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The Impact of Prior Communication About Organizational Turbulence On Members' Perceptions During Institutional Change

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The Impact of Prior Communication About Organizational Turbulence on Members' Perceptions
During Institutional Change

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THE IMPACT OF PRIOR COMMUNICATION ABOUT ORGANIZATIONAL
TURBULENCE ON MEMBERS' PERCEPTIONS DURING INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE

ABSTRACT

In this qualitative study, the researcher explored the perceptions of select faculty who were experiencing their university's sale of their college to another academic entity, and to whom accurate levels organizational turbulence might not have been fully communicated prior to significant institutional change. Communicating levels of organizational turbulence is an important factor, and it is a necessary first step in transformational change. Members' prior perceptions of organizational turbulence could affect their willingness to accept and progress through a substantive change plan. In this study, the researcher used turbulence theory as a conceptual framework to explore the level of foreknowledge of select faculty stakeholders at a college whose university was in the process of a significant change plan. The researcher used semi-structured, one-on-one interviews with 10 faculty stakeholders who were employed by the college. The study's results indicated that 1) faculty stakeholders were largely unaware of the high level of turbulence the university was experiencing prior to the announcement of what was ultimately a sizable change plan; 2) emotional change responses of faculty participants ranged from disappointment, sadness, and hurt, to anger and rage; and 3) the participants viewed university administrators as lacking transparency during the change. These results significantly aligned with literature on change and emotional change responses.

Keywords: organizational change, organizational turbulence, disturbance, urgency

University of New England

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

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DEDICATION

For my family in heaven:

Daddy – James Thomas, Sr.

Mommy – Mary Thomas

Sister – Alexis M. Thomas Walker

I hope I make you proud.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The reluctance of leaders to communicate a sense of organizational urgency or disturbance to members prior to instituting a change plan can lead to significantly negative and sometimes disruptive circumstances (Kotter, 2012). Moving ahead to change organizations without first communicating a high enough sense of urgency to managers and employees is a substantial error that many organizations make (Kotter, 2012). Organizational urgency or disturbance (i.e., circumstances that can disrupt the organizational status quo; Kotter, 2012) can be precipitated by internal factors such as overconfidence in the organization's product (Shirley, 2011). External forces (e.g., a national economic downturn) can also be at play. Chabotar (2010) asserted that the Great Recession of 2007–2009 was not only a factor in the status of American businesses and industries, but that it also had great impact on higher education in the United States, citing decreased enrollment, increased need to provide student financial aid, endowment losses, and growing deficits as negative forces pressured institutions to engage in change approaches in an effort to improve future institutional outlook. Some institutional changes involved adding online programs (Cunningham, Eddy, Pagano, & Ncube, 2011) or entering into international partnerships (Gieser, 2016). More seriously challenged cases resulted in the merging of institutions, the acquisition of one institution by another, or (in even more severe circumstances) the outright closure of an institution (McBain, 2012). Although extreme, Christiansen's prediction that, without significant change, half of American small colleges and universities would face closure by 2020 nevertheless sounded an urgent alarm, alerting the field

about potential ramifications of the pressures confronting higher education today, and the need for institutions to change practices (Christiansen & Horn, 2013).

Kotter (2012) argued that more than the urgency itself was the lack of communication of urgency, disturbance, or what Gross (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) described as organizational turbulence that could lead to difficulty with members. As a result, members to whom organizational turbulence was not previously communicated could experience feelings of shock and loss when they realize that circumstances have led to significant change that would directly affect them. Guidry, Simpson, Test, and Bloomfield (2013) referred to this situation as ambiguous loss, and they stated that loss could be a tangible person or object, or an intangible relationship, experience, or event.

Prior to 1992, Sonata College of Music (a pseudonym) was a small, independent, and highly regarded college of music that had been founded in the northeastern United States in 1926. Its musical and educational focus, although exceedingly specialized, was well known for producing high-caliber musicians. At the same time, Renfield College (a pseudonym), founded in 1860, was a medium-sized, private, liberal arts institution that was 10 miles north of Sonata, and its leadership was seeking to expand its reach and to establish itself with additional programs in its quest to attain state-sanctioned university status. Sonata was facing the very real prospect of having to close its doors after years of financial trouble and fundraising efforts that proved insufficient. Renfield expressed an interest in acquiring Sonata, and the two began an affiliation in 1991 that led to a merger in 1992, with Sonata joining Renfield as its fourth entity, Sonata College of Music of Renfield College.

From the beginning, the merger was unsteady. Renfield, which became a university in 1994, had difficulty negotiating the cultural shift that its new, two-campus model created.

According to Marion and Gonzales (2014), leaders bear the responsibility of affirming the culture of an organization by articulating its philosophy, values, and mission, representing it to the community, and defending it against challenges. In this case, Renfield had little understanding of Sonata's unique identity or its stature in the arts arena. Further, the university underestimated the inherent costs associated with operating music programs. For its part, Sonata chafed under the control of a larger university, having always been independent, and at first resisted Renfield's reasonable attempts to move it toward more stable collegiate governance. Meanwhile, as the Great Recession affected the university, enrollment peaked in 2006, and was followed by relentless declines over subsequent recruitment cycles, adversely affecting the institution's financial stability.

In 2008, the university commissioned an impact study from a prominent external consulting firm to consider consolidation of the two campuses by moving Sonata's operations to Renfield's main campus. Rather than endorsing consolidation, the result was a recommendation for broader commitment to arts programs, building on Sonata's enduring excellent reputation. Sonata tended to reach its enrollment goals during years that the wider university did not; therefore, the trustees thought that expanding arts programs to both campuses would attract more students not only in the arts, but also to other university programs. Thus, the Sonata College of the Arts was established in the fall of 2009. The restructured entity joined the music college's programs in music education, voice, and piano with existing Renfield campus arts programs in dance and theater, while adding two new Renfield campus-based programs in music theater, and arts administration.

By 2016, when enrollment in many of the arts programs had increased, but other university liberal arts programs continued to decline, Renfield again re-examined the two-

campus model. Initially, Renfield considered once again the plan of relocating Sonata's programs to its main campus; however, the university ultimately determined that transplanting complex music curricula and facilities was not financially or logistically feasible. It was announced that it would instead separate from Sonata, and sell Sonata's campus, academic programs, and service operations to another academic partner, in hopes that both entities would emerge more financially stable.

In each of these instances, the reaction of faculty, staff, and students was one of surprise. To everyone other than upper-level administrators, the moves were unexpected. Clearly, there had been signs of financial difficulty (e.g., a wage freeze on staff and middle-level administrators) and increased scrutiny before allowing the rehiring of vacated positions. During these times, lead administrators resisted the use of terms such as "lay-off" or "closure." Instead, through various forums, including ongoing university-wide town meetings and updates, the university communicated that financial decisions were under control, and plans were underway to address pressing concerns. This approach resulted in a sense of complacency among university employees that later led to shock, a deep sense of loss, and ultimately great resistance when hard decisions gave rise to significant change. Kotter (2012) asserted that, when complacency is high, workers tend to want the status quo to continue and that they resist new initiatives from administrators. Sonata's employees were steeped in complacency until the sale plan was announced. Initial shock then gave way to pervasive feelings of loss among Sonata's faculty and staff. The university's leadership did not consult with stakeholders (e.g., faculty, staff, students, parents, or alumni) before crafting or announcing their plan, and stakeholders were stunned by the news for several reasons. First, although the financial challenges facing the University were well known, the severe level of turbulence as it related to Renfield's economic position had not

been widely communicated to the campus community. Gross (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) outlined four levels organizational turbulence on his Turbulence Gauge: light, associated with ongoing issues with little or no disruption; moderate, associated with widespread awareness of an issue; severe, associated with fear for the entire enterprise, and a feeling of crisis; and extreme, associated with structural damage occurring to the institution's normal operations. In Sonata's case, stakeholders were not fully informed of the extent of the institution's fiscal difficulties, or that a change of this magnitude might be on the horizon. They were taken by surprise when it was explicitly explained to them that the identification of the new partner would proceed with the participation of only the university's Board of Trustees and upper administration, Sonata's dean, and associate dean. Moreover, these proceedings would be held in secret, and the name of the new partner would only be disclosed to the Renfield-Sonata community after an initial nonbinding acquisition document had been signed. The initial news, combined with the knowledge that they would have no real input in the ultimate direction of the college, made some stakeholder groups, particularly faculty, extremely uneasy and mistrustful of the university's motives, left them with a feeling that the college was now in crisis mode, and was experiencing severe turbulence. For their part, the university's consultant had advised the administrators that, for a successful transfer to occur, initial partner identification and early negotiations should remain confidential until the completion of the nonbinding document. This explanation did little to assuage growing feelings of fear and apprehension in the college's stakeholders.

After a 3 month search, the educational wing of an international company was identified as the new potential partner for Sonata, a binding term sheet was signed, and negotiations began for the partner to operate as a nonprofit organization in the state where Sonata is located. A final

transfer contract, turning Sonata's ownership over to its new partner was due to be signed by mid-2019. The contract maintains present academic programs, services, and personnel on Sonata's campus.

Statement of Problem

For transformational change to occur, a leader must be able to communicate to his or her members a shared vision for where the organization can go (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). The leader also must recognize that communicating a sense of organizational turbulence when necessary can directly affect members' feelings of loss and their readiness for transitioning through change (Stein, 2009).

Resistance to change can manifest in a number of ways. Leaders can inadvertently reinforce the status quo through their actions (Kotter, 2012). Resistance can also be defined as the degree to which organizational members are reluctant to do anything new (Caruth & Caruth, 2013). Grant's (2003) position was that, when change is necessary, any resistance by the organization must be addressed. Grant identified Perkins and Wilson's (2000 as cited in Grant, 2003) description of stirring the swamp as a way of persuading academic staff to begin the conversation and to think about the process. Gearin (2017) posited that resistance is the result of members encountering the unknown, and that it is complicated by change leaders who offer unsatisfactory explanations for the need for change. In a quantitative study to explore the influence of context on resistance to organizational change within a virtual faculty workforce, Starnes (2016) found no significant relationship between factors such as trust, frequency of change, and history of change on faculty resistance to change.

In both re-examinations of its two campus model, Renfield University embarked upon significant change, but with little communication to its middle managers, faculty, and staff of the

full extent of the financial challenges that precipitated it. Sonata College of Music appeared not to be prepared for the change that came its way, leading to members expressing an intense sense of loss and resistance to the change itself. Sonata's faculty in particular maintained a long-held deep emotional connection to the school that dates back decades. Their virtual familial concern for Sonata's future appeared deeply personal, which led to a vigorous backlash that stemmed from an expressed profound sense of loss at what they feared would be the death of the institution as they knew it. This, in turn, led to questions surrounding what they expressed as a lack of forewarning about the institution's fiscal condition, and the fact that those financial challenges might lead to considerable change. Kubler-Ross and Kessler (2014) explored loss through Kubler-Ross' grief model that included five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Although these stages are often used to describe one's reckoning with one's own death, the authors outlined how the stages can also clarify other feelings of loss (e.g., of family members or of a tradition). The model has also been applied to losses such as an athlete's loss of career because of injury (Tarkan, 2000) or to the death of an organization (Arman, 2014). Arman's (2014) study of worker reactions to their factory closing found that workers described the closing using three death metaphors: (a) deliberate murder by factory owners; (b) sacrificial death, i.e., the surrendering of a part to save the whole; and (c) palliative death, the natural circumstance of an unsustainable condition. The faculty members at Sonata are acutely connected to the institution; therefore, their surprise and shock (having not been alerted to the gravity of the university's financial situation) and the subsequent advent of organizational turbulence prior to its change plan manifested in feelings of loss and grief that appeared similar to the applications of the Kubler-Ross grief model (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2004). This situation triggered questions about the perceived lack of forewarning that major institutional change was

coming. Therefore, the problem that this researcher has studied is the impact of uncommunicated, organizational turbulence on the perceptions of faculty stakeholders at Sonata College of Music during significant change.

Purpose of Study

In this context, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of members of select faculty at Sonata College of Music to whom organizational turbulence might not have been fully communicated during significant institutional change.

Research Question

The central research question for this study is: How do select faculty stakeholders at Sonata College of Music describe their perceptions of the levels of turbulence that occurred prior to significant institutional change?

Conceptual Framework

In this study, the researcher approached through the lens of Gross' (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) turbulence theory to explore administrator communication and faculty stakeholder perception of organizational disturbance preceding change, for Gross emphasized in the theory the acknowledgement of varying levels of turbulence within organizations, and advanced a gauge that clearly communicates levels to members. The Turbulence Theory Gauge consists of four descriptive levels: (a) light, subtle signs of stress; (b) moderate, widespread awareness of an issue; (c) severe, fear for the entire enterprise, and a feeling of crisis; and (d) extreme, structural damage occurring to the institution's normal operations (see Appendix A). Turbulence can be considered negative, but Gross posited in the theory that turbulence could be positive to an organization, adding to the creativity and innovation of its leaders and members. However, Gross also advocated in the theory for the correct gauging of the level of

organizational turbulence, and clear communication of it to members. In the turbulence theory, Gross further sought to describe the outside forces that could result in levels of turbulence within an organization. Gross asserted that three elements are involved: (a) positionality, the position of an individual relative the source of turbulence; (b) cascading, the outside forces that contribute to turbulence level; and (c) stability, the degree to which an organization can withstand the dynamic forces confronting it.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

Assumptions

In this study, the researcher made four basic assumptions. Assumption 1 was that faculty at Sonata maintain a strong culture, connection to the institution, and investment in the institution. These factors have been demonstrated by their high regard for the history and traditions of the college, their dedication to the mission on which the college was founded, and their profound commitment to passing these tenets along to their students through teaching.

