

# ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE ASSESSMENT

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This document includes a cultural assessment of a university that will be protected by the pseudonym “Tranquility”.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

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<b>TABLE OF CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>PART 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>PART 2: DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS OF THE TRANQUILITY COLLEGE CULTURE.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>PART 3: CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS WHICH ENABLE PERFORMANCE.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>PART 4: LIKELY IMPACT ON TRANQUILITY AND ITS FUTURE.....</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>PART 5: LEVERAGE POINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>APPENDIX I: VERBATIM QUOTES FROM THE INTERVIEWS AND SURVEYS.....</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>APPENDIX II: THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS.....</b>	<b>34</b>

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## PART 1: INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

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### **THE PURPOSE OF A CULTURE ASSESSMENT**

Every organization of any significant size—whether a higher education institution, a non-profit charity, or a government agency—operates within its own distinctive culture. Corporate culture is recognized as a singular determinant of organizational effectiveness and can be an arbiter, or at least an important factor, in long-term success or failure.

Webster defines ‘culture’ as:

*5.a: the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations. b: the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group; also: the characteristic features of everyday existence (as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time. c: the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization i.e. \*a corporate culture focused on the bottom line\* d: the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic.*

The simplest construct for organizational culture is whatever is reinforced within that organization. Culture could be thought of as the set of unarticulated rules for success inside the organization. The culture acts as a kind of organizational paradigm.

Culture is the condition in which people think, act, and work in the organization; it acts like a force field, shaping and reinforcing what people think and do. It shapes the perceptions, thinking, and actions of the people within the organization. Given that all performance in an organization is reliant on the actions of individuals and the cumulative impact of the action of many individuals, the culture can be considered as the singular determinant of long-term, strategic success.

When an organization’s culture, or paradigm, becomes *the* fixed and absolute view of reality, or “how things are and ought to be,” rather than simply *a* paradigm, the organization loses flexibility, inefficiency increases, and execution slows. When a typical way of working becomes *the* way of working, the organization loses creativity, frustration rises with a loss of satisfaction, and innovation disappears. When the enterprise’s point of view becomes *the* way that it *is*, possibility is lost and opportunities missed. Much of leadership’s attention is devoted to the tools and techniques that squeeze more out of the existing paradigm. In most organizations, the culture is a mechanism for reinforcing past successes and avoiding past failures. Strategies, processes, systems, and structures are all too often artifacts of the organizational culture, artifacts of past success.

When the competitive external environment changes faster than the organization, the old culture impedes success in the marketplace. Internally, however, the existent patterns of perceptions and corresponding ways of thinking and working are validated and reinforced, and the old culture persists.

What were successful strategies are updated and honed. What were proven processes, are improved. What were effective systems are refined and re-built. What were solid structures are re-balanced. All the while, organizational performance deteriorates.

No matter how successful an institution has been in the past, it cannot develop and implement powerful strategies and effective plans if it is operating with strategies, culture, processes, systems, and structures that no longer fit the demands of the marketplace. In order to regain competitive advantage, the organization must transform itself by generating a new future for the institution that is founded in and has competitive advantage in the marketplace of the future. Commensurately, the organizational culture must be a harmonic of the marketplace of the future, a culture that empowers and enables people to invent new ways of competing and to change the rules of the game in the marketplace as well as in the enterprise.

Unless the existing culture is revealed, accepted, and owned, any attempt at cultural change will simply be lipstick on the old culture. The supposedly new culture will unwittingly inherit aspects of the old one that can undermine the effectiveness of the change effort.

It is first necessary to assess and identify the existing culture and distinguish it for what it is: a Vicious Circle of self-reinforcing rules and procedures, processes and practices, patterns of perception, action, and thinking that come from and perpetuate the past and leave room only for the predictable. Having identified the existing culture, leadership must then be willing to relate to it as merely the current paradigm for doing business in the organization—“a way of working” rather than “the way it works: or even, “reality”—and then take responsibility for how they and everyone else in the organization, participate in and reinforce that same culture.

Only then is it possible to begin to design a culture from the future to which leadership is committed, a culture that can be the source of competitive advantage, as opposed to being an attempt to fix, change, or improve on the past. In a culture of design, people’s actions naturally express and build the vision. In other words, a culture of design pulls for the realization of the vision, strategies, and intended results. This gives access to extraordinary accomplishment and to producing results that are beyond the predictable.

## **NINE FACETS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE**

As we seek to uncover and reveal the existing culture at Tranquility College, there are nine facets we examine. These facets together interact like music playing in the background to provide the culture or context in which the organization is operating.

1. **Language and network of conversations:** One can argue that every aspect of work in an enterprise involves some kind of conversation. So the content, structure, and distribution of the conversations of an enterprise are its most potent mechanism for reinforcing culture. Simply paying attention to how people in an organization interact, what they talk about, the language they use, and how their conversations are structured is essential. The remaining eight facets are all found in the conversations people are engaged in together and with students and the community.
2. **Customer orientation:** Since all enterprises exist to serve the needs of some set of customers (students, parents, the community), how the customer is viewed, served, and interacted with is another important window into culture. An indicator of customer orientation is to discern how the employees are viewed and treated. Employees are likely to treat customers in a very similar fashion to the way they are being treated in the organization.
3. **What is actually valued:** Values determine choices and effective performance requires the right choices. The best way to find out what values are operational in an organization is to listen to how people assess each other—noting what is recognized and complemented and what is looked down upon or criticized. Asking people what supports and what inhibits their success will illuminate what is framing their choices. This is a far better way to gauge culture than examining values written on a poster.
4. **Accountability and responsibility:** Accountability is being answerable for providing or governing so as to meet the conditions needed to bring about the intended results. Without accountability, the organization drifts; with accountability, it is taken somewhere. Responsibility is about dedication beyond your stated job. Nevertheless, the actual connection between results and accountability, as well as responsibility, is often hazy or gets lost in a sea of circumstances and justifications.
5. **Traditions, rituals, heroes, legends, and artifacts:** To better discern what is reinforced, make an effort to understand an institution's status symbols and what gives people a sense of belonging and pride. There are also legends or stories that are repeated and referred to almost on a daily or weekly basis. Sometimes these stories have a negative tone and can be corrosive. Others are overly positive and have people espouse about the "good old days". All of these are born from the past, reinforce current behavior, and keep an organization rooted in what was or in the perception of what was.
6. **Leadership dynamics:** We all know that the tone of an enterprise is set at the top. How leadership is viewed and overall leadership style in an organization is another significant contributor to culture and the ability to execute on strategy. Leadership dynamics are observed, emulated, and take shape in the organization's conversations.

7. **Unwritten rules for success:** Not all of the avenues to success within an organization can be found in the employee handbook. Recognizing the unwritten rules and altering them, if necessary, is an essential part of a cultural transformation. People strive to understand the real drivers of success and acceptance and adhere to them in order to move forward, even if they are at cross-purposes with the overall mission.
8. **Decision rights and processes:** One of the most powerful tools in setting a culture is defining who makes what decisions, in what forums, and whom they have to consult to make those calls. These decision rights can dramatically alter the pace at which customer needs are being met or even if they are, in fact, being fulfilled.
9. **Legacy:** Every company has a story about its origins, the visions of the founders, or major successes and failures along the way. These narratives from the past shape the actions that people take or do not take in the present.

Revealing the facets of the current culture is the first step in being able to identify where the culture is misaligned from the vision for the future and working at counter purposes to organizational and individual transformation.

## **INSIGNIAM METHODOLOGY**

Insigniam's methodology for identifying and assessing the organizational culture is based on the following principles:

- An organization can be viewed as a network of ongoing conversations.
- People's behaviors and actions are correlated to the world as they perceive it or, said differently, how it occurs for them.
- The way the world occurs is in many ways, if not totally, linguistic; that is to say, the way the world occurs is screened and shaped by the conversations in which people are engaged and the patterns of those conversations—what they speak and listen and how they speak and listen—which mostly come from and perpetuate the past.
- The patterns of the conversations of the people of an organization (both the content of those conversations and the structure of the conversations) can give insight to the culture, a filter on and boundary to the conversations of people inside the organization.

Thus, by identifying the patterns of conversation in which people are engaged within the enterprise, we can assess the existing organizational culture. We do this by conducting extensive individual interviews with the people of the organization in all functions and at all levels of the organization, as well as conducting an online survey with a wide cross-section of employees from across the company, as well as students and trustees.

