Examining The Communication Strategies Utilized During An Organizational Change Within Universities’ Branch Campuses

Portia R. Stallworth

Follow this and additional works at: https://dune.une.edu/theses

Part of the Educational Leadership Commons, and the Higher Education Administration Commons

© 2020 Portia R. Stallworth
EXAMINING THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES UTILIZED DURING AN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE WITHIN UNIVERSITIES’ BRANCH CAMPUSES

By

Portia R. Stallworth

Bachelor of Arts (University of South Alabama) 2011
Master of Science (University of West Alabama) 2014

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Affiliated Faculty of

The College of Graduate and Professional Studies at the University of New England

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the degree of Doctor of Education

Portland & Biddeford, Maine

August, 2020
Copyright by
Portia R. Stallworth
2020
EXAMINING THE COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES UTILIZED DURING AN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE WITHIN UNIVERSITIES’ BRANCH CAMPUSES

Abstract

In this interpretive phenomenological study, the researcher sought to understand the lived experiences of branch campus administrators’ perceptions of the communication strategies utilized during a pervasive organizational change. Minimal research has been conducted surrounding the specifics of the communication strategies that have effectively and successfully matriculated branch campus administrators through an organizational change. To gain a better understanding of the lived experiences and perceptions of the communication strategies utilized during a branch campus organizational change, 35 members of the National Association of Branch Campus Administrators completed a qualifying survey. A semistructured interview was conducted with 10 branch campus administrators who had worked at a nonprofit, 4-year, regionally accredited university within the United States and had experienced a branch campus organizational change within the last five years. Data collected from the interviews revealed that there were connections between the organizational relationship of the main campus with its branch campuses and participant perceptions of the effectiveness of the communication strategies utilized. Furthermore, branch campus leaders played an intricate role in how well their teams received information, remained motivated during the organizational change, and successfully matriculated through the change. Lastly, empathetic communication emerged as a necessary component when branch campus administrators engaged with their staff throughout the organizational change.
University of New England

Doctor of Education
Educational Leadership

This dissertation was presented
by

Portia R. Stallworth

It was presented on
August 25, 2020
and approved by:

Ella Benson, Ed.D., Lead Advisor
University of New England

Jennifer Galipeau, Ed.D., Secondary Advisor
University of New England

Felicia Wilson, Ph.D., Affiliate Committee Member
Saint Leo University
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I must first thank my Heavenly Father, who has sustained me through this journey. I would like to thank the faculty and staff at Clark Atlanta University that encouraged me to take this leap of faith and begin my doctoral journey over 4 years ago. I would also like to recognize my committee members who have supported, encouraged, and advised me with such care throughout this process. I am also grateful to the colleagues in my cohort; we created a space for each other to allow vulnerability and I know this journey would not have been the same without each of you.

In addition, I must thank my support system, my father, family and friends. Thank you all for being a listening ear, providing an encouraging word, and for always making sure I remained focused on the goal at hand.

Lastly, thank you to my mother and my brother who began this journey with me, but passed away before I completed. Thank you for celebrating this victory on this side and in heaven.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

- Statement of Problem ........................................................................................................ 5
- Purpose of Study .................................................................................................................. 6
- Research Questions ............................................................................................................. 7
- Conceptual Framework ....................................................................................................... 8
- Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope .................................................................................. 9
  - Assumptions .................................................................................................................... 9
  - Limitations ..................................................................................................................... 10
  - Scope ............................................................................................................................. 10
- Rationale and Significance .................................................................................................. 12
- Definition of Terms ............................................................................................................ 13
- Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 15

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

- Background ....................................................................................................................... 17
- Conceptual Framework ..................................................................................................... 20
  - Eight Steps to Leading Change and Strategic Employee Communication Models ...... 21
  - Concluding Conceptual Framework .............................................................................. 24
- Understanding Organizational Change ............................................................................. 25
- Resistance to Organizational Change ................................................................................ 27
- Commitment to Change ...................................................................................................... 29
- Organizational Culture ...................................................................................................... 30
- Transformational Leadership and Organizational Change .............................................. 33
Tianna ................................................................................................................................. 61
Cecilia ................................................................................................................................. 62
Brad ................................................................................................................................... 63
Miami .................................................................................................................................. 65
Leigh ................................................................................................................................... 66
Sally .................................................................................................................................... 66
Sophia ................................................................................................................................. 67
Sharon ................................................................................................................................. 68
Thematic Findings ............................................................................................................... 69
Organizational Relationship Between Main Campus and Branch Campus ............. 70
Branch Campus Leadership .............................................................................................. 71
Empathetic Communication During Organizational Change ....................................... 73
Understanding the Effective and Ineffective Communication Strategies ................ 75
Conclusion .......................................................................................................................... 78
CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS .......... 81
Discussion of the Research Questions .............................................................................. 81
Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of branch campus
administrators receiving key communication strategies from a main campus during
a branch campus organizational change? ........................................................................... 82
Research Question 2: What key communication strategies do branch campus
administrators perceive are most effective during a branch campus organizational
change? ................................................................................................................................... 83
Research Question 3: What key communication strategies do branch campus administrators perceive are ineffective during a branch campus organizational change? .................................................................................................................. 85