Assumption 2 was that faculty members are concerned about the sale and the future of the institution. This concern for the future of Sonata was demonstrated by the sense of alarm that the faculty members exhibited at the news of its sale, and their fear that the college that they know and love would change irrevocably. Moreover, at a more basic level, this change would affect their present employment. For many faculty members, their connection to the institution reflects decades-long careers at the college.

Assumption 3 was that some faculty members might be aware of various levels of turbulence as they experience the change plan, while others might not have been aware of the difficulties facing the institution or the impending sale.

Assumption 4 was that faculty would respond honestly to the interviewer's questions. As a member of the organization, the researcher had some inherent biases because of the investment in the organization. However, the researcher was able to set aside personal biases and concerns to conduct an objective study.

Limitations

Limitation 1 for this study was researcher bias, for the researcher's lens is that of one who also experienced these change events with great interest. Therefore, it was important that the researcher to remain objective and open throughout the study, particularly through the collection of interview data. As Moustakas (1994) contended regarding conducting a phenomenological study, the research question emerges as the result of intense interest, excitement, and curiosity about the problem or topic, as has been the circumstance for this researcher. Deep curiosity about the dynamics of the sale was the driving force behind this inquiry. However, of objectivity in phenomenological research, Creswell and Poth (2018) cautioned that it is important for the researcher to address the impact of related experiences, observing that phenomenological research requires the researcher to bracket (i.e., separate from) his or her own experiences and biases. Although this was a qualitative study, rather than a phenomenological investigation, attention to objectivity (whether through efforts similar to bracketing, or through marked researcher discipline) must take considerable priority to avoid researcher bias. Researcher bias can be defined as any predisposition that affects non-prejudicial consideration of a question or problem, and it can occur at any research stage: study design, data collection and analysis, or publication (Panucci & Wilkins, 2010).

Thus, the primary researcher concern for this study involved interviewer bias, which Panucci and Wilkins (2010) suggested could be avoided by standardizing the interviewer's

interaction with the participant, perhaps through the use of a pilot study. Chenail (2011) discussed the advantages and disadvantages of pilot studies in reducing bias, pointing out that, although a pilot study's trial run at research and at interview protocol might provide the opportunity for the questions to be asked as they would be in the actual study, and although it helps the interviewer discard questions that are proven to be ambiguous, difficult, or unnecessary, disadvantages lie in its impracticality when data from a limited participant pool is used for the pilot rather than for the study itself, or when valuable time is expended to test underdeveloped questions. This question of whether to use a pilot study was of substantial concern to the researcher. The study site's pool of potential participants was small, and a pilot study would have reduced the chances that willing participants who could provide rich data would continue to be available for the actual study. As an alternative, the researcher employed a method that Chenail (2011) outlined, that the investigator be interviewed to reduce interviewer bias. In this approach, the researcher enlists a colleague to conduct an interview with the researcher in the role of the interviewee, including simulating the signing of an informed consent document. Alternatively, the investigator could also play the role of both the interviewer and interviewee. In both scenarios, the interview is recorded, and repeated replaying of the interview provides the researcher with information that can highlight possible biases, and improve the overall interview instrument.

Limitation 2 was that the study's single-site nature might not lead to conclusions that would be generalizable to other colleges and universities in similar circumstances.

Limitation 3 was that the study occurred in what the researcher calls delayed real time, i.e., interview participants were asked to relate experiences beginning from several months earlier throughout events as they were still occurring.

Scope

The data were collected from a single site; therefore, the researcher projected that 8–10 faculty stakeholders would comprise the sample for one-on-one interviews. These interviews provided ample, rich data that resulted in emerging themes of the perceptions of the participants. The scope of the study was limited to the data that could be gathered from interviews with this small pool of participants.

Significance

Researchers have concluded that the need to communicate disturbance or turbulence to an organization is a necessary precursor to or initial phase of organizational change (Kotter, 2012). In an overview of change plan approaches, Lunenburg (2010) compared several approaches, including Lewin's (1951, as cited in Lunenburg, 2010) three-step change model. The first step of the model is called unfreezing, which can be accomplished by pointing out inadequacies within the organization's current operations or by reducing the importance of current attitudes and behaviors. Unfreezing uncovers areas of concern that could alert stakeholders to the presence of organizational disturbance. Although Lunenburg (2010) conceded that unfreezing could occur as a result of a crisis already in progress, the author also acknowledged that under Lewin's (1951, as cited in Lunenburg, 2010) model, other factors might also prove informative. Data sources (e.g., climate surveys, financial indicators, and enrollment projections) could point to problems prior to crises. Lunenburg (2010) also outlined Fullan's (2011, as cited in Lunenburg, 2010) change model that cast disturbance as the need for learning and understanding. Fullan (as cited in Lunenburg, 2010) stressed that an organization must have an understanding of the need for change before moving forward to change, and that learning is a mandated part of any change plan.

Building on Lewin's (1951, as cited in Lunenburg, 2010) model, Kotter's (2012) eight-step change plan included the first step of establishing a sense of urgency, which Kotter contended was vital in gaining needed cooperation among organizational members. Kotter contended that not addressing this first step could lead to member complacency, rendering members uninterested in change and making transformations impossible.

Common among these approaches is the need to communicate a sense of organizational disturbance or turbulence before the change or as a first step to meaningful change. The level of turbulence that Renfield University administrators communicated to members was likely not high enough to avert the faculty shock, loss, and ultimate resistance to the organizational change that followed the realization that present circumstances were ending. Bridges and Bridges (2016) wrote of the various emotional states that accompany such endings, including disengagement, disenchantment, and disorientation. Exploring the perspectives of faculty stakeholders' awareness of organizational turbulence throughout this change process was at the center of this study.

Definition of Terms

Organizational change. This change is a process by which a flawed organization moves through a transitional stage and emerges enriched (Zell, 2003).

Organizational stakeholders. These individuals have a stake in a project's outcome. They might be employees, customers, or managers whose work or results will be affected by the project (Weis, as cited in Gallos, 2006).

Organizational turbulence. This turbulence is a disturbance or volatility that exists in an organization and, depending on its extent, might disrupt organizational operations (Gross, 2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013).

Sense of urgency and disturbance. This sense is a disruption of organizational status quo (Kotter, 2012).

Grief stages. These stages are part of a model that depicts the grieving process as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2004).

Private, liberal arts education and institutions. Liberal arts education is the oldest form of higher education, which teaches students how to think and learn by focusing on analytical skills more than on content mastery (Hilbun & Mamiseishvili, 2015).

Great recession. This recession occurred between 2007 and 2009 when the American economy experienced a significant downturn that affected many small and large businesses, banks, and corporations (Hilbun & Mamiseishvili, 2015).

Conclusion

Communicating turbulence, urgency, or the existence of disturbance to an organization is an important factor and a necessary first step to transformational change. The example of Renfield University highlights the sense of loss that can occur among employees if significant change is instituted without first communicating the presence of organizational turbulence. Caruth and Caruth (2013), Kotter (2012), Grant (2003), and Gross (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) all point to the necessity of communicating disturbance prior undertaking change. Research has supported the understanding of the steps necessary to ensure that change efforts result in lasting impact (Lunenburg, 2010). Additionally, when change leaders overlook communicating turbulence, they may be faced with employees whose transition is more complicated than their own, affecting the change that they would be attempting to accomplish (Bridges & Bridges, 2016).

In this study, the researcher has aimed to add to that understanding by providing administrators with information regarding the communication of turbulence, and its impact on stakeholder perspectives during change. The researcher has explored the perspectives of faculty at Sonata College of Music during a significant change event. Chapter 2 of the study provides a synthesis of existing literature surrounding the state of private liberal arts colleges and universities in the United States, the reasons for the acute financial difficulties that some universities are confronting, and their diverse change responses. In Chapter 3, the researcher outlines the study's methodology, site, and research sample. In Chapter 4, the researcher discusses the results. In Chapter 5, the researcher summarizes the study, discusses limitations, and makes recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review synthesizes existing literature that is related to (a) change at many American colleges and universities, (b) the external pressures that lead to change, (c) communication of those pressures to organizational members and stakeholders, (d) the change typology ultimately adopted, and (e) the effects of the change on the emotional responses of members. Organizational transformation requires that a leader has the ability to assist his or her stakeholders in envisioning a new direction for the organization (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). The leader also must recognize that communicating organizational pressures when necessary, can directly affect an organization's readiness for change. An in-depth survey of literature, through which the researcher examined higher education institutions and their leaders' motivations for initiating change, is followed by an exploration of the dynamics of the perspectives and emotional responses of stakeholders to change plans, using the conceptual lens of turbulence theory (Gross, 2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013).

For the purposes of this review, several integrated categories of literature were explored. For the category of change at American colleges and universities, the following areas of literature were reviewed: (a) the state of liberal arts education, (b) colleges and universities making successful turnarounds, and (c) institutional partnerships. Under the category of motivators driving change, the literature included (a) exploration of the American financial crisis of 2007–2009, (b) the housing crisis of the Great Recession, and (c) college and university responses to the financial crisis. Regarding the emotional responses of organizational members to change, the literature included an exploration of (a) the measurement of organizational

turbulence and urgency, (b) the dynamics of feelings of loss among organizational stakeholders, and (c) the progression through stages of transition. Additionally, key words were used in search of literature. Some were used in combination and others singularly. The key terms included private liberal arts institutions, higher education, organizational change, institutional change, loss, feelings of loss, transition, Great Recession, financial crisis, housing crisis, merger and acquisition, and college and university closings. The databases used in the literature search for this review included Academic Search Complete, ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis Global, ProQuest Journals, ERIC, and Google. With limited exceptions, all of the literature was dated within the last 10 years.

The Present State of American Colleges and Universities

The state and stability of colleges and universities in the United States continues to be matter of great concern throughout the last decade. Declining enrollments, rising costs, deficit annual budgets, vulnerable endowments, and growing debt have created challenges that threaten the very sustainability of many institutions (Supplee, 2014; McBain, 2012). Those colleges affected, many of which are private and tuition-driven, have begun to use a number of approaches to stem the negative tide and to initiate a financial turnaround (Carey, 2014). Their attempts include creating digital entities (Cunningham et al., 2011) to establishing international partnerships (Gieser, 2016). Adding further strain to already stressed institutions, the Great Recession of 2007–2009 contributed to a trend toward institutional mergers, the selling of assets, and college and university closures, affecting countless faculty members, staff, and students (McBain, 2012; Seltzer, 2017). Simply put, higher education institutions in the 21st century are facing challenges which compel them to initiate change plans that ultimately affect not only their structure, but the members within the structure (Chabotar, 2010; Hay & Fourie, 2002).

The goal of this literature review is threefold: first, to examine the present state of private colleges and universities that are experiencing challenges that lead them to consider significant organizational change; second, to highlight various change approaches institutions have initiated to improve their condition; and third, to look closely at the emotional responses of employee stakeholder groups to the change plans undertaken by their institutions. Although studies on institutional change and on emotional responses to change are prevalent, those that examine member change response in higher education institutions (i.e., what this researcher seeks to accomplish in this study) are yet needed. It is important for changing institutions to gain insight into how attention to the emotional responses and perspectives of employees can affect achieving successful change (Stein, 2009).

Challenges in Higher Education

Breneman (1990) examined the condition of private colleges and universities in the United States. Breneman based the study on what was then seen as a trend of liberal arts colleges moving away from the classic simple pursuit of knowledge and toward professional career preparation. Breneman (1990, as cited in Baker, Baldwin, & Makker, 2012) concluded that the trend, which had begun around 1970, would continue. In a replication of Breneman's (1990) study, Baker et al. (2012) found that the trend was in fact continuing, and that change attempts to address it (successful and unsuccessful) resulted in the closure of some liberal arts institutions and the reorientation of others. Colleges changing their identities and the way they do business is becoming more commonplace, with private colleges feeling pressure to compete with their bigger, more comprehensive counterparts, forsaking traditional liberal arts education (Baker et al., 2012).

Some colleges have changed their missions altogether. Jaquette (2012) spoke of this trend as mission drift, where liberal arts institutions reclassify themselves as universities, adopting a more comprehensive model to increase enrollment, and thus more successfully compete in what is referred to as the enrollment economy. The study concluded that many colleges make this transition to increase and diversify their enrollment, while others do so after a period of enrollment growth to solidify their new brand. The study also found that colleges became universities after curricular changes that branded them as a more comprehensive institution rather than their previous status as a liberal arts entity, and tended to do so once their competition in the enrollment economy also made the change (Jaquette, 2012).

Common among these studies is the notion that private colleges and universities initiate change in reaction to the unique challenges they experience, chief among them enrollment decline and fiscal adversity. In a higher education environment where private colleges are tuition driven, declines in enrollment have a direct impact on fiscal health. Biemiller (2015) pointed out that even in the broad aftermath of the 2009 recession, stagnant wages, talk of work-force needs, and reduced confidence in the importance of a liberal arts education, indicated that small institutions are now operating in a marketplace that is very different from the one they experienced just 10 years earlier. Wootton (2016) pointed to poor leadership by boards of trustees as the primary reason that small colleges experience significant challenges and sometimes face closure. Wootton maintained that threats to small colleges do not emerge suddenly. It is the lack of vision, leadership, and independence of boards years in advance that ultimately lead to crisis and closure. An example of an institution attempting to heed Wootton's (2016) admonition is Hampshire College. A small liberal arts institution, Hampshire, despite its balanced budget and modest yet well performing endowment, is currently seeking to merge with

another academic partner in what the its president describes as a preemptive move. The college's board of trustees has identified this approach as the best way to ward off future threats from anticipated demographic changes, and decreased availability of likely students (Glaun, 2019).