In the case of Tranquility College, we conducted 39 individual interviews and received survey responses from 122 employees and 70 students. Each interview was designed to identify and reveal the network of ongoing conversations that correspond to the existing culture of the organization. The survey questions were tailored to focus on individual's perceptions and ways of working, how work gets accomplished in and through the system, and provide an assessment about what works and what does not work at Tranquility College.

From our review of all interview and survey responses, common themes emerged that highlight the network of conversations prevalent within Tranquility College. It is from these themes that the distinctive elements of the Tranquility College culture are derived.

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## PART 2: DISTINCTIVE ELEMENTS OF THE TRANQUILITY COLLEGE CULTURE

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### Background

Tranquility College is a small liberal arts college. Tranquility has both traditional students and students who attend its Center for Continuing Education (CCE). [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED], Tranquility's program offerings include such majors as [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

In spite of the strong commitment to their mission and values, metrics show declining performance in enrollment and retention trending downward over the past several years. The institution has an ambition to grow from approximately [REDACTED] [REDACTED]. Competition among colleges for enrollment is up and percent enrollment of accepted students is one key metric for performance. The organization is unclear about what is missing and needed or present and getting in the way of the organizational culture in order to fulfill on their ambitions.

It is necessary to begin by saying that the overall sentiment towards the College is very positive and people's commitment to its success is remarkably strong. We urge you to keep this in mind as we venture deep into the underlying cultural elements we will be revealing. Context has nothing to do with individuals and everything to do with the nonphysical background of ideas, beliefs, assumptions, and presuppositions. And in the absence of intentionally being designed, this background is most often by default a version of right/ wrong, us vs. them, and survival.

### THE CULTURE

The distinctive elements of Tranquility's organizational culture, described in this section, are addressed in no particular order of importance, other than to organize key points of emphasis.

The descriptions accompanying each element are a narrative of what was revealed in the interviews and surveys—samples of actual wording of interviews and surveys from participants are included in Appendix I. These distinctive elements are intended to give actionable access to the organization's culture and represent threads of recurring concepts that can be discerned as the network, patterns, and structures of conversations at Tranquility. The distinctive elements name and give identity to a background that powerfully shapes perception and the actions that people take at work.

As part of the process of revealing Tranquility's culture, we first asked interview and survey participants about their experience at the college. We asked participants to describe the culture at Tranquility in seven words or less. These answers constitute the first manifestation of Tranquility's network of conversations; those conversations people have that shape their perceptions of and actions with regard to the College. The most commonly used words are noted in the word cloud below. The size of each word corresponds to the frequency it was voiced in the interviews and surveys; the more the word was used, the larger it appears in the word cloud.

STAFF & FACULTY



STUDENTS



## The Distinctive Elements of the Tranquility College Organizational Culture

### **1. It is ALL About the Students**

If there is one unifying commitment that almost everyone we spoke to is rallied around, it is people's unwavering devotion to the students. People talk about their relationship with students in glowing terms, including student alumni who have graduated many years ago and still maintain a deep relationship with faculty. People's interactions with students and their role in transforming those young people's lives is repeatedly mentioned as the primary source of job satisfaction. The close-knit bond formed with students is seen as unique and a source of competitive advantage for Tranquility, one that could be better optimized in how the school markets itself to prospective students.

However, the sacrosanct bond people feel with their students sometimes has them tolerate areas of unworkability and dysfunction. They talk about being willing to "put up with" circumstances that they wouldn't endure in other jobs because they are so committed to their students. For most of the people working across Tranquility, theirs is a calling rather than a job. They receive enormous satisfaction from knowing that they are making a profound and lasting difference in so many people's lives. The vast alumni network is an underutilized resource; people express frustration in their inability to better utilize it. The commitment to the students is inspiring and should be a foundational component of whatever vision is aligned upon for the future.

### **2. A Collective of Individuals vs. A Community**

Community is a critical component of Tranquility's stated culture framework. Tranquility's value of community states, [REDACTED] "This professed value is often cited as one of the unique and compelling factors for students and faculty alike. However, in practice this commitment [REDACTED] appears to be missing on all sides. There are micro-communities but no sense of an overarching, unifying community to which everyone feels connected.

Tranquility exists for most people as a collection of individuals that identify themselves with their group (faculty, staff, etc.) or department (music, English, etc.). While people talk in overwhelmingly positive terms about their own group, they tend to point the finger for much of what they perceive to be wrong with Tranquility at other groups. Almost nobody says, "here is what is not working and here is my role in why it is that way". As long as the source of issues and unworkability lies outside of the individual (or at least their group), the opportunity to impact those circumstances is greatly diminished. Many speak in a way that leaves them helpless with, and at times victims of, circumstances rather than in a position of power to make many of the significant contributions they could be and want to be making.

There is a belief from both faculty and administration staff that the other group doesn't know, and doesn't show an eagerness to find out, about what their group is committed to or that with which they are concerned. This perception only exacerbates the "us vs. them" mindset.

From the student perspective, there are certain structural issues that are cited as hindering a sense of community and getting in the way of the campus spirit that many see as lacking. People lament that walking through campus, it is unusual to see students gathered together. Social or “hangout” spaces are desperately needed to help foster a sense of community for students.

Faculty are skeptical of the relatively new leadership’s academic background and seeming unwillingness to immerse themselves in the faculty’s world. Whether that be by sitting in and observing classes, engaging more with students, or simply finding occasions to sit down and talk to faculty, this perceived lack of empathy or interest is particularly troubling to many faculty members.

On the other side, the administration is sometimes suspicious of faculty members whom they view as stuck in the past, condescending and unwilling to make admittedly difficult business decisions for the betterment of the college and its future. Communication, or a lack of it, is often attributed by people on both sides for exacerbating the divide and keeping a real sense of community from emerging at the College.

### **3. A Call For Accountability**

People have become entrenched in their silos and often do not think from the whole of the organization. A “not my job” position has taken hold with some employees. Some of this is attributed to people having too much to do and not enough resources to even keep up with their primary job functions, much less having the time or energy to think more broadly. Some is also due to a hunkering down in their own personal points of view or camps, griping and playing the “blame game”.

Accountability is seen as insufficient by people working across all areas of the college. People point out that some simply don’t follow policies, procedures, and guidelines and their lack of adherence to those structures produces a condition of unworkability. Frequently cited are examples of colleagues not being responsive to questions or requests, whether by phone or email. Slow or complete lack of communication has rippling effects across the campus, in some cases directly negatively impacting the students.

People tend to not hold each other to account, instead merely complaining (often to anyone other than the person they have the issue with) or using others lack of accountability to justify their own behavior. Some say that there is a double standard between faculty and staff in what is expected. In particular, expectations for faculty being in communication is not matched by the responsiveness of the administration. There are also some who say the college is not sticking to its own deadlines and policies regarding students, doing them a disservice as well as lowering overall morale. Moreover, the students are looking for integrity in how the school is run and many say both faculty and administration are not living up to their expectations.

#### 4. We Know Where We Came From, Now Where Are We Going?

Tranquility's history is deep, rich, and a source of pride for the majority of people associated with the college. People talk glowingly and with nostalgia for the way things used to be. While not everyone agrees with the specifics of *what* made Tranquility great, there is a concern that the college's best days may be in the rearview mirror.

However, the vast majority are deeply committed to the future of Tranquility and willing to work in service of an inspiring, sustainable future. Many express frustration that they know something needs to change, but they don't know what or how. The question remains, "What is our shared purpose or vision?". There is an overwhelming perspective that Tranquility lacks a "North Star"—a vision that can rally the entire community and give people a sense of being part of something bigger than their individual accountability. In the absence of a clear purpose, people tend to devolve into focusing on what is right in front of them (particularly when coupled with a sense of too much to do and not enough resources to get it done).

For some, work that started as a calling has devolved into a job. People have lost sight of their individual and shared commitments. The lack of a unifying vision leaves people feeling rudderless, left to drift wherever the issue or circumstance of the moment takes them. In the absence of a vision, the Tranquility Edge has, for many, turned into tactics and "stuff to do" without a context for what the initiative will make possible. While many are optimistic that [REDACTED] will help propel the college towards a more desirable and tenable future state, overall the initiative remains unclear for many. While there are some who seem to oppose [REDACTED], many more are hopeful but lack enough understanding to fully endorse or embrace the content. People want to feel like they are part of something bigger than themselves and that their efforts are contributing to building something magnificent. A created future that acts as a vision would support many in this commitment.

