Organizational Climate in Its Semiotic Aspect: A Postmodern Community College Undergoes Renewal

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TABLE 1 CAN BE FOUND AT THE END OF THE ARTICLE

Article:
The postmodern community college is a site of expanding missions, chaotic environmental turbulence, and increasing heterogeneity both within the publics served and among organizational members (Bergquist, 1998). These and other postmodern challenges call for transformational leadership that facilitates productive responses to change so that increased institutional effectiveness ensues. In the past, when faced with demands for improved organizational performance, leaders of community colleges and other higher education institutions often turned to quantitative assessments of organizational climate. This line of institutional research has provided executive leaders with critical guidance on institutional challenges that require leadership attention. In this way, climate assessments have guided higher education leaders in setting priorities for change (Baker & Hoover, 1997). While this practice is useful in developing an understanding of the overall climate of an institution, it may fail to render an appropriate snapshot of how assorted individuals make sense of their work environments, particularly within a context of organizational fragmentation and mounting heterogeneity. In other words, the postmodern community college retains a diversity of faculty and staff — all of whom may perceive the organizational climate quite differently — and climate surveys may neglect the voices of those with contrasting experiences within the organization. In sum, postmodern theory necessitates an extension of our knowledge of organizational climate in higher education institutions.

The chief purpose of the present study was to chart various institutional discourses relating to the climate at a rural community college undergoing organizational renewal. The researcher hypothesized that members of various subsystems within the institution would differ in the ways they make meaning of the signs and symbols of organizational climate. The findings have significance for both theory and practice. First, a valid understanding of climate within a postmodern reality may require a shift in how researchers assess and define organizational climate. Second, higher education leaders who seek to understand postmodern organization must acknowledge diversity where it exists, particularly when it engenders divergent ways of making sense of leadership behaviors and symbolic actions.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Organizational Climate and the Postmodern Community College

Organizational climate has been defined as a "set of characteristics that describe an organization and that (a) distinguish it from other organizations, (b) are relatively enduring over time, and (c) influence the behavior of people in the organization" (Forehand & Gilmer, 1964, p. 362). Organizational climate may also represent "the organization as people see it in a holistic, subjective sense" (Powell & Butterfield, 1978, p. 151). Stated plainly, an employee answering the question "What is it like to work here?" will offer a description of organizational climate (Baker, 1992). Finally, influencing organizational climate is believed to be a function of leadership (Likert, 1967). For example, researchers have revealed strong associations between organizational climate and leaders' ability to arouse motivation by appealing to human needs for achievement, affiliation, and power (Litwin & Stringer, 1968; Stringer, 2002).

Because organizational climate is a highly abstract concept, its use in guiding leadership behavior can be problematic for practitioners. The highly complex and dynamic concepts used to represent organizational climate may not translate easily into information useful for guiding executive decision making. Proposing a solution to this problem, Stringer (2002) suggests that

> … we need a way to sort the features of climates into useful groupings — useful in characterizing each organization and in comparing different organizations. Most importantly, the groupings need to be useful to those leading and managing organizations by providing a guide to arousing people's motivation and energizing their performance. (p. 45)

Addressing this need, Stringer (2002) condensed complex organizational conditions into the following six dimensions of organizational climate: (a) organizational clarity, (b) responsibility, (c) reward, (d) standards, (e) conformity, and (f) team spirit (see also Litwin & Stringer, 1968).

Similarly, organizational climate studies have played a prominent role within the literature on community college leadership. Following Likert (1967), Roueche and Baker (1987) identified key dimensions of organizational climate within a community college setting, and they articulated the implications for leadership. Later, Baker and Hoover (1997) developed the Personal Assessment of College Environment (PACE), a survey instrument that captures a "snapshot" of six climate dimensions determined to be a function of leadership. These dimensions include the following: (a) formal influence, (b) communication, (c) collaboration, (d) organizational structure, (e) technology, and (f) student focus. Along similar lines, in a qualitative study of a community college climate enduring precipitous change, Ayers (2002) identified organizational structure, empowerment, communication and interdependence, and shared vision as organizational climate conditions that set the stage for effective and efficient organizational renewal.