Multiple researchers proffer reasons for the circumstances that small colleges face. Halupa (2016) pointed to the limited funding and staff of private institutions balanced against their higher tuition in the current marketplace. Valle (2016), in an examination of challenges facing higher education business schools, cited a decline in the interest of colleges to attract meaningful faculty research, therefore attracting fewer students to the institution. Lovenheim and Reynolds (2012), in a unique study, pointed to the effect housing wealth had on college choice before the 2008 housing crisis; they ultimately concluded that students whose parents own homes that increase in value in the 4 years prior to college tend to choose higher quality institutions. Although the study proved the difference to be minimal, the implication is that these higher quality institutions go on to be higher enrolled as well.

The Great Recession's Impact on Higher Education in the United States

In the same vein as Lovenheim et al. (2012), significant literature yet pointed to the Great Recession of 2007–2009 as a critical external pressure on private colleges and universities, acting as a leading driver of change (Hilbun & Mamiseishvili, 2015). The Federal Reserve Bank characterized the Great Recession of 2007–2009 as the longest since World War II, and one that was more severe in its plunging gross domestic product, which fell 4.3%, and its unemployment rate, which topped 10% in October 2009. Additionally, home prices fell an average of 30% from their peak in 2006 (Rich, 2013).

Private colleges and universities did not escape the effects of the Great Recession. Chabotar (2010) outlined several ways in which the Recession led to economic hardship on

private, particularly smaller institutions. In addition to declining enrollment, he cited the pressure for colleges to provide increasing financial aid to students, losses to institutional endowments, deteriorating debt markets, growing deficits, and ballooning tuition discount rates. Although calling attention to many of the same challenges, Toner (2013) contended that some colleges learned important lessons from the Recession, as they reinvigorated previously successful programs, and became more data-driven in developing a strategic plan. Shaw (2011), who characterized higher education financial challenges as a bursting bubble, argued that, when the housing bubble burst, consumers still wanted houses, and the adjustment that the market experienced was about price rather than demand. Conversely, in higher education, Shaw contended that a college education as a product or as a delivery of a product might no longer be something that students and their parents would be willing to pay higher prices to obtain; therefore, the challenge confronting higher education is one of a product that might be less valued and less in demand.

In today's market, many private institutions are still experiencing financial challenges. In its fifth fall survey of the financial status of private and public institutions, Ellis (2018) reported that, although no one, single storyline of the state of private institutions could be written, trends did shed light on present conditions. Between 2013 and 2017, private institutions were more apt to miss enrollment goals, lower goals in the middle of a recruitment cycle, raise discount rates year-to-year, and fall short of net revenue projections. Tuition discounting, in particular, is becoming more of a common practice in private colleges, much to the destruction of some of them, with discount rates rising 20% to as high as 58% over 2 years (Schmidt, 2017). In addition to increasing enrollment, Ellis's (2018) survey further highlighted change strategies that many institutions are implementing to address these issues. These changes include adding new

programs that are considered innovative, and increasing fiscal responsibility (e.g., more effectively managing revenue and expenses).

By-and-large, private colleges are feeling fiscal pressure. In a case study of how three liberal arts colleges adapted during the Great Recession, Hilbun and Mamiseihvilli (2015) outlined environmental, recession-induced pressures that affected the three private institutions. One pressure was a loss of fiscal flexibility and cushion that had served to make institutions more inclined to address and rectify unsustainable fiscal practices, one of the most damaging of which was borrowing from endowments to balance budget shortfalls. As a result of the recession, endowments were generally experiencing losses in accessible, spendable earnings, and borrowing against them introduced an additional burden. Two of the colleges in the study lost nearly 30% of their nine-figure endowments in just a few years. All three schools experienced a decline in enrollment, which they attributed to families that were more financially limited during bad economic times. However, each of the three institutions in the study chose different approaches to address these pressures. One used the recession as an opportunity for growth by taking what administrators saw as the balanced approach of increasing investment while being prudent about expenses. The second school took the entirely dissimilar tactic of aggressively slashing budgets, cutting more than 30 positions, including tenured faculty, and eliminating half of its majors. The third institution in the study faltered under intense economic pressures, staggering debt, and a heavily compromised endowment that dipped below \$10,000,000. The college's board of trustees ultimately sold the school to a four-entity local partnership that then gifted it to the state. Once owned by the state, the college was operated as an in-state higher education entity.

In contrast to some of the cases cited in Hilbun and Mamiseihvilli (2015), Gansemer-Topf, Downey, Thompson, and Genschel (2018) conducted a study that explored how the great recession affected spending and staffing patterns at institutions, and how that related to retention as a factor of enrollment. Looking at more than 800 public and private colleges and universities, Gansemer-Topf et al. found that institutions tended to adjust their staffing, revenue, and spending practices in reaction to external economic challenges. They further found that these adjustments helped to minimize revenue losses and increase expenditures, and that they had a positive effect on retention rates. Gansemer-Topf et al. concluded that these shifts in practice are examples of how higher education institutions can continue to thrive even when affected by economic uncertainty. In opposition, Ellis (2018) called these kinds of shifts short term solutions, and countered that the economic downturn, as experienced by American colleges and universities, will have a more long lasting effect, arguing that present economic realities have resulted in a change in the way today's students choose majors. These students, according to Ellis, are opting for more practical, career-related programs that undermine the study of the humanities, and affect disciplines that are now under-enrolled and have become more fragile.

Mergers and Acquisitions in Higher Education

Some responses to economic pressure prove more extreme than others. One option for institutions that experience some of the most severe external pressures is the merger of colleges, or the acquisition of one college or university by another. McBain (2012) observed that the trend toward mergers, which had begun as a result of the recession, was continuing to grow. McBain focused on three cases: (a) a merger of two state institutions in New Jersey, (b) a consolidation of eight colleges within the University of Georgia system into four colleges, and (c) a merger of two campus units of the University of Maryland. Of the three cases, only the University of

Georgia consolidation was successfully implemented. The merger of the two New Jersey schools was beset by political complications and community backlash, which ultimately resulted in the two schools forming a partnership among selected majors rather than a full merger, and the University of Maryland eventually abandoned the idea of a merger altogether.

As schools contemplate merging, and although the kinds of mergers differ, the reasons that institutions consider a merger as an option also vary. In a study of the motivation of institutions that enter into merger agreements, Rowley (1997) examined the mergers of 35 colleges, and the key drivers that administrators, faculty, and staff articulated as the reasons that they felt merger was necessary. The results indicated that receiving institutions identified such factors as completing a long-term vision, seeking to expand the institutional portfolio, and seeing the merged institution as a good fit. Meanwhile, the merging institutions, generally the more fiscally challenged of the two, cited issues such as survival and ending financial struggle as motivators to enter into a merger agreement.

Ashburn (2006) explored the motivation of a group of private investors who bought the assets of a small Catholic college, and turned it into a for-profit school of education. Ashburn speculated that one of the major draws for the investor group was the tiny institution's accreditation, which it was allowed to maintain in its new incarnation, leading to a discussion of the role of accreditation bodies in the purchasing of small institutions by for-profit entities (Ashburn, 2006).

Mergers might also represent a solution for smaller niche colleges such as performing arts institutions. The 2016 merger of Berklee College of Music with the Boston Conservatory of Music is an example of two struggling niche colleges, each with its own unique brand, successfully merging to become a singular institution, offering a diverse musical education

experience in classical, jazz, and pop music genres (Berklee College of Music & The Boston Conservatory at Berklee, 2016).

Institutional Closures in Higher Education

In some cases, mergers, acquisitions, or the selling of assets is not enough to rescue financially pressured institutions, and they are forced to shut down. College and university closures have become more prevalent in recent years (Seltzer, 2017). The U.S. Department of Education (2018) reported that more than 600 small colleges closed in the United States in 2017 alone. Berman (2017) pointed to the financial crisis as the precipitating factor, citing a Moody's Investors Service indicator that indicated that two thirds of its rated institutions had generated operating deficits in 2016. This rating reflects a 13% increase over a 3 year period (Berman, 2017). Berman (2017) also suggested that students and parents have become more discriminating when contemplating the price and value of a college education, thus, their choices have negatively affected smaller institutions. Figure 1 illustrates the number of college and university closures in the United States versus closures internationally between 1985 and 2015 (U.S. Department of Education, 2018).

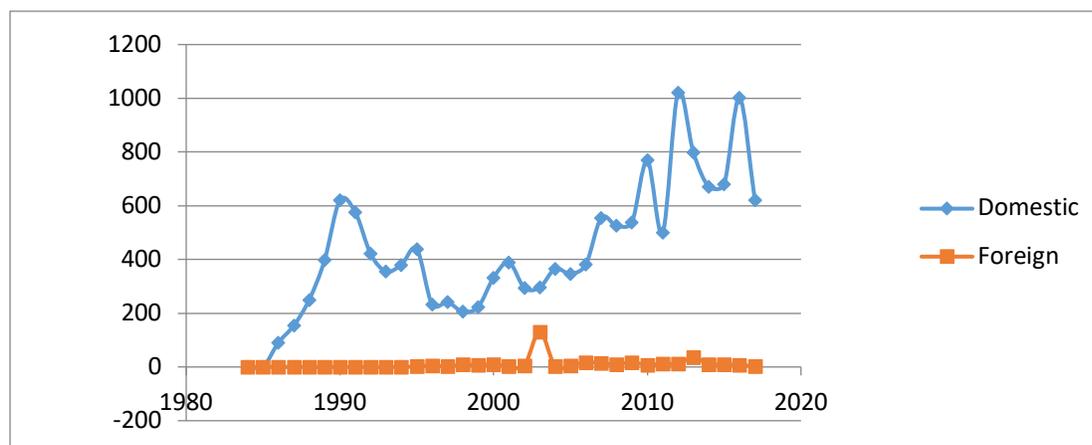


Figure 1. College Closings 1985–2015. From *Closed school search*. [data file], by U.S. Department of Education, 2018, Washington, DC: Author.

Christensen (2011, as cited in King & Baatartogtokh, 2015), whose disruptive innovation theory rose to prominence as he applied it to industries from technology to heavy construction equipment to motorcycle manufacturing, applied the theory to higher education in the United States. Christiansen's (2014, as cited in Lederman, 2017) theory is that industries are disrupted when cheaper and lesser-quality versions of its goods become more popular to the consumer, ultimately resulting in the destruction of the entire establishment unless significant change is undertaken. Christensen asserted that the threats to private institutions lie largely in competition from lower-priced community colleges, and the advent of more convenient online learning platforms. Christensen implored the industry to make the changes necessary (e.g., developing online programs) to avert danger. In a controversial statement, Christensen predicted that, without change, half of small private colleges in the United States would close by 2020. Despite widespread criticism of such a draconian prognostication, nonetheless, Christensen (2014, as cited in Lederman, 2017) has maintained that position. Although the pace of Christensen's (2014, as cited in Lederman, 2017) prediction remains under question, the issues that Christensen (2014) raised about the pressures weighing on small, private colleges and universities have been widely studied.

Institutional Reaction to Pressure and Change

As the literature articulates, American colleges and universities are experiencing external pressures, and they are reacting to them in myriad ways. The changes that institutions choose to make in response to challenges vary and are distinctive to the institution (Ivory, 2017). In the "mission drift" study, Jaquette (2012) contended that external changes directly affect internal organizational behavior, and the literature demonstrates that most of the external changes pressing on private, liberal arts institutions are similar (Supplee, 2014).

The authors in the literature also highlighted diverse approaches to the management and leadership of change as it relates to the change responses of employees. Change can take an emotional toll on organizational members, with some authors likening employee responses to that of loss and grief. Stein (2009) contended that massive organizational change elicits feelings of employee loss, grief, and mourning, but that, in most organizations, these emotions are forbidden. Stein argued that “disenfranchised grief” is largely overlooked by change agents, which results in organizational members who are stuck in inconsolable rage and hurt. In a discussion of organizational death, Bell and Taylor (2011) reviewed the movement in literature away from so-called stage models of grief and loss, where individuals are said to progress through emotional stages of loss to an end-stage where they detach from the deceased, to the continuing bonds model, which they describe as the complex ways that the living can maintain symbolic connections to the deceased, resulting in a sense of their continued presence. Bell and Taylor argued that, although practical understandings of individual loss and grief have embraced the continuing bonds model, its application in organizational death (i.e., the sense of a continued presence of the old organization) has been much slower to materialize.

Kubler-Ross Grief Construct

Larry (2017) sought to explore the experiences of organizational members’ loss and transition, looking at members’ loss feelings and progress through transition stages during major organizational change through the lens of the Kubler-Ross grief construct (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2004) and the Bridges Transition Model (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). Employees of a technology company were studied to examine their perspectives during the implementation of a major organizational change plan. The results were mixed. Although some of the study participants experienced loss feelings as represented by the five Kubler-Ross grief stages

(Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2004) of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance, others did not progress through all of the stages or experience them in any particular pattern. Zell (2003) used the Kubler-Ross lens (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2004) to explore change and resistance to change in a study of faculty in the physics department of a large public research university. First arguing for the difficulty involved in implementing change among professionals who have invested much in their training and careers, are passionate about their fields, and are entrenched in their beliefs and values, Zell (2003) outlined the qualitative study using semi-structured interviews over a 2-year period to gauge the perspectives of faculty within the department as they experienced change. Zell (2003) found that the department's faculty experienced the change roughly through the stages and sequence of the Kubler-Ross grief model (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2004), beginning with denial that the change would occur, anger at the lack of respect for physics as a discipline, bargaining in an attempt to somehow hold on to the status quo, depression as the prospect of the change began to set in, and finally, acceptance that the change would occur and they should seek to embrace it.