#### 5. Shout It From The Mountain Tops

People are desperate to feel pride about the college. The majority believe that even with its challenges and flaws, Tranquility is a truly special place; and they yearn to share it with the world. There is a strong belief that Tranquility College just does a poor job of marketing itself and telling its unique story. While it starts with the lack of an answer to the question, "Who are we?" (see #4 above) there are several factors that appear to be contributing to the poor communication of Tranquility's story. Many people describe Tranquility as a "hidden gem", one of higher education's best kept secrets.

One interesting source often cited for why the school is failing in its marketing efforts is attributed to [REDACTED] culture. Many feel that [REDACTED] culture touts a [REDACTED] that gets in the way of Tranquility sharing boldly about all of its compelling qualities. There is also a perception that part of the culture has people revel in hard work and fearful of being seen as too confident or too proud. Others say that there are simply insufficient resources in the marketing area. Communication is viewed as an area for improvement. The current administration is working to address the school's lagging reputation and undersized market presence through updates to the curriculum, marketing strategy, and facilities while also seeking to 'reset' the culture to enable future success.

There exists almost a palpable pent-up desire to unabashedly share the Tranquility story. People seem unsure about how to do so or if it is even appropriate. For others, they question, “are we really great?” and therefore don’t feel authentic in saying so. Some of the current mindset is likely a hangover from prior administrations who were viewed as not doing an adequate job of touting Tranquility. Most view [REDACTED] as a competent and committed spokesperson for the college.

## **6. We Need To Attract And Retain The Right Students**

Both faculty and administration lament the diminishing overall quality of the students matriculating at Tranquility over the past several years. People talk about Tranquility having been a place of high academic standards and good value, [REDACTED]. Many talk about students in the past who came to the school for the “right” reasons whether those were a connection to [REDACTED], a focus on social justice, or being attracted to a quirky, [REDACTED] college with a slightly different feel. Today, many are frustrated by an increase in incoming students whom they see as entitled, unprepared for the rigors of college, and therefore more demanding on already overburdened faculty and staff. Some blame the college’s lack of a cohesive, compelling marketing campaign for Tranquility not attracting the same caliber of students as it has in the past. Many point to declining enrollment numbers, coupled with financial burdens as what has led the college to relax admissions standards in order to increase enrollment.

There exists an underlying concern that the unfavorably changing student profile at Tranquility is a product of a cycle of action and reaction. Student enrollment is down and there exists no shortage of reasons and explanations for this alarming trend. Some say that in response to this circumstance, the college has adopted, though not expressly stated, a stance of “just accept more students” to get the numbers up. Being less discerning about the caliber of students accepted may indeed result in a rise in enrollment numbers; however, many see a deterioration in the reputation of the college as an unwanted consequence. As the perception of Tranquility’s academic standards diminishes, people fear that the college will become less attractive to the type of student the college desires to attract. This potential downward spiral is particularly concerning for many associated with Tranquility.

Some say that the cost of a college education and relatively inadequate student financial aid has put students and their families in a position of hardship; and in many cases, those students have needed to leave the school. Others see an overemphasis on recruiting athletes, in particular football players as contributing to the decline; some perceive them as not having the intellectual rigor or desire to perform in the classroom as well as they do on the playing field. Some say that athletic recruitment is used as a way to artificially pad enrollment numbers and that it waters down the academic culture at Tranquility.

There is no doubt that the student population overall is going through dramatic shifts alongside the population as a whole. It is a source of pride for many that Tranquility's student body represents the dynamic and changing face of the nation. These changes also require faculty and staff to change in order to meet new and different challenges to serve the student body of the 21st century. Making higher education accessible to a broader pool of students is something to be praised. If Tranquility is to remain viable in this rapidly changing environment, it must focus on growing the pie of students it recruits from, not merely strategizing on how to attract a larger slice of the existing, historical pie.

## **7. A Simple 'Thank You' Goes A Long Way**

People in general, and the faculty in particular, feel overworked and underappreciated at Tranquility. While pay is mentioned fairly frequently by the faculty as a source of dissatisfaction, in many cases people just don't feel acknowledged for the effort they put in to making Tranquility function.

A 2018 study by a global HR consulting firm revealed that 79 percent of people who quit their jobs cite 'lack of appreciation' as their reason for leaving (O.C. Tanner Learning Group, 2018). In that same study, recognition was the number one thing employees said their manager could give them to inspire them to produce great work. Study after study proves that when it comes to inspiring people to be their best at work, nothing else comes close—not even higher pay, promotion, autonomy or training.

Work/life balance is seen as out of whack, with many people complaining about being under-resourced, having to tolerate antiquated or simply non-existent technology, and feeling obligated to be available to students and colleagues at all hours of the day or night. What keeps people going is that they are doing work that they feel passionate about. However, many talk about inevitable burnout and the cost that their work is taking on themselves and their families.

Many say that there is criticism that comes at them from all—from other colleagues as well as students; they are consistently apprehensive about where the next "knock" on them or their work will come from. People fear that failing to conform to ideas or perspectives that have mass agreement is a career-limiting move. Some say that they simply don't speak up or share dissenting points of view for fear of harsh repercussions or being "bullied" by their colleagues. All of this, coupled with a sense that there is so little appreciation for good work, is taking its toll on individuals and the culture.

## 8. Tranquility Values: You Are Welcome To Your Interpretation, But Mine Is The Correct One

People at Tranquility speak often about the values and many feel strongly that the set of values is a key factor in making Tranquility successful and unique. Values in any organization are easy to define and challenging to implement. Part of what makes infusing values difficult is that they are often open to individual interpretation. Values, in and of themselves, are not actionable; and too often organizational values exist merely as posters on a wall that quickly fade from consciousness. Values need to be turned into principles and ultimately translated into practices that people engage in on a regular basis. Only then will the values start to permeate people's ways of being, thinking, acting, and the organization's culture.

This is challenging in most organizations; however, Tranquility possesses a few unique factors that make this especially taxing at the college. At the forefront of these challenges is Tranquility's [REDACTED]. As many people exclaim, "that which makes us great is often that which holds us back." Some say that the very essence [REDACTED], that it intentionally leaves things up to the individual and purposefully lacks the rigid structure of [REDACTED], is both a strength and a weakness for Tranquility. It encourages individual thought and expression and allows people to engage in meaningful dialogue about the values.

Everyone certainly has their opinions; and they are not afraid to vocalize them, especially when they feel someone is behaving or acting in a way that violates Tranquility's values and/or [REDACTED]. Some feel that, paradoxically, many have taken something that was intended to foster critical thinking and turned it into dogma with definitive "rights" and "wrongs". Others view their colleagues as using [REDACTED] that can be wielded whenever the ideas and opinions of others are viewed as in conflict with their own.

Intellectual rigor is highly valued by the people of Tranquility, and often times people are judged and evaluated based on their cerebral capabilities. However, even those with high intellect but not academics are sometimes viewed as less than by those with pedagogical backgrounds. This mindset has people looking into each other's sandbox quite often, acting as if their expertise in one area or subject gives them license to comment on and critique all others.

Bringing the [REDACTED] of query to the values will support greater employee engagement. Being reflective and interested in the question rather than rushing to come up with *the* answer will allow the values to be aspirational as well as provide guidance for behavior and action.

## 9. Having A Voice Doesn't Mean Getting Your Way

The people of Tranquility hold egalitarianism along with community, diversity, and equality in the highest regard. At the core of these commitments is a belief that every voice deserves to be heard. While this ideology has numerous benefits and can help elicit strong, sound decision-making as an ideal (desirable or perfect but not likely to become a reality), it has led to many upsets and fractured relationships.

Mostly among the faculty, there is a strong belief that too often their opinions, perspectives, and concerns are not taken into consideration by the administration. Some faculty bemoan the occasions when important, strategic decisions that have significant ramifications for the faculty and students have been made by leadership without them ever having been consulted prior to the decision being made. They claim that too often they only find out about a decision after the fact, and even then, the communication is insufficient and lacks context for why the decision was made at all. Others, particularly among the administration, experience that people equate being heard with having decisions go their way. Compounding the issue is that often a vocal minority sets the tone for the conversation and creates the perception that the loudest voice in the room speaks for the whole.

