trustees. “And in the end no one resisted what we were doing. We carried it to the Board; the Board approved it” (Participant 6). It was now time to implement the plan. “And then we went about to implement those various strategic priorities” (Participant 6). “The president will make sure that we follow the strategic plan” (Participant 2).

The four significant incidents; the Planning Council creation, the Strategic Planning Council creation, the gathering of institutional information into books, and the Strategic Planning Retreat were important strategic planning process parts. Each incident involved institutional information intended to be used when making strategic plan decisions. The chronology told the story of how the strategic planning process developed, how the process operated, what institutional information was available to the Strategic Planning Council. IICC’s actions to collect institutional information were done so with intent. There was deliberate action to bring institutional information into the strategic planning process. The council’s main goals and tasks were focused on collecting information. The Strategic Planning Council purposefully designed work groups to act as worker bees collecting institutional information. The college supported institutional information gathering into books. The Strategic Planning Retreat was an opportunity to bring together the collected institutional information for conducting the gap analysis that

assisted IICC when it drafted the strategic priorities. These were edited by IICC and approved by IICC's Board of Trustees.

IICC laid the groundwork by bringing information together and making it available for making decisions. The next section answers the fourth research question, How was institutional information used by IICC's Strategic Planning Council? Furthermore, how using institutional information for the strategic planning process has impacted the institution's decision-making is discussed.

#### Using Institutional Information for Decision-making

As IICC's strategic planning process chronology unfolded, participants shared how the Strategic Planning Council used collected institutional information. The council used institutional information to examine its internal and external environments; to analyze the college's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats; to analyze gaps that existed between where the college was and where it wanted to be in the future; and to make decisions when drafting the college's strategic priorities.

As I listened to participants recount how the Strategic Planning Council used gathered institutional information; I asked the question, "How had using institutional information in the strategic planning process impacted the institution's decision-making processes?" My findings indicated that using information had become essential to IICC's decision-making structure. In addition to the participants' accounts putting forth this conclusion, my finding was supported by college wide acceptance of an action step calling for institutional information use when making decisions. The action step reads, "Develop and implement college-wide and divisional plans to encourage data-driven

decision-making and to expedite the conversion of information into action” (IICC, 2002, p. 21).

The remainder of this chapter is presented in two parts. The first examines how IICC’s Strategic Planning Council used institutional information in their strategic planning process. The second explains how using information in this process has impacted the college’s decision-making processes.

### *IICC Using Institutional Information for Strategic Planning*

IICC desired using institutional information when making decisions from the strategic planning process beginning and ultimately did so. The college had a history of being somewhat information driven but did not use institutional information in any purposeful way. The efforts the college made to bring information into the strategic planning decision-making process was the central theme. The Planning Council and Strategic Planning Council were assigned gathering information used to draft the strategic priorities. Both councils spent a great deal of time collecting and analyzing institutional information. The institutional information was collected into books. An immense amount of different institutional information relating to IICC was gathered. The time participants spent examining institutional information varied. Institutional information was necessary when making decisions because it was the basis or background for knowing and it confirmed what people were thinking. Institutional information was important to the process because IICC used it for making decisions during the college’s strategic planning process. Before entering the strategic planning process, the college had historically been somewhat information driven. Therefore, it was

assumed from the process beginning institutional information would need to be considered.

Was it discussed that data was necessary?, No. I would say that this college has long been somewhat data driven. You didn't have to convince anyone or tell anyone that they needed to look at data. Once you have the group members agree that the structure will be. You're going to do an internal review with implications and external review with implications, summarize your implications and give your recommendations. ... Not only was it assumed from the beginning that they would use data but again we, had, suggested certain categories of data that should be looked at. It's not like the consultant had to come and tell us, "Well, you can't just sit in a room and decide what the strategic priorities." You have to spend a year or more gathering data. (Participant 9)

Data is an important part of how we look at things all the time. And the planning process was not unique to using data in decisions. Research in data here is something that is used regularly, as well as, comparatively, looking at ourselves compared to others. This organization actually has a penchant for wanting to know where it is in relationship to others and then where things are inexplicable, going to those others to say, "How did you do that?" And benchmarking itself against others to understand how. It really understands the value of learning from others and not reinventing the wheel and understanding that best practices live somewhere else, they don't only live at IICC. ... it's the way we do business. (Participant 1)

IICC had used information for decision-making prior to the strategic planning process studied. The college's problem was institutional information had not been or was not being used in any purposeful manner.

I think in a lot of cases it wasn't used. I remember asking [the Director of Institutional Research and Planning] that I wanted to see information on enrollments, by geographic sector and I wanted to see the student characteristics broken down by geographic sector and that was the first time that anyone had asked for that. And [the director] used to say things like "You're the only one who reads this stuff." Now I don't know whether that was true or not, but I'm not sure that as an institution we really used what we had in any purposeful way. (Participant 10)

IICC was somewhat information driven and yet not using it with any purpose. The strategic planning process involved information collection intended for decision-making when designing the strategic plan.

The time people spent reviewing information books varied depending upon whether they needed to refresh or did not know what information was in the books. “Did everybody who went to that planning retreat go through those two books? No” (Participant 9). Not everyone was able to read all of the information. “Ideally of course everyone is supposed to look at the work of all the committees. Practically, of course, that’s not going to happen” (Participant 9). Some participants recalled how much information they were able to read. “We were asked to read it which of course I did. ... [I] went back and highlighted things that were of importance to me, of interest to me. ... I read it cover to cover. I’m not sure what other people did with it” (Participant 7).

It’s so different by individual and that depends upon how well the individual is prepared. I’m sure there were some who spent 10 minutes reading their section, and I’m sure there were some who spent an hour or two refreshing their memory. Many of the good folks who work here don’t wait until once every five years to look at data. They look at it on an ongoing basis so some of the things in the data book, people just needed to refresh, and there were some things that people didn’t know. (Participant 9)

When I got my binder some of this stuff I had already seen and I knew about and others of that I didn’t so what I tried to do was go and look in the areas that I wasn’t the most familiar with. ... I think probably, and I think a lot of people thought that we had just tons of information and certainly a few people I think have been able to go through all of it, I’m not going to say that I did.” (Participant 4)

Well, first of all the fact that everybody had to read everything was a first for us. And I don’t know that everybody read everything because there were – I admit there were things I didn’t read because I’d seen them before or I’d been involved in them. And I think just the fact that we had this common information base to start our discussions from was a good thing because you knew that everybody else knew the same things you knew walking in, and, there was new information that I probably never had taken the time to read before or never had had access to before that were in the binders. (Participant 3).

They sent it [information books] to me. I skimmed through it, but did I read all of this? No. No I did not read all of this. I would listen to the reports from the people who were at the top on the planning council, everyone was assigned to one of

these areas and they would give a report on what their work group had done and what they were going to do in the future. (Participant 2)

The amount of time spent reading the information books varied. As a result, “Although obviously you saw the size of those data books. It is pretty clear that all of that data was not discussed with everybody in the strategic planning council nor everybody who attended the retreat” (Participant 9). “I actually spent a lot of time looking at them and I think I was one of the only people I feel like that actually went through and looked at them” (Participant 5). Even so, the books were an opportunity for people to see all of the information pulled together and taken to the Strategic Planning Retreat.

At the IICC Strategic Planning Retreat, the institutional information was used to make decisions when drafting the college’s strategic priorities. The participants used information along with personal experiences, as the basis or background for knowing, and to confirm what they thought was happening.

When making a decision, both information and a person’s intuition need to be considered. “From a generic philosophical way, I think you can only do so much that is data driven. Some of it has to be gut driven” (Participant 7).

I really believe in data but sometimes you can’t let data be the only thing that you do either. ... Because there are sometimes that good common sense is better than some of the data that leads you into some of these things because there are some political ramifications ... that data is not all encompassing but I really think data is the basis for all of this stuff. (Participant 6)

It seems that decision-making needs to take into account information and in some instances, use common sense. For example, Participant 6 points out that sometimes there are political ramifications where one would need to consider the political climate along with the information when making a decision.