Bridges Transition Model

In the Bridges Transition Model, Bridges and Bridges (2016) explored the change responses of organizational members as a result of significant change. The model is comprised of three phases: loss and letting go; the neutral zone; and the new beginning. Bridges and Bridges contended that it is not change that is upsetting to individuals within an organization, but the transition that the change precipitates, and that, for successful change to occur, members must experience each phase. Further, individuals go through the phases at their own pace, and change leaders cannot prescribe, predetermine, or enforce the various paces.

Loss and letting go. Bridges and Bridges (2016) argued that, as change brings about transition, that transition must begin with organizational members letting go of what is past. Change leaders must acknowledge the loss feelings of their stakeholders in an open and empathetic manner. They must understand that the loss that their employees are feeling is the same as grief. Bridges and Bridges categorized the various emotions that employees might encounter during this phase as denial, anger, bargaining, anxiety, disorientation, and depression. Although similar to the Kubler-Ross grief construct (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2004), Bridges and Bridges (2016) viewed these areas as typical stakeholder reactions, rather than separate stages to be experienced.

Schnakenberg and Tomlinson (2016) discussed the need for transparency and trust in maintaining stakeholder relationships during change. They contended that transparency is a necessary precursor to establishing trust, and that the quality of the transparency is a factor. That is, the quality of information communicated to members in the management of transparency speaks to the extent to which an organization is trustworthy. Cunningham et al. (2011) compared and contrasted two institutional strategic planning processes that led to different iterations of the Purdue Extended Campus, the university's online learning division. Cunningham et al. recalled the first process as largely top-down, and included very little transparency or input from potential customers or other stakeholders. Ultimately, the result was deemed unsuccessful. The second process, initiated by a new university president, was broadened to include specific charges to committees, as well as SWOT analyses. Committees were comprised of faculty, staff, and administrator stakeholder groups. This resulted in a much more transparent process, and a product that all stakeholders considered successful.

The neutral zone. When organizational members and stakeholders are able to let go, according to the transition model, they are then ready to enter the neutral zone. Bridges and Bridges (2016) regarded this phase as potentially the most difficult area of transition. It can last for a relatively short period in some change scenarios; however, in cases of deep and profound change, it could last for months if not years. During the neutral zone period, some old organizational processes are left behind, while other new processes are adopted. Organizational members often feel that everything is in flux, things are up in the air, nothing is a given anymore, and anything can happen.

In contrast to the relative feeling of uncertainty that Bridges and Bridges (2016) suggested, in a study of job crafting as a reaction to organizational change, Walk and Handy (2018) maintained that employees' reactions to change are more positive when they engage in job crafting (i.e., a collaborative, bottom up redesigning of post-change job requirements). The authors concluded that job crafting improves employees' perspectives along a four response continuum: change resistance, change disengagement, change acceptance, and change proactivity.

The new beginning. Once the neutral zone phase is completed, an organization member can begin to contemplate a new direction. Bridges and Bridges (2016) maintained that the most important factors in launching the new beginning phase would be timing of the launch itself, in addition to making sure that it would include a purpose, a picture, a plan, and the opportunity for all employees to play a part. However, Bridges and Bridges cautioned change leaders not to try to force the new beginning on stakeholders prematurely. It is important that they complete working through their feelings of loss and would have let go of their grief. Furthermore, Bridges and Bridges posited that a source of imbalance could occur when change leaders and

stakeholders might appear at odds regarding when the new beginnings phase should occur. This apparent opposition could be explained, Bridges and Bridges asserted, by the fact that change leaders might have completed all three phases of transition prior to announcing the change to stakeholders. Bridges and Bridges referred to this early completion as the “marathon effect,” when premier runners begin the race long before more casual Sunday runners, whose goal is simply to finish. Often, by the time the Sunday runners (stakeholders) are getting started, the premier runners (change leaders) have nearly completed the race (i.e., all three transition stages). Bridges and Bridges warned that change leaders must be conscious of this and understand that, although their transition might be completed, stakeholders who are just confronting the change might be at an altogether different place within the transition phases.

The Urgency of Change

The authors in the literature also addressed the issues of urgency or the level of disturbance or turbulence that precedes an organizational change effort, and the effect that correctly measuring and communicating it to an organization could have on members’ change responses. Kotter (2012) viewed successful change as multilevel. Kotter’s eight-step change approach begins with a strong call for communicating a sense of urgency to members prior to beginning change. A top enrollment manager in higher education concurred, stating that communication of enrollment challenges to campus leaders and faculty is essential in maintaining transparency (Hoover, 2017). Declines in enrollment yield, the status of the typical student financial aid package, and overall year-to-year enrollment is vital information that managers must communicate to stakeholders on an ongoing basis (Hoover, 2017). In an attempt to quantify the level of pre-change urgency, Kahne (2005) developed an instrument, the Kahne Change Scale (Urgency), to measure urgency levels within an organization even prior to the

implementation of a change plan. Kahne found that the instrument was useful in measuring urgency, and could aid change leaders in communicating it prior to change. An example in which the gauging of urgency or levels of disturbance or turbulence might have been valuable was at Mount Ida College in Newton, MA, which closed in 2018. Students, faculty, and staff asserted that warning of the institution's serious financial instability was not communicated to them prior to an attempted merger with a nearby college, or before its abrupt shutdown with just two months' notice, leaving members of all three stakeholder groups largely without options, and still reeling nearly a year later (Krantz, 2018). In contrast, administrators at nearby Newbury College announced its closing months ahead of its anticipated date, although they are still exploring the possibility of establishing a partnership to strengthen its financial viability and keep its doors open. The administrators stated that they made the decision to alert stakeholders about their financial situation, so that faculty, staff, and students could make necessary decisions about their futures. Other colleges and state regulators alike expressed support for Newbury for informing stakeholders of problems before major change occurred (Seltzer, 2018).

Best Practices in Change Management

The literature is rife with studies that test practices in change management that prove successful. Four practices that stand out are (a) a dispositional approach to measuring employee reactions to change (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008), (b) motivational interviewing and its effect on readiness for change (Grimolizzi-Jensen, 2018), (c) organizational change management (OCM) practices (Lines & Smithwick, 2018), and (d) charting the perceptions young professionals during change (Lattuch & Young, 2011).

Fugate and Kinicki (2008), who contended that personal adaptability to change can be measured and predicted, conducted three independent studies to test the validity of the

Dispositional Measure of Employability, a predictor of an employee's openness to change. They studied three areas of employee adaptability: dispositional employability, positive emotions related to the change, and affective commitment to the changes. The final analyses of all three studies supported the validity of the Dispositional Measure of Employability. Grimolizzi-Jensen (2018) conducted an experiment among employees working first shift in an organization instituting substantial change that would affect all workers. Having divided the participants into experimental and control groups, Grimolizzi-Jensen used motivational interviewing with the experimental group. Motivational interviewing is an approach that change leaders can use to help members resolve their feelings of ambivalence to change, thereby increasing their change readiness. The results of the study supported the effectiveness of motivational interviewing in reducing employee ambivalence and increasing employee readiness for change. Lines and Smithwick's (2018) research questions in their national study involved the possible relationship between the use of OCM practices and the ability to adopt successful organizational change, in addition to whether companies that have adopted changes could recommend how to use OCM practices to change agents in other organizations. Both a survey of employees and interviews with organizational leaders were used in the study. Through the survey results, Lines and Smithwick found that one OCM practice—change agent effectiveness—held the strongest association with achieving successful change. Through change leader interviews, Lines and Smithwick found that the most recommended OCM practice was the establishment of a substantial change timeline, with a commitment of approximately 6 years to achieve full successful change. Finally, Lattuch and Young (2011) used a change survey to study young professionals' perceptions of organizational change. They found that young professionals are

more open to change, the frequency of change, and the uncertainty that accompanies it. Thus, Lattuch and Young concluded that these factors were strongly connected to job satisfaction.

Conceptual Framework

In this current study, the researcher approached the exploration of the measurement of organizational disturbance preceding change through the lens of Gross' (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) turbulence theory in which the theorist emphasized the acknowledgement of varying levels of disturbance within organizations, and advanced a gauge that clearly communicates levels to members. The Turbulence Theory Gauge consists of four descriptive levels: light (subtle signs of stress); moderate (widespread awareness of an issue); severe (fear for the entire enterprise, and a feeling of crisis); and extreme (structural damage is occurring to the institution's normal operations; see Appendix A).

With the turbulence theory, Gross (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) further sought to describe the outside forces that could result in varying levels of turbulence within an organization. Turbulence can be considered negative, but Gross posited that it could also be positive to an organization, adding to the creativity and innovation of its leaders and members. Nevertheless, Gross also advocated for the correct gauging of the level of organizational turbulence, and clear communication of it to members. Gross' theory includes three elements: positionality, cascading, and stability.

Positionality. In Gross' (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) turbulence theory, positionality refers to the place or position of an individual in the organization relative to the turbulence being experienced by the organization. This position matters because the people who are closest to the center of the turbulence, whether change leaders or stakeholders, tend to feel its effects more directly than those who are farther away. Gross asserted that positionality within

turbulence theory must be understood multi-dimensionally through the relative situations of members of the organization (i.e., from their points of view). Gross cautioned change leaders that the turbulence experienced by organizational members must be empathically seen from the perspective of the entire person, without condescension or leaders attempting to speak for members.

Cascading. Cascading, as a part of turbulence theory, represents the effect of outside forces on the level of turbulence. Gross' (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) contention was that negative forces on an organization rarely act in isolation, and the combination of such forces could accelerate turbulence levels in the way water in nature picks up speed when falling over small rocks. Thus, to understand cascading is to understand the force of turbulent conditions upon the turbulence level that an organization experiences.

Stability. Within turbulence theory, stability refers to the degree to which an organization can withstand the dynamic forces confronting it. Organizations perceived as more stable can better weather these forces, and this can result in lower turbulence levels. In fact, that perception of stability can cause some organizations to turn an otherwise turbulent experience into an opportunity for reflection, and even growth (Gross, 2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013).

These elements of turbulence theory highlight how organizational stakeholders might experience turbulence, and the levels at which they might experience it. A stakeholder's proximity to the source of turbulence (positionality), the outside forces converging on an organization (cascading), and the degree to which stakeholders react to turbulence (stability) can all affect the perception of turbulence that a stakeholder identifies. In this current study, the researcher has explored through the lens of turbulence theory perceptions of a faculty stakeholder group that is experiencing significant change.

Faculty Reaction to the Stress of Change

The reaction of faculty to the stress of change and the effects that change has on their careers, has also been studied. Apte (2014) studied the attitudes of university faculty during changes in curriculum, pedagogy, technology, and student course placement. Through the study questionnaire, Apte explored faculty attitudes toward the acceptance of the change itself as well as the way the change was implemented. Apte found that, although the faculty embraced the changes, they were less than accepting of what they viewed as a lack of communication from administrators during the change, not having been included in decision making prior to change implementation, and as a lack of clarity regarding their role in the change. Laursen and Rocque (2010) studied faculty perceptions of how change occurs, as well as their thoughts on how change affects their careers. Interviews with faculty from the Leadership Education for Advancement and Promotion program at the University of Colorado at Boulder showed that the faculty felt that change happens in a number of ways: from the top down, the middle out, and locally at the department level. Further, the faculty identified several levels of career needs: individual career-stage needs, organizational needs across career stages, and systematic career needs. The faculty participants expressed the most stress regarding needs in the systematic (or rewards) tier. It was their perception that norms were unstated and could shift within the systematic tier, leading to uneven rewarding of promotion and tenure.

Summary

The challenges facing private liberal arts colleges and universities have given rise to plans for change that require leadership and participation of all members. Through this literature review, the researcher examined the issue of change by shining light on liberal arts colleges and universities, the external pressures that necessitated their need for change, the types of change

they chose to implement, and the responses of stakeholders regarding knowledge of organizational turbulence that ultimately led to change. In the subsequent chapters, the researcher expands upon this topic by exploring the following central research question:

- How do select faculty stakeholders at Sonata College of Music describe their perceptions of the levels of turbulence that occurred prior to significant institutional change?

Research methodology included semi-structured interviews with select faculty stakeholders to garner member perceptions. Qualitative analysis and coding were used to explore themes associated with their perceptions during institutional change. What emerged is data that can inform change leaders in higher education as they address the challenges that face them.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the impact of communication of organizational turbulence on members' perspectives during institutional change. The central research question was

- How do select faculty stakeholders at Sonata College of Music describe their perceptions of the levels of turbulence that occurred prior to significant institutional change?

In this study, the researcher used a qualitative research approach to specifically explore the reported perceptions of faculty stakeholders at a midsized university in the process of selling one of its colleges to an international educational entity. Basic qualitative research (qualitative inquiry) that is not phenomenological, grounded, narrative, or ethnographic is common throughout disciplines. It is the most common form of qualitative research found in educational settings (Merriam, 2009).

This study used the conceptual framework of Gross' (2013, as cited in Shapiro and Gross, 2013) turbulence theory. Turbulence theory allowed the researcher to explore the impact of pre-knowledge of organizational disturbance on participants' perspectives throughout the change event. The theory advocates for the appropriate determination of organizational turbulence on a gauge that ranges from light (subtle signs of stress) to extreme (indicating structural damage to the institution's normal operations). More specifically, the researcher examined how the pre-knowledge of organizational turbulence (Gross, 2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross 2013) affected

the perspectives of faculty stakeholders throughout the institutional change represented by the university's sale of one of its colleges.