Although researchers widely agree that organizational climate generates an influence on organizational behavior, there has been some dispute as to whether organizational climate is a property of organizations or of individuals (Powell & Butterfield, 1978). On one hand, through an exhaustive review of the literature, Powell and Butterfield (1978) found that most researchers consider organizational climate to be a property of the organization. The resulting line of research suggests that organizational climate provides an overall composite view of an organization as represented by a homogenous collective. Community college research on organizational climate is frequently grounded in this method. On the other hand, postmodern

organizations, including community colleges, are increasingly heterogeneous, not only in terms of cultural and ethnic diversity but also in terms of socioeconomic status, disciplinary affiliation, and overall world view, among others. Consequently, it is plausible that organizational climate is a property of subsystems in an organization. Powell and Butterfield (1978) advance such an argument:

> An organization is considered to have subsystem climates whenever at least one group (subsystem) of employees has different perceptions of the organization's climate than those of employees outside the subsystem. The perceived climate is a property more of the separate subsystems than of the organization as a whole. Thus the unique climate perceptions held by each subsystem may be defined as its subsystem climate, (pp. 153-154)

Furthermore, Stringer (2002) claims that "because climate represents a set of subjective perceptions of an organization, there may be an infinite variety of organizational climates" (p. 45).

Postmodern conditions lend credence to the theory of subsystem climates. As Bergquist (1998) states, "contemporary organizations are experiencing pervasive fragmentation, chaos, and inconsistency. One part of the organization does not know or care what the other parts are doing" (p. 89). As community colleges expand their missions and boundaries, the resulting growth promotes further fragmentation. Moreover, factions within an organization may operate from a postmodern, modern, or even premodern orientation (Bergquist, 1993, 1998). As the resulting fragmentation escalates, it is likely that various factions throughout the college will experience organizational climate quite differently. Consequently, it becomes an overwhelming challenge to unite organizational units with dissimilar systems of thought around a common purpose.

Accompanying the postmodern reality of fragmentation is the omnipresence of turbulence in the environments external to community colleges. As a result of ever-changing environmental demands, community college educators must now endure constant change and renewal. Within this context, it becomes crucial to understand how leaders can facilitate productive responses to change, and one approach toward this end is to understand organizational climate conditions that tend to expedite organizational responses to societal change (Ayers, 2002). Given the significance of language and discourse in understanding change within postmodernity, it follows that we may be able to understand subsystem climates through the narratives of those who experience them. As Levin (1998) states, "Organizational change in the community college is conveyed by storytelling: through descriptions and explanations that organizational members give to make sense not only of their organization but also of the relationship between the organization and its environment" (p. 44). As such, the analysis of such stories figures prominently in the present study of organizational climate in the postmodern community college.

METHODOLOGY
The methodology and data collection methods are presented in three sections below. First, this paper explains how the theory and method of critical discourse analysis informed data collection and analysis. Second, the research setting is described with particular attention to a change initiative. Third, the article articulates the researcher's methods of collecting data, analyzing data, and generating a hypothesis.

Critical Discourse Analysis

This research was structured by a view of language as a social semiotic system, or a system for making meaning of human relations, social events, and other aspects of social life (Halliday, 1978; Halliday & Hasan, 1989). Within an organizational setting such as a community college, language is a system used to represent and to construct particular ways of perceiving and thinking about experiences in the work environment. One way to understand work experiences and the way individuals make sense of them is to analyze the way language is structured for use in telling stories about work. Central to the theory of critical discourse analysis is the premise that discourse, or "language-in-use" (Gee, 1999), constitutes social action; hence discourse serves a political function. Stories told by an organization's members, therefore, construct a view of the organizational environment that carries sociopolitical ramifications. Critical linguists agree that language serves a sociopolitical function and argue furthermore that the way language is structured for use is a manifestation of ideology. In support of this principle, Gee (1999) asserts that language structures both social activity and relationships within social groups and institutions. Language, therefore, is constitutive; it is "the site where meanings are created and changed" (Weatherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001, p. 6). In fact, social scientists are beginning to understand postmodern organization as an intricate network of conversations.