Interpretation of Findings ................................................................................................. 85

Organizational Relationship Between Main Campus and Branch Campus ................. 86

Branch Campus Leadership ............................................................................................. 87

Implications of Research ................................................................................................. 89

Recommendations for Action ......................................................................................... 92

Recommendations for Future Research ......................................................................... 93

Conclusion ....................................................................................................................... 94

References ...................................................................................................................... 96

Appendix A: Permission to Conduct Research: National Association of Branch Campus

Admin ............................................................................................................................... 113

Appendix B: Email Correspondence ............................................................................. 115

Appendix C: Qualifying Survey ...................................................................................... 117

Appendix D: Consent Form for Participation in Research ............................................ 119

Appendix E: Interview Format and Questions ................................................................. 122
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

During the late 1960s, university leaders began to acknowledge the need to make a college education accessible to students who are considered nontraditional, meaning, they had a desire to live at home, maintain a job and continue their education within a convenient location of their community (Norby, 2005). One response to this need was for branch campuses to be established, generally within the geographic region. They also served universities’ need to increase enrollment when main campus enrollment numbers were low (Burke, 2017). By 1965, there were 150 branch campuses in urban areas within the United States (Norby, 2005), and by 1988, the Higher Education Coordinating Board recommended the implementation of branch campuses be a part of the master plan for higher education (Gizir & Simsek, 2005). Although there are no current databases that account for every branch campus within the United States, the National Association of Branch Campus Administrators (Bebko & Huffman, 2010) has developed a working list of approximately 800 branch campuses in operation within the United States.

Branch campuses are extensions of a university’s main location, normally operating under the same accreditation agency, but may only offer some of the degree programs of the main campus (Schuman, 2009). Branch campuses are located in areas that are relatively distant from the main campus but are embedded in locations that are convenient to the student population whom they are intended to serve (Atkins, 2015). Bebko and Huffman (2011) conducted a study on universities with branch campuses and concluded that, although branch campuses consist of a team of administrators, the governing body of administrators that provide leadership (whether for budgetary approvals, the hiring or firing of employees, or degree
program offerings) are usually located at their respective university’s main (or central) locations. Most main campus administrators do not grant branch campuses authority to change or alter policies and procedures (Miller, 2013).

With the growth of information technology, increased competition for students, fiscal and budgetary restraints, and a host of other circumstances, university leaders have become more compelled to create organizational change to remain marketable in the higher education infrastructure (Walker, 2004). Organizational change can be defined as any alteration or modification of an organization’s structure or process (Lewis, 2018). Friedman (2005) considered change as the critical driver to the success of an organization. Lewis (2018) suggested that universities’ branch campuses face many outside influences that can affect how they operate and affect the organizational changes that occur within them; branch campuses must align with the mission and goals of their main campus location, even as they respond to those outside pressures (Lewis, 2018).

When the creation and implementation of branch campuses align with the mission of the main campus, the needs of the community and the relationship the campus has with the community are relatively less important (Lewis, 2018). This means that branch campus organizational changes (e.g., adding or eliminating degree programs, relocating a branch campus facility, or implementing a new software system) most often occur because the change aligns with the purpose of the main campus and not with a specific need within the branch campus location or the community’s demographic characteristics (Atkins, 2015). Sustainability is a central concern of branch campuses. Creating and maintaining a branch campus that operates similarly to the main campus is not an easy task in the beginning phases, and it becomes more difficult as time progresses (Altbach, 2010). Branch campuses could be considered a beneficial
entity to higher education institutions. However, the pitfalls (e.g., damaging the academic reputation of the university, financial losses, and poor service to students) of branch campuses might position them as potential liabilities (Jachowicz, 2016). For this reason, main campus administrators are continuously seeking to implement organizational changes that can prevent those circumstances from occurring (Altbach, 2014).

Gilley, Gilley, and McMillan (2009) considered the organizational change that a university might implement to be a radical shift, meaning, it involves a shift in their employees’ beliefs, perceptions, and ability to accept new ideas, responsibilities, and practices. Furthermore, such a change is invasive, which means that it will affect multiple departments within the branch campus. Current literature concerning organizational change within branch campuses has focused largely on reducing resistance to change and increasing commitment to the organizational change (Atkins, 2015; Baris, 2018; Hart, Plemons, Stulz, & Vroman, 2017).