Institutional information is necessary and the basis for knowing. "If you do not look at information how are you going to know?"(Participant 2). "Yes, because beyond that, it's just conjecture or it's opinion"(Participant 4). So, one needs information as the foundation for understanding. Information is the basis that provides the background information for making decisions. "It's a question of serving of the information so that thoughtful decisions could be made to benefit students" (Participant 8).

Well it's the background. It's the back up material for how you make decisions. It's why you make decisions. You can talk off the top of your head or you can talk out of the reliable information that is founded in fact and that is useful in weighing how you recommend what should be considered as an initiative or as a strategic priority. So it helps to convince others. (Participant 8)

The information acts as a back-up to facts for what one is saying. Reliable information can, as was the case in this study, be useful when determining a strategic priority.

Institutional information is helpful because it can assist in discussions to demonstrate a point.

Institutional information can sometimes help confirm what one believes is the situation.

It's a situation where I already pretty much could have guessed what the data was going to tell me, and so I was using it to confirm a position. I would make a decision ... It's kind of self-fulfilling prophesy because I already know what the data is the gonna tell me because we know we have this need ... So yes, did I use it to make decisions, yes. But a lot of times I think that the data is confirming what I'm already sensing. (Participant 3).

The institutional information collected acts to confirm what someone already believes to be the case. It substantiates someone's thoughts about a situation.

To sum, institutional information needs to be used along with common sense, it is the basis or background for knowing something, and it can assist when making a point as in trying to convince others or to confirm what one already suspects to be the case. For

IICC, institutional information provided the background, was available to convince others, and confirmed ideas when determining the college's strategic priorities.

When asked whether the strategic plan decisions made were completely institutional information driven, or whether there may have been other things involved, Participant 7 had this to say,

My answer to that would have to be as much as they could be because, from my perspective, we're not good at the data thing. So it was new for us to be doing it like that. ... Some of that will be anecdotal and then the question becomes when you gather enough people saying the same anecdotal information, does it become data? ... There's our discussion of anecdotal data but it drives us to do something, and if enough persons say it does it become real data? ... That's where I say that our culture kind of comes into that we wouldn't sit on that anecdotal data that long. ... So, to answer your question; no, maybe they weren't as data driven as they should have been; yes, there was some anecdotal information that was coming in there, because we struggle when you say to people "How do you know?" We still struggle with that question here, but I think most colleges are in that same boat.

Participant 7 questioned whether through consensus, Can anecdotal information become fact? IICC struggled with determining how people know something is true.

When asked about how much weight was given to the information for making decisions when designing IICC's strategic priorities, Participant 8 had this to say,

I think a good deal of weight was placed on that [institutional information] I think a good deal of weight. It's hard to say but I think heavily weighted on. What is the evidence? What evidence do we have that this should be? What evidence do we have that this should be what we should be doing? What evidence of it and it's really clear because the evidences that other community colleges have been successful in this regard across the nation? The evidence is that the district is waiting for something to happen. The evidence is that there is a need here. The evidence is here that there is a gap or a hole in that service. ... And the evidence is the data that is given to us by a research office which supports all the other evidence that may be, number one anecdotal or quantifiable, so we have a little bit of anecdotal but a lot of quantifiable. (Participant 8)

The evidence for decision-making included anecdotal and institutional information. IICC asked itself questions about what the evidence was and used information to supply the evidence.

In some sense, institutional information gained from personal experiences is used for decision-making. Institutional information was also considered because it served as the basis or background information for making decisions.

It was the basis for us having the data to make recommendations or come up with ideas for what it was we did, I mean because other than that, you could simply say, maybe I want to see us do [something] ... Well then why? What am I basing that kind of a recommendation on? ... That's how, in my mind at least, that's the way I used the information and that's the way I saw other people using the information. Yes, because beyond that, it's just conjecture or it's opinion. You've gotta have basis to substantiate a recommendation, otherwise it's just a gut feeling or something that you want to see happen. (Participant 4)

IICC's decision-making needed to be based on institutional information, not just conjecture or opinion. Participant 5 observed how people were using institutional information in the books as the basis for what they were saying.

You could tell who had looked at - at least looked at it and who had not and who was just throwing things off the top of their head and who was actually trying to refer back to stuff. ... And I can't see how you could survive through a meeting like that without having a lot of references to what you already knew were going to be questions going into the room. If you had thought about it, if you had spent time looking at the information and if you had spent a lot of time looking at the process we had gone through and the ... direction that we knew this was gonna take, you should have been going through that book and been looking for external reference to support the arguments you might have brought into the room. (Participant 5)

Participant 3 discussed whether there were any disagreements in the institutional information discussions concerning what the information meant and how it was used to confirm what was being said.

I don't remember specific examples of that. I don't think that we ever really hit any disagreement amongst our group to say, "I see this data telling me this and I

see this data telling me that.” I don’t think we had any disagreement amongst how we were interpreting data. We were more of a – “This data says this” and then somebody else would say “And this data confirms it” and “This data supports it” and “Here’s another thing that tells us this is the way we should be heading.” So it was more of identifying trends or confirming with a series of pieces of information some statement that was being made. I don’t know that we really challenged anything as this is wrong, or two factions of our subgroup were heading in saying which do we think is the right way to go. (Participant 3)

IICC used information with what was known anecdotally, used as the basis or

background for knowing something, and used to confirm statements being made.

Other participants recalled referring to institutional information during the retreat.

Participant 3 described how the information books were used to prepare for the Strategic Planning Retreat.

What I remember happening was receiving my two big thick binders full of material to read in time to participate in this retreat. And so, we read through that knowing ahead of time what our subgroup was gonna be in this two-day retreat so I knew that I was reading material, keeping in mind how it impacted on. ... So as I sifted through the data, I knew that I reading it to, to look at that particular focus. (Participant 3)

Participant 5 shared a different perspective on how information was referenced during discussions at the retreat.

I was amazed at how little of it was actually referred to during that two day meeting when we actually really wrote the strategic plan. ... Part of the process was we need to look at his information, we’ll make decisions based on this information. ... It was all drilled like, we’re gonna look at this data but when I got into the room, we didn’t look at the data. (Participant 5)

Participant 5 thought institutional information may not have been referenced at the strategic planning council retreat because people may not have been sure what to do with the raw information they were given.

Most of the material in there was probably never referred to because they may have been just like me, I don’t know what to do with it anyway. Or, What does the economic study mean? There was not a lot of interpretation of the data, it was

a lot of raw data that we could go back and point to, but again, What do I do with that information? What does that mean to me? Not a lot. (Participant 5)

Participant 4 discussed how people viewed information differently, in particular how the work group used information.

Everybody had a different perspective and a different purpose in terms of what their role was and so they viewed the information a different ways, used it in different ways. I don't know some of the other teams used it, but I know how we used it. So this information was all gathered and could be used when you had to do your gap analysis if this population information was something that your team needed to it. When you did that gap analysis in other things that you would look at, did you need the common year labor market information? We did. We certainly did - we needed population information. Was technology important to you? That is how it's been in the second book. ... So, in most cases the data that was used in here was important to my team across the board, but I'm sure that there were other teams that used only certain information.

The work group Participant 4 served on used institutional information for conducting the gap analysis.

Institutional information was discussed a lot. "So, yes, there was quite a bit of discussion of what the data meant" (Participant 9). IICC made a point to disseminate information so as many people as possible would have it available to read. Participant 10 discussed how institutional information and how it was shared on campus in interesting formats.