## 10. Missing in Action: Forgiveness, Generosity and Compassion

One of the foundational [REDACTED]. Unfortunately, there are several instances from the past that still loom prominently in people's minds, tainting their perception of others and resulting in feelings of resentment and lost hope.

There was almost universal high expectations and good will towards [REDACTED] when [REDACTED] first arrived on campus. People were genuinely rooting for [REDACTED] to succeed (and therefore the college would flourish) and eager to see what changes [REDACTED] and her new administration would bring about. While there is still strong positive sentiment toward [REDACTED], with a large cross-section of the Tranquility community (including faculty, alumni, and trustees) there is a vocal minority that feels abandoned and wronged by [REDACTED] and [REDACTED] administration. That group sees several major events, including the shift in academic calendar, outsourcing of certain staff, and a retracted proposed parking fee, as evidence for out-of-touch leadership and disregard for the school's values. The administration might mend a lot of broken fences by taking responsibility for perceived missteps and offering an authentic apology for any instances where they have left others upset.

Forgiveness is in short supply with those who feel aggrieved in other ways as well. Many people seem to be committed, even if unconsciously so, to holding onto their resentments and anger. As is often the case, those with the biggest commitments tend to be the ones who are most upset; it's their seemingly thwarted intentions and unfulfilled expectations that leave them feeling wronged and hurt.

Generosity and compassion seem to be missing across the employees at Tranquility. There is very little conversation, understanding or appreciation for what others are grappling with in their day-to-day accountabilities. Faculty doesn't talk about how difficult it must be for the administration to have to make difficult decisions for the financial well-being of the

institution. The administration doesn't speak about how challenging it is for faculty to remain highly committed without the resources necessary to teach a changing student body. Finger-pointing and blame have replaced compassion and empathy.

Forgiveness is to give as before - re-open your heart and mind and reconnect to the good intentions within everyone. While there is certainly responsibility to be taken on both sides, those who are living with the incompleteness of the past would do themselves a great service if they could reconnect to the "inner light" within their colleagues.

#### **11. Consensus vs. Effective Decision-Making: Is It Possible To Have Both?**

Effective and efficient decision-making is one of the key leverage points in high performing organizations. When the right people are empowered to make the right kind of decisions, there is a higher level of focus and better outcomes. Aligning on a governance model and decision rights is a challenging task in almost any organization. However, Tranquility's Quaker heritage and the value of good stewardship brings additional complexity within the Tranquility framework.

Some say that the college has abandoned its roots and has ignored or distorted the process of consensus. Those people say that they are often not invited into the conversation and are instead merely informed of decisions in which they should have had a seat at the table after the fact. A large percentage of the population believes that consensus is used as a ploy or tactic to either stall out conversations about unpopular topics or give a vocal minority leverage to avoid or delay a particular unwanted outcome. Both sides believe they are justified in their behavior. One group longs for all strategic decision-making to be run from the collective, while the other side sees certain traditions needing to be put to the side in the name of forward progress. Without alignment on a path forward, this unproductive tangle will predictably continue.

Some decry that there is not a shared understanding of [REDACTED], in particular not grasping the [REDACTED] over the individual. Again, there is an opportunity for balancing [REDACTED], with good management practices for running the institution effectively and efficiently. An aligned upon process for decision-making that takes into consideration the need for people to have their commitments and concerns heard with the notion of accountability for governance is priority issue to be resolved for many.

#### **12. Innovation and Tradition?**

Organizations that have such a large degree of their identity tied up in their history and traditions often find it challenging to be truly innovative. History has massive inertia behind it and those who pine for the "good old days" of Tranquility have difficulty seeing change as positive and embracing it. Change is often viewed by that faction as disrespecting or disregarding the traditions they hold in such high regard. This sets up a vicious circle in which those who are committed to change push harder and with more force, and those resisting change dig their heels in even more. This dynamic becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy, compounding and reinforcing other unfavorable cultural elements.

Innovation on a small scale is prevalent, particularly by faculty who cherish their freedom to be creative within the confines of their own classroom. Large-scale, disruptive change is not as common and often met with fear and resistance. Those seeking change, frustrated by the lack of cooperation from the detractors, often stop including them in conversations, exacerbating the belief that people aren't invited to the table when crucial decisions are being made. Those viewed as being overly stubborn and unwilling to change are further left on the outside by those committed to doing what they view as necessary to ensure the responsible stewardship of the institution.

Without intervention, this dynamic will likely result in continued deterioration of relationship and collaboration. Those who feel that they are being marginalized by leadership will gather more evidence to demonstrate the validity of their points of view. And, those pushing creative and sometimes radical ideas will encounter continued resistance, either overt or passive, diminishing the effectiveness of adoption and execution on those ideas.

There is no doubt that the playing field of higher education is in the midst of a seismic shift. Those that hold onto the status quo will likely find themselves left behind or worse. While change may be difficult, not changing is likely to be disastrous. All parties must come together to explore what it would look like to be both innovative and stay true to Tranquility's traditions. The answer to this dilemma holds the key to a compelling future that will attract students and staff alike.

### **13. And YET...I LOVE This Place**

One nearly universal truth is that both staff and administration are passionate about the college. They share a view of a unique, special community that is worth fighting for, even if they don't all agree on how to best do so. People are loyal to a fault, sometimes having them tolerate areas of unworkability and simply point fingers rather than come together to find solutions.

This shared dedication leaves people wanting to come together to collaborate and work in partnership for the betterment of Tranquility. There is a strong desire to rally around the college and everything good that it represents. People want to embrace all that has been good about Tranquility and create new traditions that keep the college relevant and vibrant moving forward.

People, the faculty especially, see their colleagues as often putting the good of the school before their own well-being. They are willing to make sacrifices in the name of what Tranquility was and hopefully can be in the future. A majority of people cite their relationships with colleagues as one of the most satisfying aspects of their job. They have deep regard, respect, and admiration for those that they are "in the trenches with"; and while silos between departments exist, there is a larger thread of Tranquility and what it stands for that binds them all together.

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## PART 3: CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS WHICH ENABLE PERFORMANCE

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Culture emerges from that which is reinforced in the organization. Organizations that have produced a breakthrough and transformed strategically, organizationally, and at the individual level are united by a common set of Six Critical Success Factors. These critical success factors not only help develop a culture that engenders breakthrough performance, they also serve as pillars around which the people of an enterprise can organize their conversations, actions, and commitments.

1. **Embed a Context for Building Something Magnificent:** Establishing an overriding context and commitment within the organization that something magnificent is being built is cardinal to enabling high performance. This context can be described as what the organization is “up to”; and it becomes palpable amongst its employee population, in the network of conversations, and for students, stakeholders, and the community as they come in contact with the college, its people, and its work.

Tranquility is undoubtedly an organization where people are up to something bigger than themselves. As evidence of that, people across the organization willingly go above and beyond in service of the students and the institution. As the organization turns its attention to not just growing enrollment and retaining existing students, but also being a leader in liberal arts education, the context for that effort must also evolve to one that empowers people to engage in new kinds of thinking. Thinking that enables them to deliver radical new solutions to the existing and future students’ needs.

2. **Hone All Aspects of Integrity:** Integrity is often associated with morals of a society, the ethics of an organization, or the laws of a state. We offer a view of integrity from an engineering paradigm—that is integrity as having structural soundness. In this perspective, think of integrity as spokes on a bike—if there are spokes missing, the bike is unable to perform as intended. In the case of a high-performing organization, we assert that structural soundness is built by three key prongs of integrity:
  - **HYGIENIC:** Do people do what they say they will do?
  - **SYSTEMIC:** Are processes and systems consistent with and in service of the mission, performance commitments, and values?
  - **ULTIMATE:** Are people’s actions consistent with that for which we stand and that which we value? Are we “walking the talk?”

There is evidence from the interviews and surveys that Tranquility needs focus in all three of these areas. People talk about breakdowns in communication with emails, not following practices, not delivering on expectations, and even not returning phone calls in a timely manner. They point to systems, processes, and structures that either don’t support or are antithetical to the kind of institution that Tranquility espouses to be. And there is ample anecdotal evidence that people’s behaviors and actions in many areas are inconsistent with the values of the institution.

3. **Establish a Framework of Responsibility and Accountability:** A core cultural value and operating principle of personal responsibility and individual accountability provides the requisite framework for individuals to take a stand for and commit to bold results that are beyond one's span of control. Without such a framework, finger-pointing, credit-taking, excusing failures, and dwelling in resignation (business-as-usual) become the currency of people's conversations.