Herein the term ideology is used in the postmodern sense, that is, referring to a particular way of making sense of one's experience in the world, or one's worldview. Within this framework, the researcher hypothesized that college personnel interpret the signs and symbols embedded in the organization's climate in different ways depending on their ideological frame of reference. In light of high degrees of organizational fragmentation and heterogeneity, it seems reasonable to propose that multiple ideological perspectives are present within the organizational membership. As a result, members of the organization will likely make sense of organizational climate in a way that is constructed or constituted through the stories they tell at work or, in other words, through discursive practices. If individuals make sense of organizational climate in different ways, that is, if they produce and reproduce dissimilar narratives about how they experience organizational climate, then more than one discourse regime (Fairclough, 1995) may form within the organization. Finally, when the signs and symbols of organizational climate are the targets of constitutive discourse, the subsequent formation of discourse regimes may be equated with distinct subsystem climates.

The Study

Dodge Community College (DCC) is a pseudonym for a small rural community college located in the southeastern United States. A member of a large state community college system, DCC serves a two-county region through continuing education programs as well as 39 curriculum programs leading to associate degrees, diplomas, and certificates. The stated mission of the college is "to promote personal growth and community development through excellence in teaching, learning, and service." Seeking to realize this mission through educational programming that focuses on learner needs, DCC leaders became intrigued with the concept of the learning college as described by O'Banion (1997). Soon thereafter, a small group of faculty and administrators set out to develop a learning college model that would accommodate the college's cultural singularities. Committees were formed to create an institutional renewal project which later became designated as the Learning College Initiative (LCI).

Data Collection and Analysis

In early 2003, a senior administrator at DCC invited the researcher to study the organizational climate at the college. The researcher visited the research site on different occasions, observing workshops and meetings, reviewing faculty portfolios, and sitting in on presentations. The researcher then gathered and analyzed a set of institutional documents in order to develop a detailed understanding of policies, procedures, and recent events associated with the LCI. Having developed this knowledge, the researcher was thus able to craft interview prompts that would lead participants to tell stories of their work experiences at the college. Because the LCI was a primary concern of the administration, the researcher paid close attention to policies, procedures, and recent events that participants associated directly with this organizational change initiative.

Semi-structured interviews were then conducted with 8 academic department chairs and 11 faculty members. Each academic department was represented by one department chair and at least one faculty member. All interviews were conducted within the timeframe of one month, were recorded on tape, and were transcribed verbatim. The researcher and a colleague both analyzed interview data independently to identify salient themes, meta-themes, and sub-themes. These data were then condensed into conceptually related groupings, resulting in a coding scheme that represented an array of perceptions of key organizational climate conditions. The coding scheme was adjusted during the first round of coding so that it accommodated the data appropriately. The scheme was refined during subsequent iterations until it was deemed a faithful match with the data. This process enabled divergent perceptions of certain organizational climate conditions to emerge.

Limitations and Quality Checks

A problematic aspect of qualitative research is that the researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and, as always, observations are susceptible to human bias. Accordingly, great pains were taken to protect the integrity of the research. Quality checks (Marshall & Rossman, 1995) included a constant search for negative instances and a purposeful examination of alternative explanations. Only data that revealed consistent and clear themes were considered significant. It should be noted that the purpose of the study was to identify the climate conditions perceived to be significant by the organization's members. Climate conditions identified in this study as well as those not identified in this study may oscillate in importance as historical and sociopolitical forces act upon and change the meanings assigned to them.