First of all I think we all made it a point to read as much of the data as we could, so you didn't just have the technology team understanding its data and knowing its data, but you had 18 people on the [Strategic] Planning Council understanding it, knowing what it was. And even in the membership of the teams you had people reading other peoples' work and it was shared widely. We have the [newsletter name], which is our staff newsletter, every week there would be an article on one of the teams with information that they had gathered so we featured a different team, ... Part of it was sort of a template. Here's the team membership; here's what they are working on; here's what they found out; here's where they think the challenges are and so forth. So each article carried information like that. ... So that information got out to the entire college community in a more interesting way-pictures and what does it mean for students, and what does it mean for you in your job? ... We presented it differently. So, when we went into the decision

making part or phase of the planning, the strategic planning process you had a lot of very, very knowledgeable people not only understanding data about our students, about our, our geographic area, about the state, about the country, about our finances, about our students' finances. You really had people with a broad understanding of most of that and then it was really a matter of elimination. I believe we started by what's not important and threw that out. And what was left was still sticking on the wall. I won't say that it was painless because I do think that there were parts of the decision making process that led to the establishment of the priorities that was painful. I think we all have things that we really believe and maybe they didn't make it to the top of the list. But the data at least gave us the rationale for coming up with that list. And our consultants, [Consultant #1] and [Consultant #2] helped us too. They really guided us. I think that their broader perspective in having worked with a lot of organizations, and really understanding the state of community colleges in [state], in the Midwest, in the, in the country, constantly kept us considering the bigger picture whereas we as an organization had had a tendency to be more parochial in our approach. (Participant 10)

Sharing institutional information resulted in many people knowing the institutional information and the strategic planning process. The information was needed to base the arguments for the direction the college would take for its strategic plan. The information books provided a common information base for Strategic Planning Retreat discussions.

This information collected was used at the Strategic Planning Retreat. This was the time when the information collected was referenced.

During that two day process, we continued to go back to our books and make reference to it so to say "Well look at this." I remember us sitting there and flipping back and forth and looking at this study and that study and different members of the group saying "Yea, but this one said this and this one said this." So, my answer to that is if we used it more than once, and referred to it more than once, then it was probably more useful than if we had only looked at it once and then headed off in our discussion without ever referencing it again. (Participant 3)

Participant 4 described how the strategic priorities were drafted using institutional information.

We broke up into small groups as we looked at these areas to kind of develop ... a set of action steps or considerations that we needed to have under these various areas. Then we came back together again and we put these ideas up and then we tried to combine common themes. So, maybe it got taken from this area and put over here, sometimes they weren't even used at all. ... It was a complex process

but I think it worked, and I think everybody, at least in my mind I know I certainly felt that I had ample opportunity to get my input represented my ideas, my thoughts, and that kind of thing. So it was give and take and it was back and forth and it was, substantiate, validate, why you want to make this recommendation or why you think it's important that this be a part of the college's strategic priorities.

IICC's work groups were able to present ideas and thoughts when the strategic priorities were drafted.

The consultant helped guide how decisions were made at the retreat. When asked to describe the consultant's role, Participant 7 had this to say,

A stronger one than we ever had in the past. [Consultant #1] really kept us true to ... He would make a statement. He would say, "Now is that anecdotally based or is it data based?" And he may not have used those exact words but he was the one really keeping us true to that data thing. And he would say, "Now how do you know that?" And then we would need to say, "Well, okay, this is where we've got it from. Look at the census data. Look at this. Look at that." ... Even the group as a whole would start to say, "Now why do you know this? How do you know this?" (Participant 7)

The consultant started IICC asking decision-making questions based around institutional information and the college accepted this way of thinking. The institutional information was discussed at great length. "So, yes, there was quite a bit of discussion of what the data meant" (Participant 9). Information was an important part of the process, "So, from start to finish it was at every part of the process" (Participant 8).

I would say it [institutional information] was at least as important as the discussions and the brainstorming that occurred from leadership of the organization. It was such an integral part of the process that it's hard to differentiate its importance from anything else. Because there would have been no way to have done strategic planning without data. Without that data, without understanding where we've been and how we're doing in all these areas. There would have been no way to have defined the future for us. It [was] just as important to us as having a board member present at the strategic planning process. It was as important to us as having the president give his impression of where he thought the college ought to be going. It was as important as any others, any individual or group's participation in the process. ... There would have been

no way for us to have made a strategic plan without data. It would have been like going on vacation without a map. (Participant 1)

IICC used institutional information as the strategic plan design guide.

The strategic planning process prompted IICC to seek information it used when making strategic plan decisions. “From my perspective we don’t go back and ask for data very frequently. I think this process has asked us to do that” (Participant 7). With regard to having institutional information during the strategic planning process, “From start to finish it was at every part of the process” (Participant 8 ). As I examined the strategic planning process, I realized using institutional information during the process had impacted how IICC’s decision-making.

#### *Impact of Using Institutional Information for IICC Strategic Planning*

The use of institutional information by IICC during the strategic planning process impacted the college. The result is that the process “made a big impact on the college” (Participant 2).

The institution became sophisticated in using institutional information when making decisions. Decision-making techniques are more sophisticated because these are more developed, more complex, and more refined. The overall feeling from participants was using institutional information is essential and important when making decisions.

#### *More Developed Decision-making*

Decision-making techniques using institutional information grew and evolved. Information is now used when making decisions. Data plays a stronger role in making decisions than in the past at this community college (Participant 7). Using information for decision-making, “Has been a very, very deliberate intervention into our otherwise very soft processes” (Participant 8).

Pretty much everything that we do and what I do, it's something based upon some data, it's based upon some research. Although there are other kinds of things that people use and I have come to use them too, peoples' perceptions of certain things ... Of course you listen to those things and then in some cases they are valuable but I want to check those kinds of things out with the data. (Participant 6)

The major impact has been because one of the strategic priorities is to become a more data driven institution. It was said, and of course this I remember quite well, at the retreat that we have an awful lot of data around here, but people don't always use it. And they know it's there but they don't always stop and ask for the data before they make decisions. ... Many have made a conscious effort to become more data driven, it means big demands on [the Office of Institutional Research and Planning] of course are increasing. (Participant 9)

Participant 9 noted an increase in demand for institutional information from the Office of Institutional Research and Planning.

Participant 8 explained how the strategic planning process has since impacted how IICC conducts business.

It's made a big impact on how we do business. ... How we make decisions ... So, it has made a major impact on more people knowing what's going on at the college, making information flow more freely, more reasonably, more thoughtfully. ... The best leadership in an institution should be, the information should be not delegated but shared so that there are wonderful minds helping to create some wonderful initiatives that support student learning and that's it, very simply. I just think that's the name of the game. ... It's a question of serving up the information so that thoughtful decisions could be made to benefit students. (Participant 8)

Leadership needs to share institutional information for decision-making. Using institutional information for decision-making has developed to the point that using it is now an expectation.

First of all it's an expectation; it's a college expectation that no major decisions are made here without some sort of data analysis. That's one of the President's eight expectations and it's what each of us expects of our own administrators and ourselves so it's just the way we do it now. ... And I think a lot of people now are very excited about data. Isn't that funny? You see people clipping pieces out of different newspapers or their own professional journals and they share them with others. I think the subscriptions to American Demographics here from IICC must

have at least tripled with just using that as our, part of our regular work.  
(Participant 10)

IICC developed institutional information use for making decisions so that it has become part of everyday operations. When asked why using institutional information now made people excited, Participant 10 had this to say:

Well, I believe that we saw the impact of it. ... There was a lot of value. It wasn't just numbers; it wasn't just facts. ... It was really pieces of information that helped you to do your job better and provided you insight. And the "Ah Ha!" button kind of went on. People would read something and say, "Oh, Ah Ha! That's why such and such!" Or, "That's why those classes are not filling at that time of day." Or, "Hmm... This research says students want to take classes one day a week? One day a week! Well, alright, we'll try it." And then we try a series of one day a week classes and it's, "Oh my goodness! That worked!" Why did that work? Because the research told us that that's what people preferred, and so we weren't spinning our wheels. People saw that the research helped them do their job better and be effective and reduced their failure rate. They probably didn't call it that but no one wants to put a program in place and then have it bomb; it's a lot of work and so the data can help us make better decisions about the way we develop new programs and enhance the ones that we do have.  
(Participant 10)

IICC realized institutional information provided insight and would assist people in order for them to make better decisions. IICC has available an institutional information cache that it can use for future decision-making.

My Dean came to me. We have been trying to do a couple things lately that seem to be stymieing some of the directors, and I say to them, "Why are you making such a big deal out of this? Put it down on paper. Put the data down that is that you're needing. ... So, what's the data? How many courses are we offering? How many students are we enrolling? What do we need? Why do we need it? What are other community colleges doing about this?" All of that because those are the questions that the President and [name] are going to ask of anyone. So in a sense that using the data, using statistical, reliable data, to support decision making is obviously the name of the game here. (Participant 8)

IICC's decision-making techniques are more sophisticated. Because the techniques have developed, using institutional information for making decisions has grown.