Accountability provides a way of organizing the intended results of an organization and/or a set of individuals. Additionally, accountability can be thought of as "count-on-ability," a measure of one's being reliable. Establishing such a context begins with saying, "count on me for this behavior and this result" as a promise and continues with operating consistent with that promise. Stories, reasons, justifications, and explanations do not make one accountable; honoring one's word in the matter does. Moreover, as accountability is a matter of organizing, such a context provides clarity for people throughout the organization about who is accountable for what. Accountability kills obfuscation.

The opportunity to coordinate action and leave people clear about what is needed and expected of them is contrasted with the present state of confusion and frustration about decision rights and information sharing. Aligning Tranquility's commitment to the [REDACTED] with who is needed to efficiently make what decisions will rectify a significant source of angst and upset for the people across the organization.

4. **Organize Around Breakthrough Performance:** Being organized around breakthrough performance is about aligning the commitments, conversations, structures, and processes of an organization around the context of building something magnificent. Out of this springs creativity, new possibilities, game-changing initiatives, and empowered and inspired people who bring about an entirely new level of performance, leadership, and collaboration. Tranquility College, through the [REDACTED] and other initiatives, has demonstrated a commitment to delivering breakthroughs and many of its employees are eager to see the necessary changes and transformations come to fruition for the betterment of everyone associated with the college.
5. **Align Leadership:** An aligned leadership coalition embodies the future and it demonstrates this in everyday conversations, interactions, and operations. Executives, staff, faculty, trustees, and students constitute themselves as leaders to cause the unpredictable and share leadership across the organization in pursuit of a common commitment.

At Tranquility, while there exists strong commitment to defining and maintaining the culture throughout the organization. However, this exists in pockets, silos, and groups that remain unaligned on the "what" and "how". This lack of alignment leaves the organization spinning its wheels and individuals frustrated by a lack of significant progress. By aligning these various constituencies, Tranquility will realize a stronger leadership coalition that is capable of greater organizational impact, experienced across the college's workforce and by those they serve.

6. **Mobilize and Align Key Constituencies:** Within any organization there are key constituencies to be aligned and mobilized to work together, such as administration, faculty and students. Additionally, high-performing organizations engage and powerfully collaborate with key stakeholders and constituencies outside the walls of the institution like alumni, community businesses, parents, donors, and other institutions. Together, all of these groups can achieve much more than the sum of the parts.

Focusing on empowering historically underleveraged constituencies, [REDACTED], [REDACTED], and even some alumni, will provide the opportunities to create and implement higher levels of learning and a brighter future for students and staff alike.

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## PART 4: LIKELY IMPACT ON TRANQUILITY AND ITS FUTURE

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With its [REDACTED], Tranquility will continue to attract students, faculty, and staff. With its small class size and individual attention for students, its record for graduates being employed, and its access to financial packages, Tranquility already has a strong story to tell current and future students.

As Isaac Newton understood, objects in motion tend to stay in motion so long as they are not acted upon by an outside force. Similarly, organizations of people have a kind of momentum; the kind that keeps the current culture (including strengths and weaknesses and points of focus) in place. The passion that both students and faculty express, the lack of a clear identity and mixed views on the role of [REDACTED], the silos that people complain about, the fear regarding the future of a liberal arts college, the pride of being unique, all are likely to persist. How could this set of cultural elements and institutional traits influence Tranquility's success in the future?

Tranquility has focused on building and growing from its deep roots in [REDACTED] with a long-standing reputation. Its success has relied heavily on its relationships and reputation where it has been known for almost [REDACTED]. Attention on the current context and the elements that determine it have not been questioned. Attention has been placed on what needs to be done to increase enrollment and financial support. Faculty is consumed with what needs to be done to ensure that students receive the best education possible. Students have their attention on what they need to do for their classes and how to enjoy college life. The Administration is working on plans for buildings, fundraising, and how to retain students. The staff have daily tasks for meals, cleaning, parking, and other jobs to keep the college community running. Overall people at Tranquility are focused on what they need to do.

What people are doing and ultimately the results that are produced are shaped and determined by the context of an organization. Context also shapes and determines who people are being and their behaviors. For Tranquility to make the transformational changes desired, the current and prevailing context at the college must be redefined. Context *is* decisive; it shapes, colors, and even distorts whatever content you put into it. Context determines what people see as possible and not possible, how to be successful, and what opportunities exist. Therefore, simply working on content alone (structures, governance models, decision-making processes, etc.) will likely fall short of the desired outcome.

Tranquility has the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution to the development of higher education beyond its campus boundaries as well as its own students. To do this it must, however, intervene in its predictable and likely future.

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## PART 5: LEVERAGE POINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTION

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The set of recommendations that Insigniam is making were guided by three significant factors:

1. Tranquility College is a unique learning environment in both obvious and subtle ways.
2. The faculty and students at Tranquility as well as trustees and alumni have a deep personal respect and strong attachment to the College, its traditions, and its legacy.
3. These groups share a concern for Tranquility's survival and having it continue to hold a unique place in the world of higher education.

From an operational perspective, we found no one vehemently in disagreement with the construction remodeling or branding strategies currently underway. Most thought both were needed and overdue.

We did surmise that the implementation has been bumpy and perceived mistakes and misunderstandings jeopardize the path forward.

**The Leadership Coalition:** Insigniam will partner with Tranquility to assemble a Leadership Coalition; a collection of leaders from across the various constituencies that constitute Tranquility College. We suggest that the Coalition could evolve as a potent vehicle for continuous discussion and vetting of both strategic and tactical steps the college will need to take over the next few years. As both a guiding body and as its own community within the Tranquility community, it could evolve into a forum where strategic choices and possible actions are vetted among administration, faculty, and student members.

The format and continuation of the Coalition might reveal otherwise missing critical elements to support the future of Tranquility. For instance, the college is in need of rapid and decisive action to move many of the critical initiatives forward, and there is ample reason to think a process of aligning upon decision rights might be useful.

The members of the Leadership Coalition must think from the whole of the institution and become a living embodiment of the culture they wish to see.

**Connecting with the Students:** We frequently heard comments about the new administrative staff being removed from where the best of Tranquility is happening each day— the classroom. Faculty has highlighted that the staff seems reluctant to observe classes and see the quality of the interactions with students, as well as, gain a greater appreciation for what the faculty are doing. In addition, Students have taken it upon themselves to form a student body community, with one goal being to sort out how many changes currently in effect will impact them. We doubt that a student body community will, absent nurturing by administrative individuals, come to robust conclusions and actionable insight. They will require guidance and stewardship. There could even be an assigned administration professional that serves as a mentor to support the students in their efforts to bring about change.

Much of the wall built between faculty, students, and administration was based on the interpretation that administration's absence was seen as a lack of interest for the unique and valuable aspects of faculty efforts and student life.

Everyone complains of being too busy. Too many times, calendars reflect time committed to habitual actions and unnecessary meetings. Perhaps nothing at this point can be more important than visibly rectifying past communication breakdowns and demonstrating the two-way street of inclusion.

**Completing the Past:** There is admission on all sides that in the past certain things could have been executed with more thoughtfulness and consideration. Not addressing mistakes leaves stakeholders watching for any future actions and viewing the slightest misstep as evidence that not much has changed. A deliberate forum where all stakeholders complete or own their behavior and actions, the impact it has had on others, and make promises for the future should be strongly considered. Leaving the past mistakes unaddressed is dangerous practice for any business but is especially regrettable in a culture like Tranquility's where so much of its core function is based on relationships.

**Using the Tranquility Values as a Strategic Screen:** We think it is fair to say that the fulfillment of the new future will require numerous actions and activities not undertaken. It might be wise if the administration and trustees use the Tranquility Values as a screening tool for how they will implement a tactic and discuss ways in which implementation and communication methods can model the values whenever possible. The Tranquility values might not dictate "what" needs to be done, but might have the accountable persons reflect on the "how" of implementation. The link between action and values is an asset when implementing significant change with all stakeholders.

**Communication:** In any communications plan or practice we recommend the following be taken into consideration:

1. To support community and inclusion, we suggest always looking downstream to determine which key constituencies will be impacted and how. Once determined, those stakeholders should be brought to the table as early on in the process as feasible to make sure that their unique concerns and considerations are taken into account.
2. Tie action to Tranquility's values whenever possible. Make the connection as explicit as possible in showing people "why" certain actions are being taken and how they are consistent with demonstrating the value.
3. Every project or initiative has consequences. Detail the possible impact on key constituencies upfront and acknowledge people for being willing to take on something bigger than their own personal or group "wants and needs". Keep the big picture in front of people and help them build the bridge from the current state to the desired future.