FINDINGS

The chief purpose of this research project was to test the hypothesis that members of various subsystems within the institution differ in the ways they make meaning of the signs and symbols of organizational climate. Towards this end, the researcher mapped out prominent and competing discourses relating to organizational climate at a rural community college undergoing renewal. In large part, these discourses centered around three concrete artifacts associated with the Learning College Initiative. First, an institutional portfolio documented learning achievement occurring at the college. This institutional portfolio consisted of a set of learning artifacts produced by students and collected from instructors at random by the director of planning and institutional research. A chief purpose of the portfolio model was to document learning activities occurring

throughout the institution that facilitated student learning and engagement. Second, faculty and staff formed committees to develop a set of rubrics that would be used to assess the learning artifacts that make up the institutional portfolio. Consistent with the strategic plan for the LCI, a separate committee was formed to create rubrics for each of the following learning outcomes: (a) critical thinking; (b) effective communication through writing, speaking, and reading; (c) information literacy; (d) technology skills; (e) quantitative literacy; and (f) culture and ethics. When faculty contributed learning artifacts to the institutional portfolio, the rubrics were to be applied to these artifacts as a way of monitoring institutional progress toward institutional goals. Third, a portfolio-based faculty evaluation plan represented an accountability measure applied to individual instructors. Each faculty member was expected to compile a personal portfolio that demonstrated how he or she implemented learning activities intended to promote student learning and engagement. Department chairs were required to review these portfolios with individual faculty members each year.

Interview participants discussed their experiences with these three features of the LCI. It became clear through the analysis of data that personnel assigned markedly different meanings to these three features of the LCI, indicating support for the stated hypothesis. These semiotic differences were not limited to interpretations of these three features, however. Other organizational procedures, processes, and actions also became associated with the LCI. For example, controversial personnel decisions became, for some, symbols of an abuse of power associated with the LCI. On the other hand, administrators with firsthand knowledge of these actions did not associate personnel decisions with the LCI. Because the rationale behind personnel decisions was a confidential matter, however, administrators could not release information that might dissuade the perception of an abuse of power. Within this milieu, the researcher determined that not only were the signs and symbols of organizational climate assigned different meanings by various factions within the college but that the set of signs and symbols perceived to be related to the LCI also varied from one individual to another. Following Stringer (2002), the researcher condensed these various signs and symbols into descriptors called organizational climate conditions.

The data analysis yielded salient themes relating to the following four organizational climate conditions: power, collaboration, technology, and shared vision. In addition, the analysis of discourse relating to each climate variable revealed two organizational subsystems, each with its own unique interpretation of the first three organizational climate variables. Because these two subsystems produced unique discourses and because each had assigned different meanings to the signs and symbols of organizational climate, it was concluded that each subsystem represented a separate discourse regime. The researcher was unable to identify discrete membership in particular regimes, meaning that a few individuals shared assigned meanings of different climate conditions with more than one subsystem. For the most part, however, members of a discourse regime, or subsystem, were committed to a shared interpretation of all four key climate conditions.

Bearing in mind that exclusive individual commitment to a particular discourse regime was not universal, the researcher identified two discourse regimes that were dubbed the *dominant* and the *subjugated* regimes. Evidence of distinct subsystems as marked by divergent discourses supported the hypothesis that various groups within the institution made meaning of the signs

and symbols of organizational climate in different ways. In other words, each discourse regime demonstrated unique semiotic processes in assigning meaning to institutional procedures, processes, and actions. One instructor verbally acknowledged the existence of various regimes:

> I put the faculty in three camps: one camp, the people who are offended by it [the LCI] a little bit, one camp of people who are very proactive in trying to implement it, and then the other people are trying to sort of walk a happy medium between the two.

While this instructor spoke of a third neutral camp, the data instead suggested varying degrees of commitment to a particular discourse regime. In other words, even though some individuals seemed conflicted, or torn between two incompatible discourses, their discursive practices were not found to be neutral. On the other hand, an alternative to the hypothesis emerged in the analysis of discourse relating to the organizational climate variable of shared vision. Specifically, members of both regimes shared a common discourse relating to the fourth climate variable, shared vision, and so support for the hypothesis was mixed. The competing discourse regimes relating to each climate variable are described later. A summary of climate conditions and the meanings assigned to them by the dominant and subjugated regimes is presented in Table 1.