Setting

The conceptual framework for this study involved organizational turbulence; therefore, it is important to note that the study setting was one in which financial turbulence was a prominent factor in its identification as a study site. Many of today's colleges and universities face substantial challenges that threaten their sustainability, and small colleges and universities in particular face financial difficulties that move them toward the need to initiate significant change (Chabotar, 2010). The Great Recession of 2007–2009 deeply affected these colleges, causing some of them to consider sizable responses to initiate a turnaround. These actions included mergers, allowing themselves to be acquired by other institutions, or closing altogether (McBain, 2012).

The site of this study was one such financially burdened institution. Located in the northeastern United States, the university, under extreme financial pressures, elected to sell one of its colleges with which it had merged 25 years earlier. This university represents the type of financially troubled small institution that Hilbun and Mamiseishvili (2016) described when outlining the pressures arising in higher education that were precipitated by the recession (e.g., reduction of financial flexibility, and challenges to endowment). Although specific in identifying institutional pressures, Hilbun and Mamiseishvili (2016) did not address the pressures' impact on organization stakeholders. This researcher attempted to address these impacts.

The researcher's relationship to the study site and its participants was as an organization member, in this case, a member of the midlevel administrator (MLA) stakeholder group. The

study sample was compiled of faculty rather than MLAs, and the researcher did not represent one of the perspectives studied.

The study was conducted on the site's campus using semi-structured interviews to collect data from faculty stakeholders reacting to the sale. Site access issues, although seemingly insignificant because of the researcher's proximity to the site, were addressed nonetheless. Although the researcher is an employee at the site, and has daily physical access to it, that access that relates to interacting with individuals who participated in the study, was gained by obtaining site permission and necessary IRB approval.

Sample

The faculty population of approximately 40 people at the site was relatively small; therefore, the study's sample consisted of 10 full-time faculty stakeholder members who were experiencing the sale. To explore the perceptions of faculty who were experiencing the event, purposeful sampling was used to recruit study participants. The use of purposeful sampling allows a researcher to choose participants who will aid in the understanding of the central phenomenon (Creswell, 2014). In this study, the researcher used typical purposeful sampling. Typical sampling seeks participants who are not atypical, unusual, or beyond the norm in any way (Merriam, 2009). In this instance, the study explored the perceptions of typical, full-time faculty regarding the sale of the college.

Data Collection

Upon securing necessary IRB approvals, the researcher gathered interview data at the research site. Participation invitation letters (Appendix C) were sent to all full-time faculty members (i.e., those who were teaching at least nine credit hours per semester) and priority adjunct faculty members (i.e., those who had seniority over other adjuncts, and who were

teaching just under full-time status). The list of these faculty members was gathered from the university's online faculty directory, and through the Office of the Dean. Letters were sent to faculty via their individual campus mailboxes. The researcher conducted one-on-one interviews with participants in a comfortable site location of the participant's choosing with some faculty members opting for a campus testing facility available to the researcher, and other faculty members electing their own offices or studios. Conducting interviews in this manner afforded the researcher the opportunity to place the interviewee at ease. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) highlighted the importance of location to the overall interview process, emphasizing the advantages of a quiet, semiprivate place, and one that is conducive to audio recording the interview. The researcher is a fellow organization member with a strong positive history with colleagues; therefore, the interviewees appeared to feel more comfortable during a recorded interview that was conducted in a familiar location. In this vein, the colleague relationship between the researcher and the interviewee appeared to result in more forthright interview responses.

Throughout this study, the researcher was cognizant of Creswell's (2014) cautions to some of the disadvantages of interviewing: the filtering of interviewee responses through the lens of the interviewer, the interviewee telling the researcher what he or she believes the researcher wants to hear, and responses from the interviewee that are not clear or articulate (Creswell, 2014). Given the relationship and history of the researcher to participants, and the education level and status of the participants, none these disadvantages were anticipated, nor did they play a role in the study.

At the end of each interview, the researcher communicated to the participant that necessary member checking would occur, and a transcript of the interview was provided to the

interviewee to confirm that all of the responses were correctly captured and transcribed correctly. Each participant checked his or her transcript and provided feedback to the researcher within 24 to 48 hours. The participants were also informed that the interpreted interview data and final report would be made available to him or her, and they were provided with a timeline of when this information would be available.

Data Analysis

As Creswell (2014) outlined, to prepare and organize this study's collected data for analysis, the researcher transcribed the audio recording of the interviews into text files, using Rev.com. Next, to get a sense of overall data, the researcher made an initial exploration and read-through of the text files and documents. After these steps, the researcher manually coded the data, using segmentation and labeling, which resulted in a list of initial codes and categories. Finally, the researcher coded the text for emergent themes that were then further reflected upon and are presented in Chapter 4 (Creswell, 2014). Stake (1995) stated that the coding of data is a deliberate process that searches for correspondence (i.e., it is a search for consistency). Coding to arrive at correspondence can occur while reviewing interview texts (Stake, 1995). A code in qualitative research is a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns an essence-capturing attribute for a portion of language-based data. Coding patterns can vary, and can be described as process codes (e.g., a word or phrase that captures an action) or simultaneous codes that indicate two or more codes within a single datum point (Saldana, 2016). To achieve Stake's (1995) call for correspondence and consistency, the researcher used Saldana's (2016) pattern coding approach.

To assure the validity of data, the researcher used across data sources triangulation, a procedure that searches for convergence among data sources (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Across

data sources triangulation in this study was used to seek convergence from among data from all interview participants.

Participant Rights

The protection of participant rights was grounded in the three basic ethical principles of the *Belmont Report* (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1979). The three principles—respect for persons, beneficence, and justice—guided the research (a) to ensure that the participants were treated as autonomous agents, capable of acting with their own judgement (respect for persons), (b) to ensure participants' wellbeing (beneficence), and (c) to ensure that the benefits of the research and the opportunity to participate in the research were distributed equally (justice). In this study, the researcher refers to all of the participants and the study site by using pseudonyms. The unique nature of the university's sale of the college has resulted in occasional local and regional media reports. Therefore, using pseudonyms and adjusting insignificant details lessens the possibility of unintended identification. Furthermore, regarding ethical issues in qualitative research, Creswell (2014) emphasized that the researcher must always be honest with participants regarding the purpose of the study, stressing that a researcher must not deceive participants about the nature of the study. Creswell also highlighted other ethical issues such as the handling of off-the-record information, and researcher self-disclosure. The researcher in this study informed all of the participants of the study's purpose, maintained participant confidentiality, and obtained signed informed consent (Appendix B) prior to interviews. Additionally, the researcher conducted member checking, and shared all interpretations and study results with participants.

Limitations

There were two limitations of this research. Limitation 1 surrounded the relationship of the researcher to the topic and study participants. The researcher has been an MLA stakeholder, for more than 25 years, and approached this topic as one who also experienced events at the site, and formed opinions and biases regarding a reaction to the sale of the college, and these were addressed and successfully set aside for the sake of objectivity and for the integrity of the study.

Limitation 2 involved the single-site nature of the study. Although many colleges and universities are experiencing the kind of financial pressures that compel them to initiate substantive change plans, the data collected in this study might not be generalizable to other institutions that might experience similar circumstances.

Summary

Through this qualitative study, the researcher explored perceptions of individuals who were experiencing their university's sale of their college to another academic entity. The research question involved the effects of foreknowledge of organizational turbulence on stakeholder perspectives. The researcher gathered data from select faculty stakeholders using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix D). These data were analyzed to discover emerging themes. In the next chapters, the researcher presents the results of the data collection and analysis, and interprets the findings.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

In this chapter, the researcher analyzes and presents the results of this study, and analyzes further the research question as it relates to the data that were collected from faculty stakeholders. The central research question was

- How do select faculty stakeholders at Sonata College of Music describe their perceptions of the levels of turbulence that occurred prior to significant institutional change?

The results of this study significantly align with much of the literature on organizational change and change responses. The importance of prior communication of organizational disturbance or turbulence before or as an initial step to change (Kotter, 2012, Gross, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013, Kahne, 2005, Lunenburg, 2010) is reflected in participant responses.

In this qualitative study, the researcher explored the perceptions of select faculty at Sonata College of Music to whom organizational turbulence might not have been fully communicated during significant institutional change. Forty full-time teaching faculty and priority adjunct teaching faculty were invited to participate in the study via hardcopy letter delivered to their personal campus mailboxes. The objective was to identify eight to 10 study participants to complete in-person interviews with the researcher. Typical purposeful sampling (Merriam, 2009) was used, and the first 10 of a total 14 faculty members who expressed interest in the study were accepted on a first-come-first-served basis. All 14 persons who responded to the invitation letter were full-time faculty members. Although the researcher thought that priority adjunct faculty were as capable of providing rich data, no priority adjunct faculty volunteered to

participate in the study. Once the participants were identified, the researcher conducted interviews over a 2-week period. As shown in Table 4.1, the participants (who were indicated by individual pseudonym) represented five male and five female respondents. Five participants were employed at Sonata for more than 20 years, while five participants were employed less than 20 years.

Table 4.1

Participant Demographic Information

Faculty participant (pseudonym)	Gender identity	Years at Sonata	Participant ID
Aaron	Male	30	A
Gwendolyn	Female	9	B
Hilda	Female	20	C
Julian	Male	35	D
Lauren	Female	17	E
Mark	Male	25	F
Richard	Male	7.5	G
Sheila	Female	25	H
Stephanie	Female	7	I
Steven	Male	<1	J

The objective of interview data collection was intended to identify emerging themes among study participants relative to their perceptions of pre-knowledge of turbulence leading to change. In the interview questions, the researcher asked the participants to communicate their

perceptions of disturbance leading to previous and current change plans at Sonata, their awareness of turbulence before the current change plan, and emotions that the current change plan precipitated. Each interview lasted an average of 22 minutes, and was audio recorded. The longest interview lasted 48 minutes, but the typical interview lasted between 18 and 25 minutes.

Each completed audio-recorded interview was transcribed into text files immediately by Rev.com. The researcher read through the interview data many times. The first read was conducted to get a general sense of overall data (Creswell, 2014). Subsequent reads were conducted for the purposes of manual coding. Coding of the data used Saldana's (2016) approach. This approach called for several cycles of coding. The first cycle summarized data segments using short statements, and the researcher conducted first cycle coding on all 10 interview transcripts to establish initial data summaries. This was done directly on the transcripts with the researcher also maintaining a list of initial codes by participant. Saldana's (2016) second cycle coding affords a researcher the opportunity to choose to use either pattern (grouping) coding, focused (selective) coding, or axial (split category) coding. The researcher chose to use pattern coding for the second and subsequent cycles to group the initial codes into smaller, broader themes. Using Saldana's (2016) approach also furthered validity triangulation by discovering correspondence and consistency across data.

Note that at the time of the interviews, which occurred within a few weeks of the end of the 2018–2019 academic year, difficulties facing the sale of the college had been compounded by several developments. These included anticipation of the state Attorney General's pending approval decision, litigation by a group of alumni who were opposed to the sale, and a nearby seminary's claims of conservatorship of the land on which the campus sits. The Attorney General's initial released statements included terms of the sale previously unknown to members

of the Sonata community, including the faculty stakeholder group. Several study participants referred to these issues during their interview.

An ongoing concern of the researcher surrounded the fact that her lens would be that of one who had experienced the institution's change events with great interest. Throughout the study, it was the aim of the researcher to set aside her own experiences and biases, and (to do so) to lean heavily on Moustakas' (1994) notion of bracketing her own feelings throughout conducting the study. The researcher took considerable effort to separate her feelings and opinions about the current change plan at Sonata College of Music, and engaged in no self-disclosure as she interviewed study participants. Further, it was anticipated at the beginning of this study that the long-standing, positive, colleague relationship of the researcher to the participants would result in more forthright responses to interview questions. The researcher's confidence in this process was well-founded. Each participant appeared to answer questions in an open and honest manner. Likewise, the researcher found that the candidness of the respondents furthered her efforts to set aside biases and receive data in kind.

Coding of Data

Saldana's (2016) pattern approach produced a wealth of codes across all participants and interview questions, and resulted in seven emergent themes. Table 4.2 illustrates the themes and corresponding interview data coding patterns.

Table 4.2

Interview Data Coding Patterns

Theme	Code	Participants	Interview question
1 – Feeling about institution	Good	B	1
	Supportive	B	
	Great colleagues/students	H	
	Enjoyable	A	
	Great	G	
	Rewarding	I, E	
	Incredibly satisfying	C	
	Amazing	J	
	I love it here	D	
2 – Prior awareness and previous changes	Financial issues	D, F	2, 3
	Structural issues	A	
	Personnel changes	E, I, H	
	Little/no awareness	G, B, J, C	
3 – Prior awareness of current change	Little awareness	C, G	4
	Financial difficulties	H, B, J, I, F, D	
	University lack of honesty	A, E	
3a – Prior awareness and union involvement	Union/administration relationship	I	4
		E	
	More knowledge of situation than others because of union	A	
	Mistrust		

Theme	Code	Participants	Interview question
4 – Perceived turbulence level prior to current change	Light	C, D, F, G, I	5
	Light-to-moderate	H	
	Moderate	B, J	
	Extreme	A, E	
5 – Initial feelings about change	Caught off guard	D	6
	Surprise	H	
	Disbelief	C	
	Dumbfounded	G	
	Shock	A, I, F	
	Concern	B	
	Curiosity	J	
6 – Feelings about change over time	Hurt	C	7
	Sadness	H	
	Anger and rage	E, A	
	Mistrust	A	
	Disappointment	B, J, E, F, D	
	Skeptical	G	
7 – Lack of university transparency	No transparency from administration	A, C, D, E, F, I, J	7

The most pronounced initial codes that emerged during first and second cycles of coding surrounded Interview Question 1 regarding the participants' feelings about the institution. These responses tended to be shorter and more direct than those during the remainder of the interview,

and each respondent communicated them with great intensity. Interview Questions 2 and 3 were used to ask the participants to characterize their perceptions of prior university change plans, and their pre-knowledge of what causes might have led to the plans. During coding, the researcher noted that respondents who had been employed by the college for a longer period of time expressed more pre-knowledge of previous change plans than did the respondents who had been at the institution for a shorter time. Interview Question 4 was used to ask the respondents to characterize their pre-knowledge of the current change plan (i.e., the sale of Sonata College of Music). At this point, the responses led to codes that indicated various levels of pre-knowledge regardless of the number of years of employment. Interview Question 5 was used to directly ask each respondent to indicate a specific turbulence level on Gross' (2013, as cited in Shapiro and Gross, 2013) Turbulence Theory Gauge. After being read descriptions of all four levels, each respondent was able to indicate clearly the level of turbulence that he or she felt prior to the current Sonata sale plan. This led to very direct and clear codes that emerged from these data. Interview Questions 6 and 7 were used to ask the respondents to relate the emotions that they felt upon hearing of the current change plan and the emotions that they felt over time during the change. The respondents were also asked to express which of these emotions was most prevalent for them. Again, the codes were very direct, for each respondent was able to summarize clearly his or her emotions in one or two words. Interview Question 8 gave the respondents the opportunity to add any additional information that they wanted to share. Each respondent used this time to reiterate previous responses, which aided in clarification and specificity of codes.