### *More Complex Decision-Making*

IICC's decision-making techniques became more complex. Making decisions is more involved. "I see stronger interaction and collaboration across the campus on a variety of projects" (Participant 4). Institutional information must now be used to answer questions when IICC makes decisions.

There are certain kinds of questions that we ask everybody to do if there is something that they are going to do. ... What is it that you want to do? We want you to kind of spell it out in terms of the resources that it's going to take. When is it going to happen? How are you going to evaluate it? How are you going to use those results to improve what you do after you have done it? It's kind of a business plan. ... So that has come out as a result of this so people have gotten used to that. (Participant 6)

The individuals involved in the strategic planning process ... have been taught, have been imbued with the fact that in the end nothing comes to this table or any other table, the action and the whatever, without having appropriate recommendations based on fact, based on research, based on data, based on numbers, and that has been a very, very deliberate intervention into our otherwise very soft processes. (Participant 8).

IICC decision-making now expects people to base recommendations on institutional information. Participant 3 gave an example of how decision-making is more complex.

I changed all my forms to show when you're submitting a brand new [name] idea, you have to check off which of the strategic directions does this [project] fit under. So if it can't be fit under a strategic direction, it's not something we should be going after where we need to look at that, should we or shouldn't we. So I mean that's just a very small way that it impacted on the institution. I really think that just in general, it's, it's helped us to have a focus of where we're headed. (Participant 3)

Decision-making at IICC is more complex because there is more campus-wide interaction and communication and questions related to institutional information must be addressed when making decisions.

### *More Refined Decision-making*

IICC' decision-making became more refined, decision-making has improved. Although institutional information was used for making decisions prior to the strategic planning process, "In the years past that was very soft. I'd just plain do it, and I just go into the budget and I do this and do that and we're so much smarter. We're so much more refined" (Participant 8). Decision-making has improved because the strategic planning process gave IICC clarity and direction. Participant 1 provided a lengthy discussion of what clarity and direction have meant to the college.

I think it has given us clarity to where we're going. It has given us a real direction for how to utilize our resources, whether they're physical or financial. It has given us certainty about what's important to the success of the organization and not that contributions that people make around those things are more important, but it clearly has given us a direction that when someone is kind of wanting to go another direction, how to steer them back to, "Is this where we want to go or isn't it?" With a shrinking resource in education, as in most public settings, you really need to put your dollars and your efforts where they need to be. And this has helped us to be able to do that, in a large way. It has helped our Board to clarify what they'd like to see; it has helped the trustees be able to explain to their constituents in the community that elected them, an understanding of why the college is doing certain things and why it's going in a certain direction and reminding the constituents that they had a chance to direct this organization and they actually have helped to direct it's future. Having something that is clear to every body gives us a chance to say to all of our employees, "This is what you're going after, this is what we're kind of rowing in this direction and if you feel like you don't need to go here, we understand that and we respect you but maybe you need to row in another boat." It kind of helps to keep people focused and keep them kind of going the right direction, ... We're all kind of aiming towards the same goals. ... But it really is nice because we can truly have a defined set of things that we all agree to that makes sense for us, and we're not going in different directions. ... It has really served, I think, to clearly define the future for the organization, and it helps us at our budgeting time, it helps at our board preparation time. Often times, we will touch and say, "This really relates to our strategic plan." So I think it's served us well. (Participant 1)

Clarity and direction through IICC's strategic plan have served the college well. Using institutional information for decision-making has improved because it is now used more.

Participant 6 discussed using institutional information more now for decision-making, the benefits of having a developed institutional research office, and institutional values role when making decisions.

People look at data much more now than they used to in making a lot of the decisions that they do. ... I think in some cases we use data in order to get at some of the priorities that we had in the first place. ... It's data, data, data. ... And we asked all of the people to go through all of that information before they would even start the process of discussion and there was some discussion of some of that data in the process. So people understood that we wanted to base this pretty much on, not on their feelings but on information. ...

I think the second part of that is that we have a pretty well developed institutional research office here too which put out a lot of that all the time, on a lot of issues and a lot of things. ... But they put out quite a bit of information on all kinds of issues in the institution. And I think people are doing other kinds of things. ...

It's not by just a person's feelings. Now we are guided here and that's the other part of this. You can't forget this. We are guided by our values, too, in making some of these decisions. You will find our values, institutional values, is a part of this strategic planning process. And a couple of the things that relate to there is being fair and consistent in the institution. ... We are going to be fair and consistent in whatever we are going to do. And the only way to be fair and consistent is to know what is going on in the institution. In order to do that, so you got to use data. ... Or at least know what the data is. (Participant 6)

IICC wanted institutional information to become a part of how the college makes decisions and there was a conscious effort to do so. "Many [people] have made a conscious effort to become more data driven" (Participant 9). Decision-making has become more refined because the college improved how it uses institutional information that is supported by its institutional research office and is able to be fair and consistent in its decision-making because the college using institutional information.

To sum, IICC became more sophisticated in using institutional information for making decisions because its decision-making became more developed, more complex,

and more refined. Using institutional information while making decisions has grown, decision-making processes are involved, and decision-making has improved.

#### *Shortfalls/Difficulties for the Strategic Planning Process*

IICC encountered difficulties and shortcomings during and after the strategic planning process. The college encountered difficulties around issues as it went through the process.

Yes we encountered difficulties at times. We encountered difficulty on some of the issues we had to work through. And [name] always was here saying here's where we are and here are the difficulties that we're dealing with and do you have any thoughts of how we can get around and get through this one? (Participant 6)

IICC accepted the difficulties and worked through problems that arose. Since IICC's strategic planning process, it is sometimes difficult for people to take time to reference institutional information. "I think many people still find it difficult. They want to get through their charge faster and don't necessarily want to take the time to do a thorough data search, and I think everybody struggles with that issue" (Participant 9).

A few shortcomings for IICC's strategic planning process were discussed by participants. Participant 8 believed there was so much information that the amount may have overloaded people and furthermore there may have been too many other projects occurring simultaneously.

The issue is I would say if I were a person going out and working with other community colleges and helping them with the strategic planning process is that, you have to be careful of people who are overloaded. I think what happened here, truthfully, is that we had too much going on at one time. ... Too many of the same Deans doing [parallel project] and strategic planning initiative, too many meetings. ... Yes you have to undertake it but ... Truthfully, it was way too much going on. ... It was really an inordinate amount of work; a lot of information; many, many meetings; a lot of things to cover; and a lot of things going on at once. So, to me, but timing is all, being very careful about the timing.

Participant 2 discussed how the great deal of work may have distracted people from their day-to-day business.

It's awfully involved. It's a tremendous amount of work, and I don't know how much it distracted people from the business of what they were doing at the college. How does somebody who is in charge of a big division find the time to do the strategic plan and the [parallel project]. All of these things, there are some very talented people over there and they were able to accomplish all this, but, you have to find people who really want to do this or they're going to put that, that's extra time and effort they're not compensated for. You're not getting extra money or comp time or anything for being on the strategic planning council. So you have some very dedicated people who put lots of hours on their own I'm sure bound in this, but it is, kind of get them prepared for when the north-central evaluation comes up. They're perpetually prepared. (Participant 2)

IICC's employees had to be dedicated to the strategic planning process in order to overcome the immense amount of work involved to complete the plan.

Participant 1 believed a resulting project shortfall was how the planning document is presented in glass cases around campus. Furthermore, the plan may not effectively been taken to everyone in the organization.