Power

Members of each discourse regime differed markedly in their perceived affiliation with formal power, explicitly stated as the college administration. Said another way, the members of the dominant regime perceived themselves as associated with formal power, whereas the members of the subjugated regime perceived themselves as alienated from formal power. The construction of meanings related to power yielded a discourse of faculty accountability on behalf of the dominant regime and a discourse of faculty subjugation on behalf of the subjugated regime. The following quotes represent a common meaning assigned to power by members of the dominant regime:

1. "The weak areas of the college are being forced to make changes….They're being called on the carpet."
2. "There's been a problem with faculty who have been relatively complacent and that is where our resistance has been….They've got to improve their teaching, and they're exposed if it doesn't happen."
3. "If I were to make a list of the instructors here that I didn't think were doing their jobs, those people are bubbling up to the top now, and it's becoming obvious that they were just riding the storm out or that they're here basically to earn a paycheck….They're obvious now."
4. "I think that [documenting learning outcomes] puts a lot more work on the instructor because he's got to say, okay, yes…I do critical thinking activities and this is proof that I did it….I believe that you should be able to prove that what you're doing in the classroom is working and the students are learning."
5. "I think that every teacher should have to show proof of…what they do, because if you have one that slacks off, I hope it shows up."

A consistent theme throughout the discourse of the dominant regime is that a legitimate use of authority is to hold instructors accountable for their performance as defined by the LCI criteria.

This discourse is consistent with the current culture of accountability in higher education. It also seems clear that members of the dominant regime hold a certain contempt or frustration for instructors whom they perceive to be ineffective. Furthermore, individuals perceived as ineffective are also identified as those who stage resistance to the LCI, as indicated in the second quote above. The technologies associated with the LCI thus become instruments of control wielded to identify those who refuse to conform and to demand compliance.

The members of the subjugated regime countered the discourse of accountability with a discourse of subjugation. The following quotes represent this discourse:

1. "It's like a threat. You have to prove that you deserve to work here. It's not about enhancing this learning college, it's almost like it's being used….I'm trying to figure out a way to put this in words. [pause] If someone wanted to fire you, they could use the portfolio to prove that you should be fired."
2. "I see it as a tool to justify things that the management wants to do with the instructors. That's the only thing that I see about it. I see it as having absolutely nothing to do with learning or teaching, or advancing our product. I see it as a tool that they can use to hold over our heads. I better quit there [laugh]."
3. "They removed our department chair… without any kind of discussion with the faculty that was involved. It just happened." [Interviewer: "You think that was a part of this initiative?"] "That's what we were told….What happened instilled a tremendous amount of paranoia on the college."
4. "The faculty are very stressed about it….They [the administration] want things to change overnight, but it's going to take time to see the results of trying to implement this plan."

These quotes represent a discourse of subjugation. Members of this discourse regime articulate a tone of inequitable power relations and a sense of injustice as they face increasing levels of accountability. In response, faculty members intimate a fear for their jobs. For example, in the third quote above, an individual directly associates a personnel decision with the LCI.

Members of both regimes recognized the administration's power to punish, suggesting a predominance of coercive power (French & Raven, 1969). Members of the dominant regime endorsed and even encouraged the use of coercive power. Conversely, members of the subjugated regime felt threatened by the use of coercive power. Although coercive power is often effective in producing desired outcomes, it also yields undesired effects, namely a sense of alienation among the coerced (Birnbaum, 1988).

Counter to this theme, one otherwise committed member of the subjugated regime stated the following: "We've been pretty much left up to do our own thing on that. There are suggestions, but as, as an instructor, pretty much left up to do whatever is necessary in our area." In this case, the researcher found evidence that the department chair had successfully shielded faculty from accountability measures. This may suggest a resistance to the LCI at the level of the department chair. On the other hand, it may suggest an attempt on behalf of the department chair to negotiate between the interests of the administration and the dominant regime and the faculty in his department.