Emergent Themes

Seven emergent themes resulted from data coding. Each theme, along with its associated interview question, is discussed in detail here:

Theme 1: Overall Feeling About Experiences at Institution

- Associated interview question: “How would you describe your time as a faculty member [at Sonata]?”

Marion and Gonzales (2014) defined culture as a galvanizing force that keeps an organization together through difficult times. The responses to this question that the participants communicated indicate a commonality of sentiment and commitment toward the college, and the consistency of responses appears to illustrate the culture at Sonata. There was a consensus of responses to this question, with all 10 participants using descriptors such as “supportive,” “rewarding,” and “great” to define their tenure at Sonata. This was true regardless of the length of participant employment. Gwendolyn, who has been at the college for 9 years, described Sonata as “a pretty supportive place to work” where she had had opportunities for professional development. Sheila, who had been at the college for 25 years, stated “Oh, I’ve enjoyed it very much; a lot of variety; great colleagues; good students . . . great students, actually”. Steven, who had been at the college for less than a year, stated, “It’s been really amazing. Having colleagues that I respect so much has been one of the big highlights.” Other descriptions of time spent at the college included “Incredibly satisfying” and “I love it here.”

Theme 2: Awareness Prior to Previous Institutional Change Plans

- Associated interview question: “How would you describe your level of awareness of some of those changes [at Sonata] at the time?”

Six of the 10 participants expressed awareness of previous change plans, while four participants expressed little or no awareness. The participants who had been at the college longer indicated more knowledge than their newer colleagues. Julian, who had been at the college for 35 years, recalled some of the problems that led to the merger of Sonata and Renfield 26 years

earlier. He expressed having experienced an instance where payroll was in doubt, and indicated that he had felt panic at the time: “The associate dean informed me she wasn’t sure they were going to make payroll.” Aaron, who had been at the college for 30 years, recalled that “the structural change was quite clear when we merged 26 years ago.” Some of the participants found previous changes insignificant and not disruptive. Lauren, a 17-year veteran, saw earlier changes as minor compared to the present change plan. Three participants who had been at the college less time expressed little awareness of prior changes other than faculty turnover and retirements. As Steven phrased it: “Yeah, I think most of [the change] was just either retirements or, you know, faculty moving on to other opportunities.” One outlier, Hilda, who had been at the college for 20 years, indicated that she had had little awareness prior to previous changes. Clearly, the participants held varying perceptions of the level of disturbance prior to previous change plans at the institution. Gross’ (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) notion of perceived stability (i.e., the degree to which an organization can withstand the dynamic forces confronting it) might come into play here. Some members might perceive their organization as more stable and better equipped to weather negative forces, while other members might see the organization as less stable (Gross, 2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013).

Theme 3: Awareness Prior to Current Change Plan

- Associated interview question: “What experiences do you recall that were hints or inklings that a plan such as the sale could possibly occur?”

The participants expressed varying levels of awareness of organizational disturbance or turbulence prior to the current change plan calling for the sale of Sonata College of Music. Although six participants communicated having much awareness or pre-knowledge that trouble, specifically financial trouble, was occurring, two participants expressed little awareness.

Richard, who had been at the college for 7.5 years indicated having little awareness of turbulence prior to the current change plan, explaining:

In hindsight there were probably a lot of them, and as I mentioned, I was fairly new to the college and fairly new to the profession. And fairly new to being an academic in general. I just didn't know exactly what I was supposed to be looking for. The biggest thing probably would have been the rhetoric around the two negotiations between the union and the administration.

Hilda also expressed little pre-knowledge of turbulence, communicating: “We were always told that Sonata was running in the black, and for them to tell us that we are a financial drain, I was taken aback by that.” Sheila did have an inkling that trouble was on the horizon, and expressed during her interview that, although the university had allowed the building of new class and rehearsal space on campus several years before, “There was always that sense in the air that we’re still skating on thin ice.”

An interesting subtheme began to emerge throughout the data analysis around Theme 3, resulting in Subtheme 3a. Three participants who were more engaged in the faculty union expressed a deep awareness of pre-knowledge of turbulence, while the other seven participants, whose level of union interaction was more basic, expressed less pre-knowledge. In turbulence theory, Gross (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) spoke of positionality (i.e., the place or position of an individual in the organization relative to the turbulence that the organization is experiencing). Gross (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) further asserted that the people closest to the center of the turbulence, whether change leaders or stakeholders, would tend to feel its effects more directly than those who would be farther away. During their interviews, the three respondents who were more involved with the faculty union expressed more awareness of the

turbulence prior to the current change plan than did their colleagues. Stephanie, who had 7 years at the college, and was heavily involved with the union for several years, spoke of the relationship between the faculty union and the administration as a sign of turbulence: “So that was a big eye-opening experience, and I learned a lot about governance, and about how the relationship of the faculty union to the administration . . . how really hostile that kind of was.” Of her union interaction, Lauren stated,

The reason I was very aware of these is I’ve had a lot of involvement in our faculty union. I’ve been in committees where I’ve seen documents that don’t tend to be available publicly because, in part, the union can request these documents either for negotiation purposes or because of an arbitration we’re doing, we can make information requests.

Aaron described his perspective as one heavily involved in the union this way:

As I say to students, if you don’t ask someone, you’re not going to get anything. They can always say no, which is fine, but you asked. And, and so, I was meeting people from other disciplines and being, [a union officer] university-wide, just not our college, and thinking of things in more of a global fashion rather than, you know, it’s all about us.

Theme 4: Perceived Level of Turbulence Prior to Current Change Plan

- Associated interview question: “Would you say that your understanding of the level of disturbance or turbulence prior to the sale plan would be (a) light, meaning that you observed subtle signs of stress; (b) moderate – you observed a widespread awareness of an issue; (c) severe – you observed that there was fear for the entire enterprise, and a feeling of crisis; or (d) extreme – you observed that there was structural damage to the institution’s normal operations occurring?”

The respondents' perceived level of organizational turbulence prior to the current sale plan at Sonata College of Music was gathered and analyzed through the lens Gross' (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) Turbulence Theory Gauge. The gauge consists of four descriptive levels: (a) light, subtle signs of stress; (b) moderate, widespread awareness of an issue; (c) severe, fear for the entire enterprise, and a feeling of crisis; and (d) extreme, structural damage to the institution's normal operations is occurring. As part of the interview, each respondent was read each turbulence level and its description, and was then asked to characterize the level of turbulence that they recalled sensing prior to the change plan to sell Sonata. Of the 10 respondents, five respondents characterized their sense of turbulence prior to the change as light, with one other describing the sense as light-to-moderate. These respondents further articulated that, given their sense of light turbulence prior the change plan, the announcement of the plan was of great surprise to them. Sheila stated that, prior university changes seemed normal; therefore, she had no indication that a major change was coming:

We felt that we, you know, for once we were lulled into a sense of security. We had a new building, I think we had good enrollments. Um, and quality enrollments. Not just the numbers, but the quality of students was very high. And to suddenly be hit in the face with, "Oh my gosh, there's a problem."

Two of the respondents characterized their perception of turbulence prior to the change plan as moderate. Gwendolyn described this perception according to information about the financial instability of the university that she had learned about through a research grant:

I would say moderate only in that I got a [research] award, and as part of that I had to find out financial information about the university and talk to leaders over at the other campus, and so I got some hints about financial troubles that were brewing.

Steven communicated that he had sensed moderate turbulence because of what he saw happening between the faculty union and university administration: “As an outside observer, noticing the, the issues that the union and the administration were having, and I believe there was a no confidence vote that the union took in the president.”

Two of the respondents characterized their perception of turbulence prior to the change plan as extreme. As with Subtheme 3a, these two respondents had some of the highest and most intense engagement with the faculty union, a position closer to the turbulence source (Gross, 2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013). Both respondents expressed skepticism of the university’s motives in its explanation of the true financial state of the institution, with one respondent describing the crisis and ensuing panic as “manufactured,” and the other respondent stating, “And so, the stakes have changed as we, the union, has gotten to know more and more and seen more of their paper.”

Theme 5: Initial Feelings about Change Plan

- Associated interview question: “What would be a list of emotions you recall experiencing upon hearing about the plans for the sale?”

Apte (2014) maintained that faculty should be involved in any change process and should also be taken into confidence of change leaders as decisions are made. The responses would indicate a faculty-change leader dynamic where neither of these elements was present. There were two events that 8 of the 10 respondents mentioned when speaking about their initial feelings on hearing about the current change. The first was the fact that the original change plan was proposed as a consolidation of campuses by moving Sonata’s operations to the main Renfield campus. These respondents expressed feelings of doubt that the plan would work. Doubt later became alarm as the consolidation plan transformed into a sale plan. As Mark put it

“And so, [the sale plan] didn’t sit right with me because colleges don’t sell off pieces of themselves to other places.” Stephanie stated, “Do colleges sell other colleges? I was not aware that that was something that happened. And indeed, that isn’t something that typically happens.”

The second event that the eight respondents mentioned involved the meeting that the university president had led and in which the campus consolidation was originally announced. Its described abruptness had shocked the participants who mentioned the event. Julian recounts:

I think I was really caught off guard by the initial announcement, I think the, uh, can’t remember the year, the year before they decided to sell the college, just an off the cuff remark by the president in a faculty meeting about the possibility of the college not continuing as it is . . . um, surprised me. Up until that time, I thought everything was fine with the situation. I knew there were questions about financials, but there, like I said, with schools of music, there are always those questions, and they’re always attempts to make things easier financially, but that one remark at that faculty meeting is when I first thought that the situation might lead to this. I was really caught off guard by that. It really threw me.

Upon hearing the consolidation announcement at the same meeting, Sheila related:

And the meeting started at 11:30 and about 12:25 a PowerPoint slide changed. And down there on the fourth or fifth bullet point was “consolidate campuses into one-campus model.” And we were all a little bit sleepy at that point because [the meeting] had been going on for a while. And suddenly everyone sat up and, “What? W- what?” You know? But to me it was a complete shock. A complete surprise.

In all, six respondents reported feelings of shock, disbelief, surprise or being dumbfounded in speaking about their initial feelings upon hearing about the change plan. Richard stated, “Shock,

disbelief, surprise again because this college has been here for so long. In that it wouldn't maintain what it is, was kind of dumbfounding.” Hilda related, “I mean, it was just disbelief. It was such a, it was such a shock that there were no words.”

Theme 6: Emotions about the Current Change Plan Over Time

- Associated interview question: “Can you tell me which of those emotions are most prevalent or real to you?”

This study occurred in delayed real time as the researcher has called it (i.e., participants were asked to relate experiences beginning from months or years before the sale, throughout events, as they are still occurring; therefore, Theme 6 emerged from an interview question by which the respondents were asked to relate their most prevalent emotions about the change plan over time. All 10 of the participants related that the more information they learned about the change plan, the more skeptical they became. Three respondents—Stephanie, Richard, and Steven—initially had a hopeful view of the possibilities that the plan might hold, but later, as more facts became known, their perception changed. Richard’s initial shock was followed by excitement surrounding possibilities for the college. This changed as he learned more about the plan.

So it’s a mixture of, uh, a little bit of shock and then, um . . . and some excitement on rebranding it. When it was announced that it was not going to be a move, but it was actually going to be a sell, then it became a little bit more worrisome. I just felt that the people who are in charge weren’t thinking things through completely.

Steven stated:

And then, it was announced that it was going to be a sale, not a merger, and that it will be for a for-profit company with no experience in higher education. And then that, that made

me very nervous, and skeptical. Although I think I've tried to maintain an open mind about what this company's intentions are, what the opportunities might be. Um, and I was positive until I saw the purchase and sale agreement.

The two most prevalent emotions that respondents related they experienced over time were disappointment, and hurt or sadness. Half of the respondents expressed that they were disappointed with the university for taking the action to sell Sonata. As Mark stated, "We are the jewel in the crown of the university on an international stage. And so, I was disappointed that they would even think that this is what we need to do to move forward." Two other respondents spoke of sadness and hurt at the decision. Sheila communicated her own "extreme sadness that the place I loved so much was in danger." Hilda stated, "The way they were, the way they were going, the way they went about doing it was just . . . hurtful. It was really hurtful." Stein (2009) speaks of inconsolable organizations (i.e., those that have been emotionally traumatized by major change). These participant responses reflected the surprise, hurt, and—as Stein (2009) would argue—trauma, all of which were felt as a result of the ongoing impact of the institution's change plan.