One of the shortfalls might very well be that we encase it as we've done. A strategic plan, in order for it to have value, probably is a document that ought to have lines put through it, and things written on the bottom of it, and I think in some ways, having it encased in a glass, like we've done, looks a little bit like a document that's on a shelf somewhere. And I don't think it really - it doesn't live that way. That is kind of to remind people the basic values, of course a hundred things aren't on that list, but the action plans that have spun from that, that are being worked on ... the directors will give us an end of the year update on how things have gone on, and we'll talk about the future, and it will tie to the strategic plan. ... I wouldn't want anyone outside the organization to think that that strategic plan was behind a sheet of glass. It lives in the day-to-day of this organization, especially at the leadership level. I don't know that we've really taken it to the staff level. I don't know - although I should say there were efforts to do that - I'm not sure if you were to ask a custodian or a secretary or someone who is perhaps at the delivery level of the organization, "Do you know the five or six or seven or eight focuses of this college?" That they'd be able to answer. I don't think we've done that effectively. And that's as much of a leadership responsibility at the next level that perhaps we haven't insisted or trained people to do, and I think we need to do that a little bit more. We have spent time reminding our employees the values of the organization; we have reminded them

of, look these are the things that we need to work with, but more often than not, that's used by employees to remind us that perhaps we're not living up to them all the time. So despite the fact that we try to make these present everywhere, I'm not sure how many people have taken the time to really look at them at the staff level to ask, "What do I do to make this happen? What's my responsibility around these focused areas of priority?" And that might really send us into the next level of fulfilling much of these things might be worth our effort, and I think that's the piece that I feel might be a little missing in this. (Participant 1)

Despite the minor difficulties and few shortcomings, Participant 3 stated "I think it's been a really positive thing for the college." Overall, the strategic planning process was a positive experience for the college's Strategic Planning Council members.

#### *Concluding Strategic Planning Council Comments*

IICC's Strategic Planning Council members generally reflected on the strategic planning process experiences. Participant 10 thought organizational attitudes had changed since the process.

I think the organization has changed and that the strategic planning process. ... we are still going through; we're not done. But I think we really have seen an organization that changes the way it works; people who have changed their attitudes and that's such a tough thing to do, but I think we have had a lot of attitudinal change, not throughout. ... So it's been a really exciting process. (Participant 10)

Since the process, Participant 3 noted, people seem to be more focused and moving in the same direction.

Because of the way we did the process, I think that it has pulled a lot of people together. We always have been sort of together as a group, but it pulled everybody even more so in sort of a focused moving in the same direction kind of feel. So I think that that's sort of a general feeling of—it's clear to people what our strategic directions are, they're on the walls everywhere you walk around campus.

Participant 2 also thought through the college's examination process, people are now more focused on teaching and learning.

It made everybody, focus on something that [college president] ... he's been talking about teaching and learning being the focus of the institution since he got

there. And, he wasn't very successful at convincing people early on what that really meant. ... And bringing that then to the school made everybody at the school focus on students and on the teaching and on what people are learning. So it made everybody do a self-examination. And the college is much better for it. You could see how actively engaged these people. (Participant 2)

IICC's strategic planning process actively engaged people and, according to Participant 2, "This project [made] IICC a better place." When asked about how the organization was different since the strategic planning process, Participant 10 had this to say,

I think it's like going from good to great. I think we really were a very good organization. We have always been, at least in my time here moving forward as a good organization would. But I'm not sure we would have characterized ourselves as a, or others would have characterized us either as a great organization. And I think we really needed to focus on this student centered issue and learner centeredness and you can't do that if you are operating as we had inclinations to do from time to time in silos. But very well in those silos but really not moving out of them and you know the terms, and I won't say it was that way all the time; I don't mean that at all, but I do think we, we had an inclination every once in awhile as an organization to operate that way, and not really see the greater purpose of the institution at all times, at all levels. (Participant 10)

The strategic planning process resulted in IICC going from being a good organization to a great organization.

The findings presented in this chapter answer the study's four research questions. How did the strategic planning process develop?, How did the strategic planning process operate?, What was the institutional information used by the Strategic Planning Council?, and How was the institutional information used by the Strategic Planning Council? The findings also discussed how using institutional information during strategic planning impacted IICC's decision-making processes.

## CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

### Summary

This case study's purpose was to better understand how one community college's leaders used institutional information when making decisions for their strategic planning process. Of particular interest was how these decision-makers used institutional information to shape their decisions while establishing strategic priorities. The study goals were to explore the strategic planning process and evaluate how institutional information was used for decision-making. The study answered four research questions: How did the strategic planning process develop? How did the strategic planning process operate? What was the institutional information used by the Strategic Planning Council? and How was the institutional information used by the Strategic Planning Council? The study also explored how using institutional information during the strategic planning process has since impacted Institutional Information Community College's (IICC) decision-making processes.

The case study findings were presented in two parts: the IICC's strategic planning process chronology and discussions concerning the institutional information used for decision-making. First, the strategic planning process chronology was marked by four significant incidents. The first significant incident was the Planning Council creation. The Planning Council updated IICC's annual planning process and recommended the Strategic Planning Council be established. The Planning Council further suggested work

groups were created to assist the Strategic Planning Council with its tasks. IICC followed the Planning Council's recommendations and created the Strategic Planning Council and its work groups. This was the second significant incident along the strategic planning process chronology. The Strategic Planning Council and its work groups continued gathering institutional information that was eventually placed into two large books. The institutional information being gathered into the books was the third significant incident along the strategic planning process chronology. The fourth significant incident was taking the books to the Strategic Planning Retreat where the gap analysis was conducted and strategic priorities drafted. The four significant incidents mark places along the strategic planning process where institutional information was important to and impacted the process. The significant incidents chronology answered the study's first three research questions because it told the story of how the strategic planning process developed, operated, and what institutional information was used by the Strategic Planning Council.

The second case study part discussed using institutional information for decision-making. The discussion addressed the fourth research question, How was institutional information used by the Strategic Planning Council? The analysis extended to exploring how using institutional information for decision-making during the strategic planning process impacted IICC's decision-making processes.

#### Discussion of Findings

I began the research project interested to learn how community college leaders used or could use institutional information while planning. I found the community college studied used institutional information while making strategic planning decisions. Using institutional information was central to how the process operated. IICC decided

institutional information would be used for decision-making when it began the strategic planning process and the college wanted involvement from within the college and input from outside consultants. An overwhelming amount of institutional information was gathered; it was intended to be used when making strategic planning decisions.

The Strategic Planning Council used institutional information throughout the strategic planning process. The Planning Council and Strategic Planning Council's institutional information collection was essential to the process. The institutional information drove strategic planning decision-making. IICC wanted to use institutional information in the process, collected it, and used it to determine institutional gaps which led to the strategic priorities draft. The strategic planning process impacted IICC's decision-making processes because the institution has more sophisticated decision-making processes. Decision-making is more developed, more complex and more refined. In order to now make IICC decisions institutional information is consulted.

I concluded from the findings that IICC set out to use institutional information for making strategic planning decisions and was able to accomplish this goal. The new college president, appointed in 1991, established a college governance committee structure that solicited college wide input into decision-making. The new committee structure developed an organizational governance structure that would implement participative governance. The participative governance structure established the environment that allowed intense and immense institutional information gathering. IICC's *1996 Self Study Report* charged the North Central Accreditation Steering Committee to gather data to assist with strategic planning, thus, calling for the college's information collection process. The college found planning had been done in a cursory

manner and it needed to confront this issue to move forward. The college had traditionally neglected planning and was reactionary in thinking when it came to planning. Existing plans were outdated and needed to be updated. Furthermore, IICC wanted to tie planning with budgeting and institutional effectiveness. IICC realized it was time to examine how it did planning to improve as an higher education institution.

Therefore, the Planning Council was created in 1999 to examine planning from a broad perspective. The council's charge called for them to research and analyze the environment, identify and recommend strategies and projects, and develop and recommend a planning process. The charge's purpose was to position IICC as a strong and competitive higher education institution in the future. IICC wanted institutional information to be a part of this process. This council gathered, researched, and analyzed institutional information. Furthermore, the Planning Council prioritized critical college issues and recommended work groups be established to address these, prepared a prioritized project/strategy recommendations report, and recommended a new college planning process.

IICC's new annual planning process was instituted August 2000 and the Strategic Planning Council was formed Fall 2000. The college intentionally brought together people who were thought to be good thinkers to design a new way to plan. The college did not have shared cultural institutional priorities and needed to update its strategic plan. IICC engaged in the strategic planning process. The college brought in believers and disbelievers. Six Strategic Planning Council work groups, formed around the college's existing priorities, were given charges to research, analyze, and recommend strategic initiatives. IICC wanted people to consult information. The work groups were the worker

bees collecting institutional information. Much work group institutional information was placed on the college's mainframe R: drive. The R: drive and other gathered institutional information was brought together into two large books.