Bateh, Castaneda, and Farah (2013) showed that, when employees are asked to move from the known to the unknown, they react negatively and might resist the idea of the organizational change. Most of the authors in the literature surrounding resistance to organizational change have focused on employees and have distinguished ways in which managers can manage and reduce resistance (Beatty, 2015). Furthermore, Beatty (2015) suggested that most leaders underestimate the importance of on-going, clear, respectful, and positive communication strategies when addressing resistance to organizational change and increasing employees’ commitment to organizational change.

Communication strategies can be defined as a plan to achieve communication objectives (Elving, 2005). Communication strategies have four major components: communication goals, target audience, communication plan, and channels (DeRidder, 2005). According to French and
Holden (2012), understanding how to implement the most effective communication strategies during an organizational change will assist administrators who might find difficulty in communicating organizational changes to employees and gaining assistance in determining the timing, communication channel, and method to disseminate organizational change communication. Argenti, Howell, and Beck (2005) revealed that many organizations and their leaders neglect communication skills and strategies. However, the most effective change occurs when leaders possess the ability to motivate, communicate, and coach employees through organizational change (Gregory, Harris, Armenakis & Shook, 2009; Hao & Yazdanifard, 2015).

Implementing effective communication strategies is important to the overall success of an organizational change that occurs within a branch campus (Barrett, 2002). Regarding communication strategies that relate to the implementation of an organizational change, LaClair and Rao (2002) showed that, of 40 major organizational change initiatives, 58% of them failed and 20% of them realized a third or less of the value that was expected. Furthermore, researchers have indicated that one of the essential components of organizational change is effective communication strategies between leadership and subordinates (Ahn, Adamson, & Dornbusch, 2004; Daly, 1995; Denning, 2005). Although researchers have identified communication or the lack thereof as a pivotal component of change (Barrett, 2002; Howard, 2015; Mayfield & Mayfield, 2015), they still seek to understand the communication strategies needed to implement an organizational change. Specifically, they seek to understand the organizational changes that cause the beliefs, values, or structure of branch campuses and their employees to shift and the changes that potentially reduce their employees’ hesitation to move towards the organizational change.
In this study, the researcher examined the lived experiences of employees who come from a collective of branch campuses that are extensions of regionally accredited private and public universities within the United States. The researcher examined their perception of the effective or ineffective communication strategies utilized during an organizational change within their respective branch campuses. The organizational changes that were examined were those that affected multiple departments and areas within the branch campus. An interpretive phenomenological study was conducted during which the researcher used a qualifying survey and a semi-structured interview to answer the research questions regarding the role that communication strategies played during the organizational change, and what employees perceived to be effective or ineffective communication strategies during the organizational change.

**Statement of Problem**

The problem studied was the communication strategies utilized between main campuses and branch campuses in relation to organizational change. Lack of (or poor) communication has been identified as a barrier to organizations’ success in relation to organizational change (Bossidy & Charan, 2002; Gilley, 2005). Potentially, employees might feel lost, have doubts about the future, or become apprehensive when presented with the idea of organizational change (Hechanova & Cementina-Olpoc, 2012). Several researchers suggested that the resolution to change resistance is organizational commitment (Denning, 2005; Gilley, 2005; Kotter, 1998). Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) suggested that organizational commitment is a force that helps to unite employees to a course of action that is deemed necessary for the successful implementation of an organizational change. However, to increase organizational commitment, administrators
must be able to utilize communication strategies that articulate these changes effectively (Barrett, 2002).

Although much research has been conducted regarding organizational change (French & Holden, 2012; Gilley et al., 2009; George & Jones, 2008), minimal research has been conducted on the employee’s experience of the role that communication strategies play during organizational change, specifically when that organizational change involves a branch campus. Moreover, research is lacking regarding studies on the topic of communication during organizational change at a macrocosmic level, the development of effective communication strategies, and the perceptions of employees concerning the organizational change according to the utilization of those effective communication strategies (Gill, 2011).

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of university branch campus employees regarding the effective and ineffective communication strategies utilized during a branch campus organizational change. Organizational changes of branch campuses can include, but are not limited to, a change in degree program offerings, a facility relocation, implementation of a new university-wide software system, or a change in policies or procedures. The participants included the branch campus administrative staff, who were campus presidents, directors, staff assistants, advisors, and faculty who were currently experiencing or had experienced an organizational change within the last five years. The study was focused on the participants who were a part of the day-to-day operations of a branch campus and who had experienced an organizational change while maintaining and operating a functional branch campus that did not impede or disrupt the academic or administrative services for continuing or prospective students. The participants were asked to share their perceptions on the
communication strategies utilized (or the lack thereof) by main campus administrators to convey the branch campus organizational change, their experience of how effective or ineffective the communication strategies were, and their opinions on how successful the organizational change was able to occur with minimal resistance. According to Barrett (2002), effective communication is the glue that holds the organization together. Therefore, during a branch campus organizational change, the glue becomes a critical component. Understanding the role of communication strategies is essential during organizational change because it links all of the other organizational processes (Christensen, 2014).