Theme 7: Lack of Transparency by University Administration

- Associated interview question: "Can you tell me which of those emotions are most prevalent or real to you?"

A second theme emerged from the question of most prevalent emotions among the respondents. Seven of the 10 respondents expressed feelings that university administrators lacked transparency in their dealings with faculty. Schnakenberg and Tomlinson (2016) emphasized the importance of organizational transparency during any successful change plan. In Renfield's case, a majority of the respondents stated that they felt that the administrators were not acting in a

transparent manner when communicating with faculty about the details of the change plan.

Aaron reported that his feelings of shock regarding the plan were driven by the University's lack of transparency: "Because it was supposed to be transparent. There was no transparency, and it was just presented to us." Stephanie expressed similar feelings:

Oh, I was upset. I was dismayed primarily that we weren't being given much information about it. And that the faculty was not consulted and probably the staff or the administrators— you know, the lower levels of administrators probably also were not consulted.

Sheila communicated that, in her estimation, the relationship between the faculty and administration might have been less contentious had university administrators been more forthcoming:

And so to have been left out of that loop from day one was a major, major disastrous mistake, and I think so much of what has happened since then could have been at least mitigated by welcoming faculty input, gathering of the faculty together and saying, "Here's the story. Here's why I'm here." Be open. Say to us, "We have this huge problem. The board of trustees has given me this mandate. I want you in on the solution, if there is a solution."

Although respondents indicated feelings of disappointment and sadness during interviews, they did not expressly communicate feelings of loss. The reason for this may be because of the context of time in which the interviews were conducted (i.e., delayed real time) that calls for impressions from the past to be brought into the present. Negotiations involving the sale of Sonata were still ongoing at the time of the interviews; therefore, the respondents tended to communicate the change plan's final resolution in future terms, or in terms that alluded to the

length of time that the change plan had been occurring, creating the perception of the participants' ongoing uncertainty that loss is Sonata's ultimate fate. As Stephanie articulated it:

It's amazing to me how long this has gone on, and that, you know, I kinda hate that phrase, the "new normal." But it almost feels like, you know, for almost half the time I've been here, we've been in this situation.

Gwendolyn stated that her current feelings about the change could be described as "wait and see," adding further, "I can't get upset about it anymore. I can't; I'm more worried for Sonata and for the students than I am for myself."

Summary

Using the conceptual lens of Gross' (2013, as cited in Shapiro and Gross, 2013) turbulence theory, the researcher has explored in this qualitative study the perceptions of select faculty at Sonata College of Music, one of four colleges connected to a mid-sized university that was experiencing financial issues that prompted the administrators to engage in a change plan that called for the selling of the college to another entity. Recorded, in-person interviews were conducted with 10 full-time Sonata faculty stakeholders who were experiencing the change. Interview questions were used to explore the participants' perceptions of the disturbance that led to previous and current change plans at Sonata, the participants' awareness of turbulence before the current change plan, and emotions that the current change plan precipitated. The interview data yielded seven emergent themes:

Theme 1: Overall feeling about experiences at institution.

Theme 2: Awareness prior to previous institutional change plans.

Theme 3: Awareness prior to current change plan.

Subtheme 3a: Impact of faculty union interaction.

Theme 4: Perceived level of turbulence prior to current change plan.

Theme 5: Initial feelings about change plan.

Theme 6: Emotions about change plan over time.

Theme 7 Lack of transparency by university administration.

Two observations stood out to the researcher. Observation 1 was the unanimously expressed warm feelings of the study participants for the institution. Despite any feelings of animosity they might have expressed about university administration, it was clear from their responses that the participants maintain a strong positive connection to Sonata College of Music. Observation 2 was the absence of anticipated expressed feelings of loss among the participants. Although the timing of the interviews might have affected the outcome, the lack of loss as an expressed emotion surprised the researcher. This observation will be further discussed in Chapter 5.

Additionally, emergent themes will be further interpreted in detail in Chapter 5, leading to conclusions regarding the perceptions of faculty stakeholders during change. Opportunities for future research of organizational turbulence related to higher education institutions will be evaluated and discussed.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The sustainability of American colleges and universities in the 21st century has been of great concern throughout the last decade (Supplee, 2014). The declining enrollment, increased costs, and growing debt that have confronted some institutions of higher learning threaten their continued existence (McBain, 2012). These challenges were exacerbated by the Great Recession of 2007–2009 (Chabotar, 2010), and institutions have reacted in a myriad of ways to improve conditions, including the addition of digital entities, entering into international partnerships, and engaging in mergers and acquisitions (Cunningham et al., 2011; Gieser, 2016). Many institutions, with varying success, have entered into change plans that ultimately affect not only organizational structure, but also the members within structures (Chabotar, 2010; Hay & Fourie, 2002; McBain, 2012). The authors in the literature maintained that a central element to an impactful change plan is the clear communication to members of organizational urgency or turbulence prior to or as a necessary first step to change (Gross, 2013 as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013; Kotter, 2012).

Through this qualitative study, the researcher explored the perceptions of select faculty at Sonata College of Music, which merged 26 years ago with midsized, northeastern Renfield University. As of 2019, the university was in the process of a change plan that called for the sale the college to another entity. The purpose of this study was to gain insight into faculty participants' perceptions of organizational turbulence prior to change when it might not have been fully communicated to them. In an overview of change theory, Lunenburg (2010) highlighted Lewin's (1951) three step process, Fullan's (2011) call for understanding and

learning as a part of change, and Kotter's (2012) eight step change theory (Lunenburg, 2010). All three theories required change leaders to communicate clearly the urgency or disturbance prior to or as a first step to change. Gross (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) called for clear communication of organizational turbulence prior to initiating a change plan. Using Gross (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) as a conceptual framework in this study, the researcher explored the participants' awareness of organizational turbulence prior to Renfield's change plan.

Summary of Findings and Conclusions

One-on-one, semi-structured interviews were used to gain insight into the perspectives of faculty at Sonata, and into their awareness of turbulence levels prior to the university's change plan. Ten full-time faculty members participated in the study to communicate (a) their perceptions of disturbance leading to previous and current change plans at Sonata, (b) their awareness of turbulence levels before the current change plan, and (c) their emotions that the current change plan precipitated. Gross' (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross) turbulence theory gauge outlined four levels of turbulence: (a) light, subtle signs of stress; (b) moderate, widespread awareness of an issue; (c) severe, fear for the entire enterprise, and a feeling of crisis; and (d) extreme, structural damage to the institution's normal operations is occurring. Before execution of a change plan, it is important for change leaders to have a clear understanding of the perception of urgency or turbulence being felt by organizational members (Kotter, 2012; Gross, 2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013). It is also important for leaders to have an understanding of the emotions of organizational members, and how feelings affect member readiness for change (Fugate & Kinicki, 2008; Stein, 2009).

The following section is a review of the study's research question, along with a discussion of the emergent themes that resulted from participant interview data analysis and from the findings and conclusions using those themes. Recommendations for action and for future study are also outlined and discussed.

Review of Research Question, Summary of Findings, and Conclusions

With the central research question of this study, the researcher asked, "How do select faculty stakeholders at Sonata College of Music describe their perceptions of the levels of turbulence that occurred prior to significant institutional change?"

Seven themes emerged from interview data analysis:

Theme 1: Overall Feeling about Experiences at Institution

Theme 2: Awareness Prior to Previous Institutional Change Plans

Theme 3: Awareness Prior to Current Change Plan

Subtheme 3a: Impact of Faculty Union Interaction

Theme 4: Perceived Level of Turbulence Prior to Current Change Plan

Theme 5: Initial Feelings about Change Plan

Theme 6: Emotions about Change Plan Over Time

Theme 7: Lack of Transparency by University Administration

The next section is a summary of findings and conclusions as they relate to the research question and to the more prominent emergent themes.

Feelings About Institution

Culture within an organization should be constantly evaluated to measure how it enhances the satisfaction and growth of members (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Despite ongoing challenges and strife between university leadership and organizational members, the Sonata

faculty maintained a strong culture and connection to the college. This finding was revealed through the consistent responses to Interview Question 1 through which all 10 participants expressed feelings of support, satisfaction, and reward when describing their experiences at Sonata. Although throughout the rest of the interview, the participants communicated varying levels of pre-knowledge of organizational turbulence, and expressed diverse emotional reactions to the change overall, all of the participants conveyed a strong connection to the college.

Awareness of Turbulence Prior to Current Change Plan

In response to Interview Question 5, which asked faculty participants to characterize their awareness of pre-change turbulence according to Gross' (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) Turbulence Theory Gauge, the data revealed that the participants were largely unaware of the high level of turbulence that the university was experiencing prior to the announcement of what was ultimately a sizable change plan. A preponderance of faculty participants indicated pre-knowledge of light turbulence (6 participants) or moderate turbulence (2 participants). None of the respondents indicated that they had awareness of severe turbulence, and 2 indicated awareness of extreme turbulence. These turbulence levels were sensed by faculty participants until and including the announcement of what was ultimately significant organizational change. Considering that most of the participants did not perceive high levels of turbulence prior to the change announcement, one could conclude that the faculty members at Sonata were not aware of the actual level of turbulence that was being experienced by the institution prior to the change. The one exception was that the participants who were more engaged with the faculty union had both awareness of higher pre-change turbulence, and emotional reactions were more intensively angry. Gross (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) would have argued that these faculty

were positioned closer to the turbulence; therefore, they experienced its impact more than the faculty who were farther away.

Initial Change Emotions

Gross' (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) positionality element of turbulence theory also appears to be an impact in this situation. Emotional responses of faculty participants, which they were asked to characterize in Interview Questions 6 and 7, ranged from disappointment, sadness, and hurt, to anger and rage; again, they seemed more intense according to the level of faculty union interaction of the participant. Two of the three more union-engaged faculty expressed having emotions of anger and rage as they experienced the sale plan; by extension, having had exposure to more information than their colleagues, they also characterized their awareness of turbulence prior to the change as extreme, a much higher level than other participants. One could then conclude that the faculty participants expressed overall negative feelings regarding the institution's change, but those who engaged more broadly with the faculty union held more intense negative feelings, and experienced higher levels of turbulence.

Lack of Transparency by University Administration

Transparency and trust are important elements in the health of an organization (Schnakenberg & Tomlinson, 2016). Further, in their recounting of Purdue University's two attempts at establishing a new digital entity, Cunningham et al. (2011) highlighted the institution's second, more successful attempt at initiating the change, which relied on transparency with and among all stakeholders. One could clearly conclude from the faculty participants' responses to Interview Question 5a that they doubted that the university administration had been forthright with them regarding the change plan. A majority of the

participants (7) expressed feeling that university administrators were not interacting with faculty in a transparent manner, communicating that the university had not kept them “in the loop” regarding decisions either in crafting the change or throughout the progress of the change plan.

Emotions About Change Over Time

Faculty participants’ responses to Interview Question 7, which asked about their feelings and perspectives of the change over time, led to the conclusion that their perceptions grew more negative as the plan progressed. The participants related that, the more they learned about the plan to sell Sonata, the more skeptical they became. Citing recent opinions by the state Attorney General, and information from the previously undisclosed sale and purchase agreement between the university and the purchasing entity, the participants communicated that what they learned tended to intensify their feelings of disappointment, hurt, sadness, and anger, and fortified their belief in the lack of transparency from university administration, thus eroding trust. When trust is absent, successful change becomes more difficult to achieve (Schnakenberg & Tomlinson, 2016).

Although this outcome of the study was anticipated, the faculty participants did not express feelings of loss during the interviews. Stein (2009) would have contended that they did not express their loss because their grief was disenfranchised, i.e., although they had profound grief that was deeply felt, their leaders did not allow them to express it. Larry (2017) found that participants’ behaviors did not uniformly follow a Kubler-Ross grief pattern (Kubler-Ross & Kessler, 2014), which appears to align with the researcher’s findings in this study. The university’s change plan was yet incomplete; therefore, the participants continued to speak of the college in future terms, and did not appear to be envisioning at the time of the study the loss of Sonata as its ultimate fate.

Implications

For transformational change to occur, a leader must communicate to his or her members a shared vision regarding where the organization could go (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). The leader also must recognize that communicating a sense of organizational turbulence when necessary could directly affect members' feelings of loss and their readiness for transitioning through change (Stein, 2009). When change leaders overlook communicating turbulence, they might be faced with employees whose transition is complicated, affecting the change they would be attempting to accomplish (Bridges & Bridges, 2016). The findings in this study have implications not only for Renfield University, but also for many organizational leaders at all stages of an intended change plan.

The difficulties that plagued the change plan that Renfield University executed were apparent from the beginning. First, the university did not properly assess the strong connections and culture of Sonata College of Music; therefore, the university did not, upon announcing the change, anticipate the robust negative faculty reaction they received, which was founded on long-standing, durable, faculty connections to the college. Change leaders should, before enacting substantive change, consider Marion and Gonzales' (2014) assertion of leaders' responsibility to understand and affirm organizational culture, values, and mission. Doing so might have helped Renfield's administrators, and more broadly assist all administrators in more successfully navigating a change plan throughout institutions by acknowledging the relationship of members to the organization. As the authors in the literature indicated (McBain, 2012; Supplee, 2014), Renfield is just one of many institutions that has experienced challenges that have led them to engage in substantive change. However, the strong culture of Sonata College of

Music might have produced an additional layer of resistance that other institutions, that do not have long-standing employees or in which the history is not as compelling, might not encounter.