People want to know that they have been heard, even if ultimately their wishes and wants go unfulfilled. It might be useful to include a broad cross-section of the population but making it clear that we are not committing to anything, simply engaging you in a dialogue early in the process. When a decision has been made, it is also imperative that sufficient context is given for the choice. People deserve to know why a decision was made, what was considered, and the path moving forward.

Students for the most part are concerned with how changes will impact them personally. “How is this going to change my life here or my future ambitions?” was the primary concern voiced by students. It would appear that in the past, the range of consequence was not detailed when the action was announced. Said simply, students and faculty listen to changes through a filter of “what’s in this for me?”. People need to know that their concerns will be fulfilled before they are likely to get behind a broader ambition for the good of Tranquility.

**The Tranquility [REDACTED]:** For many people across the organization the Tranquility [REDACTED] is perceived favorably, and people are hopeful. Many are adopting a “wait and see” attitude. More people across all parts of Tranquility need to be inspired to make [REDACTED] a reality. When questioned deeper, many people admitted that the most visible part of [REDACTED], [REDACTED], is known and encouraged but that [REDACTED], by comparison, are not understood nor visible in any recognizable way. We suggest that Administration find methods to give these two form and substance.

*Learning Collaboratively* is a factor that the Faculty claims to have been doing and uses the revised curriculum project as an example. We think more can be done to make this tangible.

We recommend initiating some visible efforts to strengthen the three lesser known items in [REDACTED]. For instance, a set of criterion and protocols for updating and using the information systems across the campus might be a fine project to staff with experts, faculty, and administration as an example of *Learning Collaboratively*.

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## APPENDIX I: VERBATIM QUOTES FROM THE INTERVIEWS AND SURVEYS

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The following is a sampling of direct quotes from interview and survey participants, arranged by topic and in an order that corresponds to Part 2: Distinctive Elements of the Tranquility Culture.

### 1. It is ALL About the Students

- *“Because there are faculty and staff who are willing to go above and beyond, there are students who get the support they need.”*
- *“Interacting with students every day. The diverse student population. The hard work I am putting in is really worth it. I get to see the transformation of them. That is the most rewarding piece for me.”*
- *“When it works, this is an amazing place. When I talk to alumni about what they valued most about their time here, they talk about the bonds they formed with their teachers, and the kinds of work they did together.”*
- *“Outstanding faculty deeply engaged with students.”*
- *“The strong bond between faculty and students. When it works, we can inspire students to achieve amazing goals and produce fantastic work.”*
- *“Professors at Tranquility College know their students very, very well. We are very accessible to students. We look after students when they struggle. We challenge students to reach higher. We go out of our way to find experiences (internships, pedagogies, field trips, assignments, study abroad programs) that are transformational for students, broadening and deepening their understanding of the world. Faculty here work hard every day to offer a superior education to our students. This unusually strong faculty-student connection is what makes the college stand out among its peers.”*
- *“The only thing that keeps me here is my students.”*
- *“First and foremost, each day I get to work with our students is incredibly satisfying. I came to Tranquility because I was confident in what I could help students achieve. I’m continually glad to have the opportunity to demonstrate that.”*

### 2. A Collective of Individuals vs. A Community

- *“We have social justice gatekeepers that stand afar (or disconnected) and point fingers rather than coming to the table w/ open heart and minds of other ways of thinking. We are not allowed to make mistakes related to things like social justice. Instead of seeing a mistake as an opportunity for growth and awareness, we have public and private shaming’s over the mistake.”*
- *“Committed individuals, I don’t think there is a system built for success but rather people who believe in the mission and dedication to our students.”*
- *“The inability, for whatever the reason, for the entire campus community to unite around a single or set of directives. Silos. Lack of transparency. Mistrust. Egos.”*
- *“The potential for collectivism to lead to mediocrity.”*
- *“We tend not to trust one another. Sometimes this is deserved. There is a culture of secrecy that lives right alongside a culture of collaboration, which tends to undermine everything we do.”*

- *“Sometimes it seems as if the faculty’s (or some strong voices within the faculty) reaction is to look for the way they are being victimized rather than see the group as a team and trust that the college, as a whole, is the big picture seen by our leadership. This is uncomfortable for me. I don’t feel safe to voice how I feel about pretty much any issue because some faculty are so vocal with their views that it is an exhausting prospect to challenge them or puts me in a vulnerable position to disagree.”*
- *“I think sometimes we work in silos and do not collaborate to ensure changes or ideas work well for all areas of the college. Some things affect other offices in ways we don’t understand and become bigger issues and added stressors.”*
- *“I want to be able to be joyful and address the challenges. We don’t take self-responsibility and ownership.”*
- *“We have a real background of community. We do not have fraternities and sororities but operate as a community of faculty and students.”*
- *“Communication has improved a lot from where it was with the past president. There have been some balls dropped. There was a snafu around parking on campus. No communication—there was one around outsourcing some of the housekeeping staff—that didn’t go down very well—not a communication plan. If you want to sell community, egalitarianism, equity, and inclusion, then you can’t drop those balls—fly in the face of who you claim to be. Happens, but makes it easy to have your critics cry hypocrisy. We could have managed the delivery of the message better, I do think it is improving.”*
- *“I think that there are faculty who, because they are involved in their own world, don’t understand what staff do. And Staff is the same way not understanding the faculty. It would be great to have more opportunities for staff and faculty to work together on campus together. Lack of understanding and appreciate each other.”*
- *“For the first time in [REDACTED], we have an administration that are not teachers, have not invested a majority of their career to the classroom, and are not in the classroom AT ALL at Tranquility College. They do not have first-hand experience teaching our current student population (which is deeply challenging). As a result, we have administrators who are not in step with faculty and faculty who feel unheard or dismissed by an administration that is more interested in bureaucratic policy than in shared pedagogical mission.”*
- *“We have some enormously creative and talented people among our faculty and staff; People are committed to be at Tranquility; People want to work together and we have been constrained in doing that; Potential to be a wonderfully collaborative environment.”*
- *“There are more negative comments than positive ones, and the only ‘community’ I see is that of people who are wallowing in their negativity together. They shout down any happiness or positivity, like we should feel guilty about being proud of our work or happy with our lives. What is that all about?”*

### **3. A Call For Accountability**

- *“Low morale and lack of accountability among some which can result in poor customer service (the ‘it’s not my job’ attitude and lack of follow through to ensure problems are resolved).”*
- *“Some administrators who are not held accountable. A sense that there is not a truth in reporting our finances.”*
- *“Senior administrators who believe they can make decisions and act without any accountability.”*

- *“People don’t feel a sense of their own accountability to their job. They don’t see that it matters how you talk to a colleague, student, outsiders. No one smiles on the campus. There is no one out on the campus and when you do see someone they are not friendly. People don’t answer email, even at the leadership level. I should not have to follow up every email.”*
- *“I think students would like to see a certain level of integrity in how the school is run. Of all the things they have asked for—protests and demands and ‘Integrity for Tranquility’ indicates that they see a lack of integrity. All the different groups want to see it and want to see it from the top down. We are not doing a good job at showing it. We have to hold the students accountable for integrity too. We have a role to play.”*
- *“People who are totally unresponsive. They don’t answer their phones and they don’t respond to emails. I have to collect data from faculty members and many of them require no less than 5 email requests over the course of a semester before they respond. In order to elicit a response from them, I literally have to beg for their cooperation. This is for an automated process that takes one minute for them to complete and is initially requested at the beginning of a semester. I spend hours trying to collect this information. Staff members also don’t respond to email/phone calls.”*
- *“Committed individuals, I don’t think there is a system built for success but rather people who believe in the mission and dedication to our students.”*
- *“We are losing staff and students out of frustration. This past year, some students slipped between the cracks due to slow communication between faculty and administration. We used to have systems that took care of that, but I was told the program broke and we have not replaced it.”*
- *“I also think we do a disservice to students by not sticking strictly to our deadlines and policies, which causes a lot of issues behind the scenes.”*
- *“Communication with leaders (Vice Presidents and some directors/academic deans) is virtually impossible since they are seemingly incapable of answering email or returning a phone call. If I treated my email and phone like a number of the leaders on this campus, I would lose my job. I don’t understand why the same standard isn’t set for them.”*