IICC's institutional information books combined the institutional information the Planning Council and Strategic Planning Council gathered, IICC institutional information had never been gathered on such a large scale. The institutional information gathering purpose was for use when making strategic plan decisions, and the institutional information was used at the Strategic Planning Retreat to determine institutional gaps and draft strategic priorities. Institutional information gathering activities involved internal/external environmental analyses; focus group interviews; and strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analyses. The college established information gathering activities allowing for many people from within the college and the community it serves to be involved in the strategic planning process.

IICC's Strategic Planning Council's two-day Strategic Planning Retreat took place in July 2001. The college's gap analysis involved using the institutional information books to determine the leap IICC would have to make from where it was to where it wanted to be in the future. The gaps led to the college drafting its strategic priorities that were later edited and approved by the administration and Board of Trustees. The final six strategic priorities are accompanied by action steps that IICC's action teams are now implementing.

IICC's commitment to using institutional information for making decisions is carried forward by an action step that calls for encouraging data-driven decision-making. Furthermore, decision-making is now more developed, more complex, and more refined.

Information used for making decisions is more developed because institutional information is now built into IICC's decision-making. Decision-making is also more complex because it is involved. Certain questions need to be answered that guide decision-making. When recommendations are presented, research facts and data must accompany them. Decision-making also is refined more because it, too, is improved. IICC is much smarter when making decisions and information is necessary when planning. To sum, information is referred to and used more in IICC's decision-making.

IICC is developing its decision-making culture by establishing an environment where the college and community are involved and decision-making and institutional information is being shared.

I found IICC began the strategic planning process with a commitment to gathering and using institutional information and in fact was able to gather this information in an immense amount and used it when making strategic planning decisions. The college has committed itself to the continued institutional information use while making decisions. The study's findings increase understanding about the role institutional information played in decision-making in one community college's strategic planning process. IICC's strategic planning process serves as an example community college that collected and used institutional information for decision-making instead of using intuition, anecdotal information, and consensus when making decisions.

#### Discussion of Decision-making Models

The literature review examined organizational governance models and how they have been used to describe higher education decision-making. Organizational governance models describe governance structure and decision-making processes (Johnson, 1994;

Angiello, 1997). How decisions are made is related to the organization's structure (Fryer & Lovas, 1991; Angiello, 1997). The bureaucratic, collegial, political, and organized anarchy organizational governance models have been used to describe organizational structure and to explain decision-making in higher education institutions. Angiello (1997) found the bureaucratic, political, and collegial organizational governance models are the most common used to describe decision-making in higher education organizations. The organized anarchy model is also used to explain how decisions are made in these organizations.

Examining IICC's organizational chart reflects a bureaucratic organizational model. A bureaucracy is generally defined as an organization that is formally and hierarchically structured that has numerous levels; the structure consists of rules and procedures; tasks, responsibilities and authority are distributed to the individuals, offices or organization departments with the entire structure being held together by the administration (Hirsch, et al. 1998; Peabody & Rourke, 1965; Stroup, 1966).

The bureaucratic organizational model decision-making processes are described by Angiello (1997) as being rational and maximizing. Decision-making responsibility is assigned a specific place in the organization's structure. The final decision is made by a designed office holder. Decision-making within this model is based on the assumption that information is available for analysis to consider possible action courses.

The bureaucratic model does not adequately describe higher education institutions and the decision-making processes. Coplen (1994) states the bureaucratic organizational governance model is no longer appropriate. Bess (1988) believes that due to the variety

and number of disciplines within higher education organizations, information is unable to flow through a bureaucratic hierarchical structure.

IICC's organizational chart reflects the bureaucratic organizational governance model. Top administrators, the Executive Leadership Team, made the final strategic planning decisions and blessed the Strategic Planning Council's work. The Board of Trustees gave final approval. However, IICC's decision-making does not adhere to a pure bureaucratic form. While the organizational chart reflects an overlying bureaucratic structure, IICC's strategic planning process decision-making was collective.

The collegial organizational model describes what some believe is the collective decision-making nature found within higher education organizations. The collegial organizational model is generally defined as scholars using consensus in the decision-making process (Angiello, 1997; Cellucci, 1989; Eastcott, 1977). Consensus is the way faculty and administrators use to make decisions. Individual power within the decision-making process depends on a person's professional competence for a particular decision (Eastcott, 1977). IICC used collective and consensus decision-making for its strategic planning process. It was collegial because IICC's President called for open decision-making processes involving all organizational levels. The Strategic Planning Council established work groups whose membership reached into all organizational levels. The council gave guidance to the institutional information collection process. The work groups conducted research, analyses, and made recommendations. Input came from various campus areas through focus groups. The college brought in a variety of viewpoints from within the college and its community district. Focus group information served to inform IICC what people were thinking about the institution. The college was

continually given updates and institutional information about the process through the campus' newsletter. The Strategic Planning Council's work groups made strategic priority recommendations based on the gap analysis. The Strategic Planning Council used consensus at the Strategic Planning Retreat to draft the strategic priorities. These priorities were shared with IICC's campus community for agreement.

I concluded that the collegial model was present because IICC intended for its decision-making to be participative. The college's president wanted more participation in decision-making. The college brought together individuals from all organizational parts to make strategic planning decisions. The Strategic Planning Council and its work groups gathered institutional information and shared it with the college and community. Hence, many people were familiar with the institutional information. As a result, the institutional information was used to determine institutional gaps and write strategic priorities. Therefore, strategic priority decision-making process was participative. The college wanted input from throughout the college and was successful in accomplishing its goal.

Critics for the collegial model state that consensus may be difficult to reach in large complex organizations, like higher education institutions (Angiello, 1997). The inability to find consensus often makes it difficult to accomplish commonplace tasks. Baldrige (1971c) believes the collegial organizational model does not provide an adequate description of the processes operation in higher education institutions and believes the processes are better described with the political organizational model.

The political organizational model assumes complex organizations may be viewed as miniature political systems (Baldrige, 1977). When an issue arises, it attracts competing groups' attention; they struggle over which group should make the decision;

then the question may become a question of authority as opposed to the issue; interested parties seek allies and form coalitions; bargaining and negotiation take place; threats and coercion may be involved; mediators may then emerge; finally a compromise is reached and the bureaucracy authority structure implements the decision (Angiello, 1977). The result is the decision-making process is filled with negotiations and bargaining along with political influence (Angiello, 1997; Eastcott, 1977). I did not detect political model components at IICC. Conflict was not present and questions over authority did not arise. Strategic planning process decision-making was described by participants as cooperative and non-combative. I did not find evidence for the political organizational governance model operating at IICC.

The political organizational model moves away from a formal and rational decision-making structure and emphasizes the active nature of individuals when decisions are made in organizations. Movement farther away from rational decision-making is described by the organized anarchy organizational model.

The organized anarchy organizational model is based on the ideas that organizations have unclear goals, individuals in the organization do not know their behavior will impact outcomes, and their interest is generally fluid and changing (Giesecke, 1994). Within this organizational model, decisions are described as being made in a "garbage can." A problem mixes with solutions and participants causing chaotic decision-making (Cohen et al., 1972). Stress is the overriding factor influencing how decisions are made. This model is seen as being used as the scapegoat to explain decision-making when traditional theories fail to do so (Langley et al., 1995). IICC's strategic planning process decision-making did not reflect how decisions are made in the

organized anarchy model. The college had clearly stated and held goals for the process. Individuals remained focused on the projects goals and were rational in decision-making.

A literature review found that few studies explored organizational models in an attempt to explain community college decision-making. Research studies into decision-making processes via organizational governance models for community colleges suggest more than one model generally functions within these institutions when making decisions. IICC's strategic planning process confirms previous findings.