Collaboration

As indicated above, meanings assigned to the climate condition described as collaboration included divergent discourses. Members of the dominant group perceived the accountability measures to be legitimate, arguing that they were the outcome of a collaborative enterprise involving representation from across the organization's membership. The following quotes represent the dominant group's discourse of inclusion:

1. "A handful of people…they're on every committee in the school and everything. They're the ones involved with it, and sometimes I think that we do a lot of covering for the rest of the faculty….You got a handful that are taking all of us this far."
2. "I think they've allowed us all lots of input on it."
3. "There is an attitude of inclusion, when I say that I mean from the administration."

The first quote indirectly represents a sense of inclusion. It positions members of various LCI committees as hard workers who do more than their share in order to compensate for those who are not involved. Though this individual recognizes unequal levels of involvement, she explains it away by insinuating that those who are not involved have excluded themselves intentionally by not serving on committees. This discursive practice complements the portrayal of some faculty members as indolent and disinterested. The other two quotes above directly represent a sense of inclusion. The researcher found support for this theme in institutional documents that explicitly stated a need for varied membership in LCI committees. These documents represent an intent on behalf of the administration to involve faculty and staff in a variety of departments and units in planning for the LCI.

In contrast, members of the subjugated regime voiced dissatisfaction with the extent to which they were involved in developing the accountability measures, thereby countering the discourse of inclusion. Furthermore, theirs was a discourse of alienation, as the following quotes demonstrate:

1. "It might be in the general ed classes where the impact has been seen, because it seems like those that were on the main committees are those type of people. Not too many of us from our area."
2. "All the same people are on the same committees. They'll add two or three extra people, but all the major players are on every single committee….I don't think they're getting a full range of comments."
3. "I think a lot of the faculty members who are upset see the learning college as a sort of a criticism — particularly the older members — criticism of what they have been doing, whether it is or not, that's the way it's perceived."
4. "I just feel like this has been shoved down our throats until we can't stand it any longer."

A common thread throughout this discourse is the sense that members of the subjugated regime are outside the mainstream. They are affected by the LCI but are not participants in its design. Within this discourse, their contributions to student learning are not valued, nor are they deemed legitimate. The researcher found the use of coercive power and a sense of alienation to be conceptually related, as discussed by Birnbaum (1988). The first and second quotes above, for

example, portray committee membership as a concentration of power that includes primarily those in the dominant regime.

Technology

Herein, the term technology is used in a general sense, that is, referring to practical, applied knowledge in operation within a social system. With respect to the climate variable known as technology, the dominant regime represented the LCI and its technologies as a means of improving educational practice. Key technologies related to the LCI include the institutional portfolio, the faculty portfolios, and the assessment rubrics. A great deal of controversy surrounded the latter. On one hand, members of the dominant regime viewed the assessment rubrics as technologies that were not yet perfect but would improve through innovation to be appropriate for a wide range of disciplines.

1. "There are certain things that in [my discipline] have to be there above and beyond the basic rubrics of the college, but I find them useful…"
2. "My students are not to that level. It's not appropriate for them. So I have to adapt it…"
3. "Are they going to need some tweaking from time to time? Probably so."
4. "I can see some of our staff applying some of them or some of the rubrics being applied to some particular assignment, but not all of them."

What is clear from these remarks is that members of the dominant regime view the rubrics as a technology that is imperfect but evolving. They discuss the need for modifications and do not mention any fear of repercussions. It is clear within this discourse that the rubrics are not a technology that is universally appropriate; however, members of this discourse regime intimate a belief that innovation and creativity will lead to improvements over time. It is possible that their history of involvement in the LCI offers a voice to members of this regime — a voice which they can direct toward reconciling the existing flaws in the rubrics.

On the other hand, while members of the subjugated regime also described the need to modify rubrics somewhat in order to accommodate discipline-based pedagogical differences, they consistently described the policies and procedures as rigid, static, and inflexible.