#### **4. We Know Where We Came From, Now Where Are We Going?**

- *“I don’t think we have a sense of self.”*
- *“We don’t really have culture here: What is Tranquility known for? We say we have values, but they aren’t practiced.”*
- *“We do not have a clear sense of Vision.”*
- *“Like a vision of a shared future vs. a future of a shared vision. We don’t need the same vision, but we need a vision for a shared future. We can still come together on having a future. Right now we get caught up in the differences rather than finding the connections—has a lot to do with trust. If I take on your vision than I lose mine.”*
- *“We need to build ‘true community’. Right now we are a mechanic collection of parts. We need to be a whole with a single purpose that is ‘higher’, more spiritual than ‘the survival of the school’.”*
- *“I love my job. I love working with the students, staff and faculty. I feel most all of us truly, 100%, do want to do what is right/ best for Tranquility. I feel that a lot of us don’t know what that is right now.”*

## 5. Shout It From The Mountain Tops

- *“We just don’t talk about ourselves. We don’t tell people what a special place we have.”*
- *“There are so many great things happening that are not well communicated internally or externally. people don’t know about them. I don’t know if that’s due to modesty or a lack of ability in that area.”*
- *“A difficulty that we have is delivering the message of who we are. What we do well, doesn’t seem to be communicated to students.”*
- *“We need to decide who we are and let the world know. So many things we can promote and market, and it doesn’t have to be saying something we are not.”*
- *“I think we have a hidden pearl and think we should do everything we can to keep it the way it is and let others know about it.”*
- *“Tranquility needs more marketing resources to be able to tell its story. In some respects, ████████ do not ████████ their abilities.”*
- *“██████ culture ████████ that leaves us reveling in our misery as a sign of hard-work, and unafraid to be confident or proud. This is not good.”*
- *“Tranquility breaks my heart and has since I arrived. I see a place with so much potential. But it’s a place overrun with fear and distrust and insecurity. When do we get to like who and what we are? When do we get to be proud? When do we get to stop apologizing?”*
- *“People do not know who/what Tranquility truly is all about...there are people who live in Tranquility County that do not know we are in this community...they do not even consider sending their kids to Tranquility College.”*

## 6. We Need To Attract And Retain The Right Students

- *“There is a sense of entitlement from the youth of today, and the youth at Tranquility seem intent upon their needs and wants vs. the needs and wants of others and making compromises. I don’t think anyone is tackling that. Some of our faculty may even be perpetuating that so they are adding fuel to the fire instead of educating them about other perspectives.”*
- *“The overall lower quality of student that we have been accepting. Losing the best students. Accepting good, promising students who are undocumented, first generation, or underrepresented and then not supporting them financially, emotionally, so that they have equal chance to succeed.”*
- *“An outsized emphasis on athletic recruiting has also had a detrimental effect on the college. We have many, many first-year students who will tell you plainly that they are at Tranquility to play their sport. They know almost nothing about the history or mission of the college. In many cases, they are unprepared for the academic rigor we demand in the classroom. In particular, I am concerned about the size of the football team. I personally think we would be stronger without football and closer to living our value of ‘integrity,’ given all the research about the health costs of the sport. But if we must have a football team, I think it is problematic and even unethical to use it as a way to ‘pad’ our admissions numbers. In my experience teaching Gen Ed classes, our football players are among the least prepared for the academic expectations of this institution.”*
- *“Students find that Tranquility is not a good fit for them, or that the tradition and culture is not the ‘college experience’ they anticipated. As an alum, I would also say that Tranquility’s placement rate for jobs, or even its ability to put students in the best position to find job opportunities, upon graduation, have hindered its success.”*

- *“Students that are not prepared to be in college (the student body as a whole has dropped in academic ability and preparedness in the last 10 years).”*
- *“Tranquility needs to define itself much better than it does We have a retention problem. The main answer for people leaving was ‘I can’t afford it anymore’ but that is also the easy answer, so no one needs to probe more. The question might be ‘what student are we recruiting?’ I think the answer might lie within that question.”*
- *“As a whole the students are more demanding, less independent of thought, and more much more entitled. I have had more students dropping my classes in the last few years who tell me it was because ‘it is too hard’.”*
- *“We have been slow to identify and understand the changes needed in what attracts students to come to Tranquility and, I think, the profile of students coming to Tranquility.”*
- *“The reality is that we are desperate for enrollment and will accept students who are unprepared (academically, emotionally, financially). This desperation has made us chase trends, rather than own our identity and focus on finding the students who are our ‘fit’. We now try to fit everyone and everything and, as a consequence, are nothing.”*

## **7. A Simple ‘Thank You’ Goes A Long Way**

- *“I have colleague friends who do incredible ‘volunteer’ service for Tranquility and the world via their work at Tranquility. That is to say that they do important work they are passionate about, but not exactly stuff they have to do. The college runs on this stuff. The college clearly knows what they do because it ends up in the press but rarely does someone get a note of thanks or acknowledgement.”*
- *“The College promotes a culture of overwork. I get emails from the deans and provost after working hours (8-5:30pm)—rarely do these folks have the courtesy to respond to emails during the day.”*
- *“Appreciation goes a very long way. Taking time to understand the unknown or areas that you are not familiar with it is very healthy to try. Show appreciation beyond awards day is important. You can be excited about your work but showing that externally is like wearing things that say TRANQUILITY says something. I am proud. More of that would help us.”*
- *“A ridiculous amount of criticism and almost no congratulations/good work/good will. Nothing is ever good enough, and no one wants to take responsibility. It’s hard to find professional satisfaction when you’re constantly looking over your shoulder to see who’s going to knock you down and criticize your work. People are always looking for who to blame when something doesn’t go right, instead of themselves, especially in some departments.”*
- *“We are a tired, overworked, under-appreciated, underpaid group of employees who need time and support to grow as professionals and individuals, who need help with work-family balance, and who need to feel appreciated for their work.”*

## **8. Tranquility Values: Everyone Has Their Own Interpretation, But Mine Is The Correct One**

- *“In a lot of ways they stay true to their [REDACTED]. That may also be what holds them back.”*
- *“The values that the college has speaks to people. People are united around the values. However, they may define the values differently.”*

- *“Issue with the cleaning staff being let go—people felt like it wasn’t in line with our values.”*
- *“Values: everyone understands and endorses them, but everyone has their own interpretation of them. Everyone has a strong and supported opinion. A value cannot be perfected, it exists, it applies itself in specific instances and when those instances don’t match up with the individual’s interpretation of those values things tend to go berserk”*
- *“Some good but others that get used as shortcuts. I’ve witnessed people say, ‘you can’t do that [REDACTED] [REDACTED], it causes misunderstanding. I wouldn’t want to say we should get rid of that, we have to recognize that we have grown and made our own way of thinking. [REDACTED]—not as clear cut as people might like.”*
- *“No common understanding of [REDACTED]. Outside of some core ideas, everyone has their opinion. [REDACTED] have structure, [REDACTED]. Allows for everyone to be themselves. Appreciate that. It’s both a strength and weakness.”*
- *“We are too locked in to what we think [REDACTED]. We tend to embrace elements of [REDACTED] to make a point while ignoring the overall [REDACTED].”*
- *“I have seen that we get so caught up in living our values to some perfect standard to which we aspire that we forget that our ideas and opinions are not synonymous with our values. But, rather I believe our ideas and opinions are our personal reflections on our values. In confusing the two, I think we set our own ideas and opinions over the ideas and opinions of others and in equating ideas/ opinions with values ironically fail in what we set forth as our mission as an institution.”*

## 9. Having A Voice Doesn’t Mean Getting Your Way

- *“People feel we are a community—equality—everyone gets a voice. but that causes people to feel like if things didn’t go their way, they weren’t heard.”*
- *“In light of the college’s traditional values around transparency and egalitarianism, the way to deal with that is to communicate in advance, to encounter resistance at the beginning instead of the end of the process. People need to know that they have been heard and valued.”*
- *“There are probably more people who are for the [REDACTED] and for the change than the administration realizes. But the voices that are raising up are not that.”*
- *“The number one problem with Tranquility is that admin does not care what the faculty thinks. The problem is that they are unwilling to even talk with the faculty.”*
- *“I may not agree with every decision made, but I do also understand that sometimes difficult decisions must be made and not everyone can get their way. Sometimes it seems as if the faculty’s (or some strong voices within the faculty) reaction is to look for the way they are being victimized rather than see the group as a team and trust that the college as a whole is the big picture seen by our leadership. This is uncomfortable for me. I don’t feel safe to voice how I feel about pretty much any issue because some faculty are so vocal with their views that it is an exhausting prospect to challenge them or puts me in a vulnerable position to disagree.”*