Benjamin and Kerchner (1982) found California higher education institutions (universities and community colleges) studied viewed decision-making on a particular policy as rational and some political. They found individuals are capable of effortlessly mentally integrating various decision-making models. Dougan (1984) studied private and public baccalaureate and community colleges and found three models: political, bureaucratic, and collegial were useful framework for making decisions. One model was not able to explain decision-making processes at these higher education institutions.

Hunn (1991) found two Kentucky community colleges did not conform to any of the three models: political, bureaucratic, and collegial. White (1991) found two Florida community colleges that the decision-making process is complex and difficult for one model to describe organizational behavior. Ball (1994) examined the bureaucratic, political, and organized anarchy models in community college districts in Texas and found decision-making processes were very complex. Older districts tended to function under the bureaucratic organizational governance model and it was impossible to assign an organizational model to individual decisions. Abungah (1996) studied the bureaucratic, collegial, anarchic, and political decision-making processes at Houston

Metropolitan area colleges. He found a significant number of respondents thought their institution was using collegial and anarchic models to make decisions.

Caldwell (1981) conducted an ethnographic governance and decision-making study for a community college examining the bureaucratic, participational (collegial), and political models. The classical bureaucratic model operated within the sphere of influence occupied by the Board of Trustees and the sphere of influence occupied by the president and administration was rational, programmed, unencumbered, and nonprescriptive. Jackson (1983) found Essex County College examined Baldrige's political model and found shared decision-making kept tension and conflict at the college to a minimum. Cellucci (1989) found compared bureaucratic, collegial, and political. Found all aspects of all organizational models were present in the decision-making process. Bureaucratic seems to best describe decision-making processes at the college.

The study at IICC did not ask participants about decision-making models. The finding is a conclusion based on indirect information gained from interviews and documents, emergent data, and my analysis. I found both the bureaucratic and collegial models present on IICC's campus during the strategic planning decision-making process. This finding confirms previous research because more than one model was present at this community college higher education institution.

This research study differs from previous research because it did not ask participants which model was present and the study did not seek to examine particular model. The case study research and analysis was guided by the four research questions and model comparisons were conducted after the findings were completed. After the findings were drawn, I referred to previous model research and examined model

characteristics to determine if any were present during IICC's strategic planning process. Emerging from the findings were the bureaucratic and collegial organizational governance models.

#### Discussion of Institutional Information and Decision-making in the Community College

Previous research studies investigating institutional research's decision-making role, institutional information decision-making kinds and sources, and institutional research information decision-making availability were examined in the literature review. Previous findings concluded institutional research was generally not used for long term planning; its use was unclear; institutional research information was not used enough; administrators wanted raw data interpreted; decision-makers have difficulty finding data to make decisions; decision-making may be tied to confidence levels for the data source; administrative tenure level influenced whether data was used to make decisions; there was not a strong connection between using research data and planning/decision-making; and lacking information did not prevent decisions being made based on intuition, anecdotal information, and consensus.

Swanson (1965) found two-year institutional chief administrators selected from the American Association Junior Colleges directory. Swanson received responses from half of these institutions and studied six colleges' institutional research programs. Two colleges used institutional research findings to make decisions. Little information was used for long-term planning. Decisions were made on impulse. IICC differed from Swanson's findings because it used information for long-term strategic planning.

Tosh (1996) used qualitative methods to study one large community college and found although faculty and administrators found data useful and interpreting there was

not a strong connection between the use of research data and the planning/decision-making processes. Lack of data did not prevent decisions from being made, decisions were based on intuition, anecdotal information, and consensus. IICC's Strategic Planning Council discussed how intuition, anecdotal information, and consensus are sometimes involved in decision-making. IICC did not base decisions on these factors. The college used institutional information to make its strategic planning decisions.

In conclusion, the literature on the community college exploring institutional research, the information it supplies, and how this institutional information is used in decision-making processes has not focused on institutional information being used in a community college's strategic planning process. This study focused on one community college and its strategic planning process.

#### Implications

This study of IICC's strategic planning process contributes to the knowledge base on strategic planning decision-making using institutional information. This study differed from previous research because it investigated a strategic planning process at one community college, which investigations have not done previously. Whereas past research studies may have sometimes explored planning, it was done from a general perspective. Additionally, previous research did not always focus on one college. The qualitative case study design allowed an in-depth strategic planning process examination at one community college to gain an understanding of the case.

The findings uncovered that strategic planning decision-making used institutional information. Previous research has not concluded a connection between using information and planning decision-making. IICC intended for institutional information to

be used when making its strategic plan decisions. The college accomplished its goal since it incorporated institutional information strategic planning process for making decisions. This was a significant accomplishment given previous research findings indicating institutional information did not play an important role in decision-making or other factors determined how decisions were made. The college's drive and commitment to the process carried it through a long institutional information collection period to the point where the institutional information was used for making strategic planning decisions.

### Study Improvements

An improvement to the IICC strategic planning process study would be to discover specifics on how particular information influenced decision-making. Participants were able to recall generally how the information was used; however, many when asked could not remember details around how specific information pieces influenced their decision-making. I did not pursue this area with participants.

Another improvement would have been to explore in-depth each strategic priority and how information was used in the gap analysis that led to each priority development.

### Recommendations for Further Research

Further research into using institutional information for decision-making could pursue the following:

1. Conduct a qualitative research study to contrast IICC's strategic planning process that used institutional information for decision-making with an institution that did not have the same commitment to using institutional information.

2. Conduct a qualitative research study exploring other community college processes to understand how using institutional information has been used at other colleges.
3. Survey community colleges and universities to comparing decision-making processes between these higher education institutional types.
4. Survey Association for Institutional Research member community colleges regarding how institutional information is used at their institutions for strategic planning and other decision-making.
5. Survey college presidents about their institutions' institutional information use for strategic planning.

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## APPENDICES

APPENDIX A



June 16, 2003

School of Education  
Fort Collins, Colorado 80523-1588

RE: Strategic Planning Research Project

Dear Member of the Former Strategic Planning Council for Institutional Information Community College:

My name is Rosanne Crossen. I am a former student of Institutional Information Community College (years) and adjunct faculty member for the Departments of Mathematics, Statistics and Political Science (years). I am presently a Ph.D. Candidate at Colorado State University in the School of Education. I am writing my dissertation on the topic of using institutional information for decision-making in the strategic planning process. In the next several months, I will be interviewing individuals who were involved in the strategic planning process at your college. Of particular interest are those individual who served on the Strategic Planning Council. I understand that you were involved in the strategic planning process and I would like to interview about your experience.

Your participation in this research project is voluntary. If you should agree to participate in this study, your involvement would include a 30 to 60 minute interview either in person or by telephone. The interview will be scheduled at your convenience in a suitable location. You may be contacted after the initial interview for clarification of your interview responses or additional information.

All interviews will remain confidential. Research standards and ethical codes will be followed to protect your privacy. You will have a pseudonym. Neither you nor your institution will be identified in the dissertation.

I greatly appreciate your consideration of this request. If you would be gracious enough to agree to participate, please contact me at this toll free number 000-000-0000. We can arrange for a convenient time to meet.

Regards,

Rosanne C. Crossen  
Ph.D. Candidate

Dr. Timothy G. Davies  
Program Chair  
Community College Leadership  
School of Education  
Colorado State University

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Guide

#### CASE STUDY OF THE USE OF INSTITUTIONAL INFORMATION FOR DECISION-MAKING IN THE STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

##### *RESEARCH DESIGN NOTES (WILL NOT BE READ TO INTERVIEWEES)*

This study will attempt to answer several questions regarding the strategic planning process, use of institutional information, and the impression this experience had on the views about using data for those individuals serving on the Strategic Planning Council at a community college. The case study research design begins with several grand-tour questions that guide the interviewing process. The prompts will be presented to the interviewees that will collectively guide the inductive analysis of the interviews as part of answering the grand-tour questions. In some cases, not all prompts will be used as in the case that the interviewee has already provided the information. This interviewing format allows the participants to respond with open-ended statements that provide a discussion of the process that ultimately leads to a better understanding of their experience and the decision-making process on campus.

### INTERVIEW

#### GREETINGS AND INTRODUCTIONS

Participant will be asked to take a pseudo name as part of retaining confidentiality of responses.