The researcher's findings further indicate that the faculty at Sonata displayed an overall lack of awareness of actual heightened organizational turbulence prior to the announcement of change. Gross (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) warned that attention must be paid to current turbulence levels so that cascading (i.e., the increased force of turbulent conditions upon the organization) does not occur. Kotter (2012) cautioned that change leaders who omit communicating urgency might be confronted with members who exhibit feelings of complacency toward the organization, making change difficult. This study's findings indicate that a lack of initial communication of urgency or turbulence led to feelings of faculty complacency related to the university's status, and initiated cascading forces that negatively affected faculty change feelings over time. Faculty participants at Sonata expressed awareness on the lower end of Gross' (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) turbulence theory gauge, despite the fact that the university's ultimate considerable change plan would indicate pre-change turbulence that was higher. Clear communication of an organization's condition would benefit change leaders, and ultimately, would benefit organizational members before and throughout successful change (Gross, 2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013).

The timing of when a change is enacted should also be of significance to leaders. Bridges and Bridges (2016) wrote of organizational change or transitions in terms of three stages: loss and letting go, the neutral zone and the new beginning. Bridges and Bridges contended that members must fully experience each of the three stages, and must experience them in order. Of the new beginning, Bridges and Bridges (2016) advised leaders about the marathon effect in which premier runners (change leaders) begin the race long before more casual Sunday runners

(stakeholders), whose goal is simply to finish. Often, by the time the Sunday runners are getting started, the premier runners have nearly completed the race (i.e., they have completed all three transition stages). The timing of Renfield's abrupt change announcement had members reporting feeling caught off guard and surprised. Administrator consideration of change plan timing might have mitigated the feelings of surprise and dismay that the study participants felt. This is important information for change leaders as they decide when and how to enact change. Although the leaders might have already experienced all of the stages of a transition, they should assess and carefully time when to alert organizational members who are behind them in the process. An illustration is Newberry College, whose administrators announced a change plan well before it was to be enacted, so that they could make organizational members aware of possible outcomes (Seltzer, 2018).

Finally, a priority for change leaders should be an attempt to avert member resistance and perceptions of administration non-transparency throughout change progression. Gearin (2017) maintained that resistance to change results from members who encounter the unknown, and change leaders who offer unsatisfactory explanations for the need for change. Change leaders should maintain ongoing communication and transparency among all stakeholders throughout a change plan (Cunningham et al., 2011).

Recommendations for Action

As the researcher maintains with the findings of this study, leaders should communicate a strong sense of urgency or turbulence before or as a first step to enacting change. Caruth and Caruth (2013), Kotter (2012), Grant (2003), and Gross (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013) all point to the necessity of communicating disturbance prior to change initiation. The authors in the literature have supported the understanding of the steps that are necessary to ensure that

change efforts result in a lasting impact. Before undertaking substantive, transformational change, it is important that leaders communicate organizational urgency (Kotter, 2012), anticipate possible member resistance (Grant, 2003), and properly gauge and communicate organizational turbulence (Gross, 2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013). This current study supports that literature.

Further, leaders should be aware of organizational culture and the culture's role in bringing about successful change (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). One of the assumptions of this research study was that faculty at Sonata College of Music maintained a strong culture, connection to, and investment in the institution. This assumption manifests in their high regard for the history and traditions of the college, their dedication to the mission on which the college was founded, and their profound commitment to passing these tenets along to their students through teaching. The responses during this study affirmed the positive feelings and connection of faculty respondents to Sonata. In anticipating members' emotional reaction to change, it is important that leaders understand and acknowledge the organizational culture and that culture's meaning to its members (Marion & Gonzales 2014).

Additionally, change leaders should maintain transparency among all stakeholder groups when initiating change. Transparency, and the quality of information through which transparency is communicated is essential to maintaining healthy stakeholder relationships (Schnakenberg and Tomlinson, 2016). Therefore, when change must occur, the trust that has been established through transparent communication will aid in a successful change process (Schnakenberg and Tomlinson, 2016).

Finally, leaders should be aware of the timing of a change or transition. Bridges and Bridges' (2016) new beginning warns against allowing change leaders to become comfortable

and adjusted to change prior to announcing change plans to stakeholders. Leaders should be aware that change transitions can become complicated without careful timing of when to announce a change plan to members.

Recommendations for Further Study

This study supports much that is represented in change literature in Kotter (2012), Gross (2013, as cited in Shapiro & Gross, 2013), and Bridges and Bridges (2016) whose works are related to the need for clear communication of urgency or turbulence prior to initiating a change plan. However, study results also indicate that several gaps exist in areas that are related to organizational change, particularly in higher education, and that should be addressed with further study. Areas for additional study include (a) a study of pre-change assessment of organizational culture, (b) a study of emotional change-responses as they relate to timing of change plan announcement and initiation, and (c) a study of the impact of leader transparency before and during a change plan.

Recommendation 1 for Research

Administrator understanding of organizational culture during consideration of a major organizational change plan.

Culture is the force that holds organizations together (Marion & Gonzales, 2014). Future studies could gather rich data regarding administrator perceptions of organizational culture, and the impact of their perceptions on a plan for change. The results of this research could aid leaders in understanding their own perceptions of their organization's culture and the impact of that culture as they contemplate change.

Recommendation 2 for Research

Member emotional change responses and their connection to the timing of enacting substantive change plans.

Bridges and Bridges' (2016) notion of a marathon affect, when change leaders become more comfortable with the prospect of change before organizational members, can lead to important research regarding the timing dynamics of enacting and progressing through change. This research would aid leaders in anticipating and understanding the responses of members, based on timing of change initiation.

Recommendation 3 for Research

The connection of organizational transparency to organizational leadership before and during change.

In Hoover (2017), a university admission administrator highlighted the importance of being transparent with institutional stakeholders about such issues as enrollment, tuition increases, etc. Thus, future research could address the importance of transparency regarding areas of organizational health (e.g., the financial outlook). This research would aid leaders in making decisions about the level of transparency that would be important to maintain with members during change.

Conclusion

Colleges and universities face many economic challenges in the 21st century (Chabotar, 2010). Many institutions have adopted diverse change plans to affect a successful financial turnaround (Carey, 2014). These changes often affect organizational members in ways that leaders do not anticipate or understand (Stein, 2009).

This study was conducted to explore the organizational members' perspective of disturbance or turbulence before and during significant change. Selected faculty from a college of music that was separating from its midsized university as mandated by the university's change plan, participated in one-on-one interviews, and were asked to communicate (a) their perceptions of the disturbance that led to previous and current change plans at their university, (b) their awareness of turbulence before the current change plan, and (c) their emotions that the current change plan precipitated. The study's findings affirm the importance of communication of turbulence prior to change, the progression of emotional reactions during change, and the importance of organizational transparency.

It is important that institutions gain as much insight as they can as they enter into significant change plans. Although studies on institutional change and studies on emotional responses to change have been prevalent, studies that examine member change response in higher education institutions have been needed as well. Therefore, this researcher sought in the current study to fill that need in the literature.

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APPENDIX A: TURBULENCE GAUGE

Degree of Turbulence	General Definition	Turbulence as Applied to This Situation
Light	Subtle signs of stress	
Moderate	Widespread awareness of the issue	
Severe	Fear for entire enterprise – feeling of crisis	
Extreme	Structural damage to the institution's normal operations is occurring	

Note. From *Ethical leadership in turbulent times: (Re)Solving moral dilemmas* (2nd ed.), by J. P. Shapiro & S. J. Gross, 2013, New York, NY: Routledge.

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Version 8.22.18
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title:

The Impact of Prior Communication About Organizational Turbulence on Members' Perceptions
During Institutional Change

Principal Investigator(s): Evelyn Thomas

Introduction:

Please read this form. You may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to give you information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document that choice.

You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this research study being done?

This research is being done explore perceptions of faculty stakeholders at Westminster Choir College of Rider University (The College) regarding their awareness of organizational turbulence (i.e. financial disturbance, etc.) prior to the change plan ultimately undertaken by Rider University (The University) to transfer ownership of The College to another entity.

Who will be in this study?

Select faculty stakeholders of Westminster Choir College of Rider University

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to engage in a one hour, one-on-one, audio recorded interview with the lead researcher (The Researcher) to share your perceptions of the level of organizational turbulence prior to the University's intended change plan.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

There are no experimental manipulations, no deception, and no known or predicted risks or discomforts associated with this research.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

It is unlikely that you will directly benefit from participation in this study.

What will it cost me?

There is no cost to you associated with this study.

How will my privacy be protected?

Collected data and research report will protect the identities of The College, The University, and all research participants. Pseudonyms will be used for each participant as well as the institution to reduce the possibility of direct or indirect re-identification.

How will my data be kept confidential?

Data will be kept in a password protected electronic folder known only to the The Researcher.

What are my rights as a research participant?

Your participation is voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University.

Your decision to participate will not affect your relationship with Evelyn Thomas, the lead researcher.

You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.

If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason.

If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

You will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.

If you sustain an injury while participating in this study, your participation may be ended.

What other options do I have?

You may choose not to participate.

Whom may I contact with questions?

The researchers conducting this study are Evelyn Thomas, Lead Investigator

For more information regarding this study, please contact Evelyn Thomas at ethomas13@une.edu

If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Evelyn Thomas at ethomas13@une.edu

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Mary Bachman DeSilva, Sc.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4567 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

You will be given a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

Participant's signature or _____ **Date:** _____

Legally authorized representative: _____

Printed name: _____

Researcher's Statement

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Researcher's signature: _____ **Date:** _____

Printed name: _____

APPENDIX C: PRELIMINARY LETTER OF INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN
RESEARCH

Evelyn J. Thomas

[Invitee Name]
[Institution Name]
[Date]

Dear

I am writing to you to invite you to be a participant in a one-on-one interview as part of research I am conducting here at [Institution Name]. In addition to my position at [Institution Name], I am also a doctoral candidate at the University of New England in the Educational Leadership program, and this research study is part of my dissertation requirement.

The study's goal is the further understanding of change feelings based on faculty stakeholder perceptions of pre-knowledge of organizational turbulence (i.e., financial disturbance, etc.) as it relates to the current sale and transition process of [Institution Name].

Your participation in this research would be entirely voluntary, and you could end your participation at any time. It would involve a one hour, audio recorded, one-on-one interview with me as Lead Researcher.

As part of the study, I will take measures to assure your anonymity, as well as that of the University and the College to reduce the possibility of your direct or indirect re-identification. Once the audio recorded interview is completed, it will be transcribed into a text file which I will share with you to make sure I have captured your statements correctly.

If you could let me know of your interest in participating in this research by emailing me at ethomas13@une.edu by [Date], it would be greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your consideration of this invitation.

Sincerely,

Evelyn Thomas
Doctoral Candidate in Educational Leadership
University of New England

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview:

The Impact of Prior Communication About Organizational Turbulence on Members' Perceptions During Institutional Change

Interview Number:

Interviewer:

Interviewee Pseudonym:

Gender: M/F - Female

Years at Institution: _____

Interview Date:

Interview Location:

Opening Statement

Thank you very much for agreeing to this interview. As we discussed, I am a doctoral candidate at the University of New England in the Educational Leadership program, and this research study is part of my dissertation requirement. The study's goal is the further understanding of change feelings based on faculty stakeholder perceptions of pre-knowledge of organizational turbulence (financial disturbance, etc.) as it relates to the current sale and transition process at Sonata College of Music. As you have seen from the Informed Consent Form you completed, your participation in this interview is entirely voluntary, and you can end your participation at any time. As part of the study, I have taken measures to assure your anonymity as well as that of the University and the College to reduce the possibility of your direct or indirect re-identification. Once this audio recorded interview is completed, it will be transcribed into a text file, with any identifiable information removed, using a third party agency. Once transcribed, I will share the transcript of your interview with you to make sure I have captured your statements correctly.

Question 1: To begin, how long have you been on the faculty at Sonata College of Music and in what capacity? How would you describe your time as a faculty member here?

Probe: How would you say your connection to Sonata – co-workers, students, etc. has evolved over the time you've been here?

Question 2: Prior to the current change, have you witnessed any other structural changes to the organization?

Question 2a: How would you describe your experiences as you witnessed those changes?

Question 2b: What, in your estimation, were the causes that led to those changes?

Question 3: How would you describe your level of awareness of some of these causes at the time?

Question 4: How would you characterize your reaction to the sale plan when you were first aware it was going to occur?

4b: What experiences do you recall that were hints or inklings that a plan such as the sale could possibly occur?

Transition: Part of my study consists of participants' estimation of their knowledge of the level of organizational disturbance or organizational turbulence – that is knowledge that trouble is brewing – within the organization prior to being notified that the sale was going to occur.

Question 5: Would you say that your understanding of the level of disturbance or turbulence prior to the sale plan would be light, meaning you observed subtle signs of stress; moderate – you observed a widespread awareness of an issue; severe – you observed that there was fear for the entire enterprise, and a feeling of crisis; or extreme – you observed that there was structural damage to the institution's normal operations occurring?

Question 5a: What events can you recall that led you to your understanding of the level of turbulence the University was experiencing prior to the sale announcement?

Question 6: What would be a list of emotions you recall experiencing upon hearing about the plans for the sale?

Question 7: Can you tell me which of those emotions are the most prevalent or real to you over time?

Closing Question: In closing, is there anything that you would like to add about what we have discussed today?

Closing Statement

Thank you! This has been very helpful. As I mentioned at the beginning of the interview, I will be contacting you in a few days with a transcript of our discussion today, and would appreciate your feedback to make sure I have accurately captured your responses. Once the study is completed, I will contact you again with study interpretations and conclusions. Again, thank you for your assistance.