## 10. Missing in Action: Forgiveness, Generosity and Compassion

- *“There are folks who are still angry about those things and can’t let it go.”*
- *“I’m worried about the relationship between the faculty and the president—resistance about changes. I think [REDACTED] isn’t perfect and people can develop resentments.”*
- *“Weakness: the way they (leadership) have interacted with faculty in the decision-making process. I’ve heard people say that an apology would go a long way.”*
- *“The calendar change was a REALLY big deal, some people still bring it up in meetings. ‘We should have been consulted. should have been consensus.’ Two years ago we were challenged to come up with something, after a year we couldn’t reach consensus. In Fall of ‘17 President proposed calendar change and in January it was happening even though faculty said, ‘no, we don’t want to do that.’”*
- *“Seems to me that the people that care the most, that are the most committed, are the most angry over time.”*
- *“I think 2019 might be a bit of a shit show. Like when you clean your house, sometimes it’s worse before it gets better.”*
- *“There is a continuing lack of trust among everyone that makes even the smallest of initiatives suspicious.”*
- *“People here just aren’t nice to each other. They aren’t willing to listen to what their co-workers have to say unless they’re all in 100 percent agreement with one another.”*

## 11. Consensus vs. Effective Decision-Making: Is It Possible To Have Both?

- *“Decisions are made absent of conversations that would help shape it. Everyone has value and has the right to be heard.”*
- *“Some would say that our decision-making process of Consensus is flawed. But it is cooped and bastardized as a concept. True consensus is not what we have made it. At Tranquility, people find a sense of power in being able to block a decision. Or they will accuse [REDACTED] of being authoritative because [REDACTED] didn’t consult everyone.”*
- *“Because of the need to come to consensus it is easy to stall out in a tough conversation. You can get really interesting debate but need to get a solution. I don’t see some conversations go anywhere because of that. Sometimes you have to put tradition aside to make progress.”*
- *“Our consensus making system that we say we apply is misapplied. It is usually who speaks the loudest and the last.”*
- *“A minority group of faculty that uses [REDACTED] to frustrate the majority and impose their will on the majority.”*
- *“Lack of trust, particularly between the faculty and administration, resulting largely from poor decisions that are announced with no groundwork (such as the proposed parking fees and the decision to lay off the housekeeping staff) that bypass our decision-making structure and violate the spirit of [REDACTED]. When we don’t act together as a body, these violations of our core values make the faculty feel like they can’t trust the administration, and this leads to a plummeting of morale, which makes us less likely to go above and beyond to make this place amazing.”*
- *“A lot of sabotage. Undermining from students and faculty who think of themselves as community organizers but who do not build relationships or connections to folks who have the power to change things.”*
- *“Trying to please everyone and therefor pleasing no one.”*

- *“Prioritization of the individual over the collective. Some think [REDACTED] is pushing back against power. It is easier to protest or get mad than it is to sit down and create a solution together.”*
- *“Unfortunately, we have been confronted, as faculty, with governance that has been perceived as mostly top-down and fraught with lack of clarity and transparency. Far too often ‘things happen’, out of the blue, with little to no communication with the community. Let me be clear: I totally understand that problems need to be addressed as Tranquility College is indeed a business and we need to stay solvent. However, silly things have happened (like the proposed parking fees), along with terribly unjust things (treatment of the house-keeping staff) that could have been avoided IF COMMUNICATION would have happened...The new [REDACTED] calendar was mandated upon us with an incredible lack of rationale and data to support this.”*

## **12. Innovation and Tradition?**

- *“Our greatest assets has become our greatest obstacle. We use [REDACTED] to shut things down rather than for generative growth and imagination.”*
- *“Those of us who have been here for a while tend to resist change, as we think things have always been just fine just as they were, and things will continue to be fine. It is my hope to embrace change and to be a part of the improved Tranquility as we welcome a new generation of students who find their way here.”*
- *“Also, a perception by many faculty and alums that the administration, all but one member new to the college, does not understand the importance and value of some of the college’s cherished traditions, and as a result, are not adequately sustaining them during this process of innovation.”*
- *“Always been excited by change and making a difference. To really engage in thinking about things in a new way. Different ways of communicating and looking at how we do things.”*
- *“We have totally lost connection with what made us unique—relationships, community, [REDACTED], etc. Change is necessary to grow. Tranquility needed change. We all know that, however it does not mean that you have to change everything about a place. This administration has chosen to ‘throw the baby out with the bathwater’ without even trying to understand the why or how of the place.”*
- *“I feel both the anxiety and frustrations coming up as well as a weird sense of optimism. I have hope that we can do this and I look forward to a day when things really are renewed.”*
- *“I love teaching here and am very committed to the success of the college. I’m somewhat worried about sustaining [REDACTED] through this process of change, and about preserving the unique culture of the college.”*
- *“Change is inevitable, whether we choose to embrace it or not, as the generation that attends college now wants different things than the students that have come through in the past. If we don’t keep up with the changes in this constantly revolving age of electronics and instant access, we may lose students who feel we are too old-fashioned and out of touch with the rest of the world.”*

### 13. And YET...I LOVE This Place

- *“People LOVE this place. We’re unique and have been a strong community, whether students, faculty/staff or otherwise. It literally is a place that ‘changes live’ no matter your affiliation. People are critical because they believe in Tranquility and want to see us shine.”*
- *“I love this place. I have the best job in the world.”*
- *“I think it’s our legacy and we should take time to know the history of Tranquility. We have ‘traditions’. We could construct some new traditions. Perhaps the Tranquility Edge might produce new traditions. A lot of our students would say we don’t live [REDACTED].”*
- *“Our history and [REDACTED] are also important. This is a true community, which holds a set of powerful ideals at its center. We are unique because there is not [REDACTED]; social-justice oriented college [REDACTED]. Students come here to be in close community with other students and faculty who hold the college accountable to its founding ideals.”*
- *“People are loyal to Tranquility and that makes it easy to come together and see the possibilities. I wouldn’t stay here if there were limits to what I can see for my department.”*
- *“A long history of a lot of people caring and committed to the institution. We’ve been through difficult times, there is a culture of defining our identity as an underdog, something kind of unique and special.”*
- *“The commitment of the people that work here, in general people put the good of the school before their own. The people that are here are here because they want to be not because they have to be.”*
- *“People want to work together, and we have been constrained in doing that; potential to be a wonderfully collaborative environment.”*

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## APPENDIX II: THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

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1. What words would you use to describe the culture at Tranquility College?
2. What has made Tranquility College a success to date?
3. What most hinders the success of Tranquility College?
4. What gets in the way of you personally making your maximum contribution to Tranquility College success?
5. What most supports you in fulfilling on your accountabilities?
6. Re: the future at Tranquility College: about what are you optimistic/excited about?
7. Re: the future at Tranquility College: about what are you pessimistic/concerned about?
8. What opportunities is Tranquility College missing?
9. What is the most satisfying aspect of working at Tranquility College?
10. What do you have to put up with to work at Tranquility College?
11. If no significant changes are made, what would you predict over the next 3-5 years for the college?
12. Describe the quality of leadership at Tranquility College? Strengths and weaknesses?
13. On a scale of 1-10 How would you rate the relationship between the faculty and the staff? Why did you give this rating?
14. On a scale of 1-10 How would you rate the level of communication at Tranquility College? why ?
15. Regarding the Tranquility Edge:
  - a. Teaming for Success,
  - b. Learning Collaboratively,
  - c. Rallying Campus Spirit
  - d. Incorporating Ethical Leadership
16. What is working well? What is not working well? What will most support success moving forward?
17. What supports innovation at Tranquility? What gets in the way of innovation?
18. How would you rate how well people's thinking, behavior and actions are aligned with Tranquility's [REDACTED] core values? What works? Doesn't work?
19. Please describe how the college's [REDACTED] impacts the culture at Tranquility?
20. If we asked the students, "what is one change that would make the biggest difference to your experience at Tranquility?", what do you suppose they would say?
21. Anything else you want to tell us or think we should know about Tranquility.