#### OPENING STATEMENT

The purpose of this research study is to gain an understanding of how a community college leaders' use institutional information when making decisions regarding the design of an institution's strategic plan. Because you served on the college's Strategic Planning Council, you are in a unique position to describe the process; the impact the process has had on the institution and how institutional information was used to make decisions during the planning process. This interview is about your experiences with the planning process and your thoughts about those experiences.

Your responses will be combined with the responses from the other members of the Strategic Planning Council (and perhaps other individuals at the institution who played a key role in this process and did not serve on the council who may also be interviewed) and discussed as part of a dissertation study. Nothing you say will be identified with you personally. As we proceed through the interview, if you would like to

know why I am asking a particular question, please let me know. If you do not wish to answer a question, please say no. The purpose of this interview is to gain insights into how institutional information was used in the strategic planning process.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

#### GRAND TOUR QUESTION 1

How did the strategic planning process develop?

Prompts

Could you walk me through the steps taken at your college to design the strategic plan?

Could you describe how the strategic plan was developed?

Could you describe how the strategic planning council was formed?

How did people become members of the strategic planning council?

Could you tell me about your experience of having served on the strategic planning council?

Do you view the development of the strategic planning process as being effective?

Do you view the development of the strategic planning process as being efficient?

How did \_\_\_\_\_ start?

What led up to \_\_\_\_\_?

#### GRAND TOUR QUESTION 2

How did the strategic planning process operate?

Prompts

Could you tell me about what happened during the strategic planning process starting at the beginning?

Could you describe your role in the strategic planning process?

Please identify the major activities for the council.

Please discuss the timeline for when the major activities occurred in this process.

Could you elaborate on \_\_\_\_\_?

Why do you think the strategic planning process operated in \_\_\_\_\_ way?

### GRAND TOUR QUESTION 3

(Respondents will be given the opportunity to review the binders of data that were given to them originally during the strategic planning process.)

What was the institutional information used by the SPC?

Prompts

What information was supplied to you in this process?

Where did the information come from and how was it given to you?

Was this information understandable?

Could you describe your understanding of the information supplied to you during this process?

### GRAND TOUR QUESTION 4

How was the institutional information used by the SPC?

Was the information useful in making decisions during this process?

Could you elaborate on the usefulness of the information?

Could you discuss whether you thought the data supplied was the right type for making decisions as the strategic plan was designed?

Could you describe your use of the data sets (information) for the strategic planning process?

Did you ask for more or acquire other information on your own in order to make decisions about the strategic plan?

Are you now requesting more or different types of information (data sets) when you need to make decisions?

Have you been able to acquire the information you desired?

Could you describe other situations where you were involved in decision-making on campus?

What role did institutional data take in these other decision-making processes?

How has the strategic planning process affected the institution?

How has the experience of having served on the Strategic Planning Council changed the way you now make decisions?

How is the college different as a result of the strategic planning process?

#### WRAP-UP

Do you have any other comments about the strategic planning process?

Do you have any other comments about the use of institutional information for decision-making?

Is there anything else you would like to tell me about the process?

#### CLOSING STATEMENT

Thank you for your time and thoughts about the process of developing the strategic plan on your campus. I appreciate your perspective. May I contact you if I have any further questions or need additional information?

A report of the findings of this study will be presented to your institution.

## APPENDIX C

### Strategic Planning Council Planning Objectives

1. Engage the college community in process that will examine educational trends, forces and conditions in and beyond its service region, and develop projections for programs and services.
2. Review the institutional mission and purpose statement and the core values to ensure that they are consistent with the mission of a learning-centered college and responsive to the changing needs of diverse constituencies in the service region.
3. Develop a vision statement to guide future discussions regarding programs and services.
4. Identify multiple sources of information, detailing current and emerging trends that will shape [college name] development between 2002 and 2007.
5. Document the demand for college programs and services between 2002 and 2007 through analysis of data describing constituency needs.
6. Document the capacity of [college name] to meet regional needs through analysis of internal data describing institutional goals, strategy, structure, systems and culture.
7. Conduct a review of existing program offerings, support services and administrative systems to determine current strengths and opportunities for the future and identify strategic alternatives for college development.
8. Identify strategic options and forge working priorities to guide college development between 2002 and 2007.
9. Develop action plans and achievement indicators as well as a timetable for implementation of priorities as part of a five-year strategic plan. (IICC, 2002, p. 2).

## APPENDIX D

### North Central Accreditation Activities

The NCA Steering Committee and other related self-study groups were given the charge to conduct an in-depth study of the college to accomplish the following:

- To identify the extent that the college fulfills its mission of serving the community and meets its responsibilities as a public two-year institution.
- To gather data that will assist the college in strategic planning to assure continued success, and to analyze future directions for the purpose of setting goals and fiscal priorities.
- To continue the college's efforts toward documenting academic achievement and expanding assessment efforts in all areas of the college which impact the teaching and learning process.
- To use the results of this self-analysis to improve the institution's resources, programs and services.
- To create a document which will support the continued development of institutional priorities while addressing the need for change and renewal.
- To seek continued accreditation by evaluating the extent to which the college has met the General Institutional Requirements and Evaluative Criteria as set forth by the North Central Association. (IICC, 1996, pp. 5-6).

## APPENDIX E

### Goals and Tasks of the Planning Council

1. Gather data, research and analyze external environmental factors to identify opportunities and threats that could impact the college
2. Gather data, research and analyze internal strengths and weaknesses to identify those that may affect future college performance and success
3. Analyze strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (SWOTs); draw conclusions to identify critical issues that should be addressed this year and beyond
4. Develop and implement a collegewide process to increase awareness and gain input/feedback on SWOTs and critical issues
5. Prioritize critical issues and recommend work groups or other means to address them
6. Prepare a report with prioritized project/strategy recommendations (including accountability and outcome measures)
7. Recommend and champion a new college planning process. (IICC, 2000, p. 2)

## APPENDIX F

### Planning Assumptions FY2000 - FY2004

- The goals of the college should be driven by its mission, strategic directions, core values, and annual institutional priorities, and student preferences.
- Successful colleges will be learner-centered in programs and services.
- The district population growth will be about the same as the previous decade (4-5 percent).
- The number of high school graduates in the district will decline in 2000 and 2001 and increase moderately after that.
- To maintain or increase enrollment over the next few years, the college will need to enroll a greater percentage of recent high school graduates, recruit more adult students and seek training partnerships.
- The district's population is becoming more diverse.
- The college will face increased competition from proprietary schools and the private sector.
- Externally mandated accountability measures will increase; community expectations for accountability will increase; performance funding may increase.
- Competition for state and local public funds will increase.
- Use of technology will impact students' academic experiences.
- Technology will increase the convenience, quality and quantity of services the college can provide to students.
- Technology training for faculty and staff will need to increase.
- Alternative delivery systems such as distance education will require us to have multiple strategies.
- Staff productivity will need to increase and staff resources may be reallocated.
- There will be a large amount of faculty turnover.
- Many College facilities are aging and will require renovation and/or expansion.
- Health care and technology costs will continue to rise.
- College revenues, including tuition, will need to increase.
- The general economy will continue to thrive.

## APPENDIX G

### Strategic Planning Process Activities Strategic Planning Council Information and Documents

In 2000-2001, the Strategic Planning Council reviewed the following documents/information:

1. Summary of the work of the Planning Council (1999-2000)
2. The reports of six workgroups which included: an internal review of the college's current status in the area, an external review of other college benchmarks, implications from the reviews, a gap analysis, and recommendations for actions
3. A summary report of the five community focus groups held in spring 2001; all council members served as facilitators for these focus groups
4. A summary of the 18 faculty and staff focus groups held in spring 2001
5. Other focus group reports reviewed were: two student focus groups, four career program advisory groups, one focus group with local business leaders, one focus group with high school advisors/counselors, and one focus group with high school career program coordinators
6. Reports from a survey of high school seniors
7. A community needs assessment survey were reviewed, as well as a Web survey, annual surveys of graduates and other Research Office surveys.
8. Census data, enrollment trends, projections, other core component information, and the reports mentioned above were used to create two large data books to be used at the Planning Retreat. (IICC, 2002, p. 4)