1. "Many people feel that they were already doing what is asked for them to do. Other people feel that they are being told to do something regardless if it matches with their curriculum or not."
2. "There's so much hype about it…that it's making a lot of instructors feel like they're worried more about how the administration perceives them. That's what's driving what we're doing. And in a sense the administration wants to drive them to change, but their focus still has to be on their gut instincts about what the students can accomplish…. That needs to be the primary focus."
3. "Each student is an individual. They don't all have the same equipment; they don't all have to perform the same way for either them or the institution to be successful…. And that's a hard thing to do when you have often imposed upon you — or should I say inflicted upon you — a set of regulations that requires this and that."
4. "They [faculty] can't perceive that it makes their programs any better."

5. "To me they [the rubrics] don't fit my area as well as I'd like for them to…. I think it's much more geared towards the transfer-type classes."

This discourse is quite similar to that of the dominant regime in that modifications to the rubrics are seen to be required; however, a striking dissimilarity is that members of the subjugated regime feel that the rubrics are unalterable. It seemed clear that members of the subjugated regime were reluctant to suggest modifications to the rubrics that would better accommodate their pedagogical preferences. Perhaps they feared that repercussions might ensue if they advocated for modifications to the rubrics. Alternatively, perhaps their sense of subjugation and alienation balkanized them from the innovative processes within the institution. In other words, their perceived alienation in the planning of the LCI may lead them to believe that they have no voice in challenging the appropriateness of the rubrics. One possible consequence of this apprehension to modify technologies is a loss of innovation and creativity. This has meaning to those who perceive that personnel decisions were related to noncompliance with the LCI. Advocating for change and pioneering innovation involves risks, and if the consequences of failure are likely to be dire, then there is safety in maintaining the status quo. In climates of perceived threat, organizational knowledge may fail to evolve, resulting in stagnation and inactivity. In fact, Gryskiewicz (1999) recommends that leaders embrace difference and dissent so that a full range of views will lead to greater creativity and innovation. By the same token, Nonaka and Teece (2001) report that a caring environment and a commitment to individual well being in the workplace is essential for the production and reproduction of knowledge.

Shared Vision
The final climate condition identified in this study was shared vision. This finding contradicted the hypothesis of varied meanings assigned to organizational climate conditions. The findings related to shared vision indicated that there was no divergent perception of the core purpose of the college. Across the board, faculty and division chairs who participated in the interviews endorsed a focus on student learning and development. Bergquist (1993,1998) places high priority on a shared sense of purpose in postmodern organizations experiencing increasing fragmentation and heterogeneity. As individuals and subsystems within an organization venture in different strategic directions, pursue different goals, and assign different meanings to organizational signs and symbols, it becomes essential for leaders to unite an organization's membership around a common mission, or a shared vision of the future. According to Bergquist, it is the organizational mission that holds the postmodern organization together, and executive leaders must constantly promote and reinforce the institutional mission both within and outside the organization.

CONCLUSIONS
This research revealed the following four climate variables related to an organizational renewal project at a rural community college in the southeastern United States: power, collaboration, technology, and shared vision. Mounting heterogeneity within the community college may be equated with the presence of dissimilar world views, thereby producing varied effects on organizational climate in its semiotic aspect. In light of postmodern views on organization as well as the theory and method of critical discourse analysis, the researcher hypothesized that the signs and symbols related to each of these climate conditions would be assigned different meanings by individuals and subsystems with varying world views. The hypothesis was

supported in an analysis of the first three variables: subsystem views of power included discourses of accountability and subjugation, subsystem views of collaboration included discourses of inclusion and alienation, and subsystem views of technology included discourses of flexibility and rigidity. Evidence relating to the fourth climate condition, shared vision, countered the hypothesis. The meanings assigned to this variable consistently reflected a focus on student learning and engagement. In other words, there was no significant inconsistency in views of the college's main purpose.

These findings bear significance to both theory and practice. With respect to theory, the findings underscore the centrality of discourse in explanations of how climate conditions influence behavior and dispositions during periods of organizational renewal. The findings suggest that climate surveys may fail to capture the heterogeneity of meanings assigned to perceptions of climate among various organizational subsystems, particularly when subsystems enact markedly different, or even opposing, discourses. It is plausible that climate surveys only represent the dominant meanings assigned to elements of organizational climate, thereby rendering all other meanings imperceptible to organizational leaders. As such, ideological-discursive positions of the majority gain dominion over those of the minority. Within the quantitative paradigm, this silencing of the minority may be addressed through linear modeling or multivariate analyses that pinpoint the differing perceptions of climate; however, such analyses would depend upon the collection of detailed data relating to individual characteristics. Among such characteristics may be affiliation with organizational divisions or departments, job category, level on the hierarchy, and gender, among others. Conversely, this study indicates that the defining characteristics of various subsystems may be less obvious and more difficult to capture in terms of categorical variables. For example, the results of this study indicate that each of two discourse regimes was determined at least in part by individuals' ideological frames of reference and dissimilar semiotic processes. It would be difficult to capture these subtle nuances through existing quantitative methods. As such, the findings suggest that research on organizational climate may benefit from an approach grounded in the theory and method of critical discourse analysis with careful attention to postmodern organization theory.

Although an analysis of the characteristics of individuals affiliated with the two discourse regimes was beyond the scope of this research, the researcher was aware that the heterogeneity within this particular setting was representative of that in our society. In particular, among interview participants the researcher noticed the appearance of higher socioeconomic status among those in the dominant regime. For example, evidence was found suggesting that members of the dominant regime typically had earned graduate and advanced graduate degrees, were more likely to travel to professional conferences outside the state, and were more often assigned to academic programs that led to transfer and the attainment of the bachelor's degree. In contrast, members of the subjugated regime typically possessed an associate's degree as the highest degree earned — and many had received the degree from the institution that was now their employer. Furthermore, most of these faculty and division chairs were assigned to vocational and technical programs that prepared graduates for immediate entry into the workplace. When referring to the institution's formal leadership, members of this regime frequently used the term "management," whereas members of the dominant regime preferred the term "administration." This difference in terminology signified an industrial mindset on behalf of the subjugated regime, which is understandable since most of the members of this regime worked in the vocational and technical

areas of the institution. Their backgrounds were in business and industry where management is often hierarchical and controlling. This background, and the implied lack of familiarity with the collegial culture of many higher education institutions, may explain, at least in part, a labor-versus-management mentality. This evidence raises questions about social stratification in society and the ways that it is manifest within the workplace. Furthermore, the competing discourses identified in this research reflect the uneasy tension between academic and vocational programs in many community colleges. To what extent is it reasonable to house such different programs within the same institution? Can this be done while maintaining a sense of community among students, faculty, and staff of different curriculum areas across campus? The research findings in this study raise these and other questions, which are suggested as topics for further research.

With respect to practice, the findings suggest that a critical awareness of diverse organizational discourses may serve organizational leaders who seek to establish organizational climates that empower all personnel, not just the majority or those affiliated with power. This goal is crucial within higher education, particularly within organizations with collegial systems (Birnbaum, 1988). By incorporating diverse discourses into planning for organizational renewal, community college leaders may negotiate the ideological-discursive positions of various discourse regimes and thereby achieve greater consensus on decisions related to organizational renewal. Critical linguists agree that language is constitutive — that it is the site where meanings are produced. By attending to and moderating diverse discourses, community college leaders can engage members of various organizational subsystems in the joint production of meanings related to the work environment. This practice may result in a higher level of commitment to the institutional mission as well as to increased levels of cooperation.

Table 1:

Summary of Discourses Related to Organizational Climate Variables by Discourse Regime

Climate Condition	Dominant Regime	Subjugated Regime
Power	Accountability	Subjugation
Collaboration	Inclusion	Alienation
Technology	Anticipated innovation	Unalterable, permanent
Shared vision	Focus on students	Focus on students

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