**Research Questions**

The authors in the current literature have determined that one of the most pertinent parts of creating effective organizational change is reducing employees’ resistance to change and improving their commitment to change (Gilley et al., 2009; Hechanova & Cementina-Olpoc, 2012). Barrett (2002) noted that communication is a key factor in obtaining a successful organizational change; however, minimal research has been conducted regarding the specifics of effective communication strategies needed during organizational changes within universities’ branch campuses. More specifically, this researcher has gained perspective from the employees who have experienced an organizational change within a branch campus. Therefore, in this interpretive phenomenological study, the researcher sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of branch campus administrators who received key communication strategies from a main campus during a branch campus organizational change?
2. What key communication strategies do branch campus administrators perceive are most effective during a branch campus organizational change?

3. What key communication strategies do branch campus administrators perceive are least effective during a branch campus organizational change?

**Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual framework of this study was based on the Strategic Employee Communication Model (Barrett, 2002). The model functions as an analytical tool that informed organizations of their weaknesses and strengths of the communication strategies utilized with employees. The goal of this model was to assist organizations in structuring and positioning communication to facilitate the organizational change process (Barrett, 2002). An essential concept of this model is that employee communications can directly affect the success or failure of any major organizational change. Husain (2013) acknowledged that the strategic employee communication model could aid in the success of organizational change by establishing meaningful communication that educates employees and invites their support of the organizational change strategy. Furthermore, Christensen (2014) utilized the strategic employee communication model to determine the efficiency of communication as an essential component of organizational change as it is the foundation of all other organizational process.

The Strategic Employee Communication model might uncover best practices that administrators could use to communicate effectively with members of their teams (Barrett, 2002). Effective employee communication encompasses five primary goals: (a) messages to employees should be clear and concise in educating them on the vision, strategic goals, and what the change means; (b) motivate employees to support the new direction of the organization, (c) encourage the team to increase their performance, (d) limit rumors and misunderstandings
that might damage productivity, (e) align employees behind the organization’s strategic and overall performance improvement goals (Barrett, 2002). Although the Strategic Employee Communication Model references communication strategies from a broad view within an organization, the premise of the model assisted in determining whether these strategies were equally effective when an organization was in the process of implementing organizational change.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Scope

Simon (2011) suggested that it is both humbling and empowering to realize that researchers are critically restricted in many ways when conducting scholarly research. In any research, the researcher has certain assumptions and limitations to the study and the methodology and must establish an understanding of the scope of the study. In this section, the researcher focuses on acknowledging and describing those perspectives.

Assumptions

Assumptions are statements that help to remove or reduce doubts about the validity of the study, accepted in good faith, and taken as truth without proof or verification (Nenty, 2009). One assumption of this study was that the research data would not represent any personal bias, nor would the researcher have any bias towards those who had been a part of an organizational change and had previously expressed their disdain for the process. To review both the qualifying survey and the interview questions before disseminating them to the participants, the researcher mitigated personal bias by utilizing administrative staff who had experienced an organizational change within a branch campus. Regarding personal bias during the findings and analysis phases of this study, the researcher completed several readings and reviews of the transcript of each interviewee to ensure that their thoughts were captured in the most accurate account as they were
conveyed. The researcher then assumed that those participating in the study would answer each question according to their viewpoint so that the results would not be swayed one way or the other. To obtain participants’ most honest perceptions of their experiences of the communication strategies utilized during a branch campus organizational change, confidentiality was preserved and pseudonyms were utilized. The researcher also assumed that the methodology in place would answer the research questions regarding effective communication strategies according to the Strategic Employee Communication Model framework and literature review.

**Limitations**

Limitations are unavoidable conditions that are not within the researcher’s control regarding the study (Nenty, 2009). First, the specifications of the target population were that the participants worked at a branch campus and were involved in a branch campus organizational change within the last five years; therefore, the number of participants was limited. Second, the researcher utilized the NABCA to find qualified participants for the study because of the specific population. Third, the association has more than 1,000 active members from whom the researcher sought to interview 10-15 members. Fourth, regarding the interview process itself, a limitation might result in garnering enough participants in a timely manner to result in meaningful data. Therefore, the researcher attempted to disseminate the invitation to participate in the research as soon as possible to allow for a substantial amount of time to disseminate a qualifier survey; select approximately 10-15 participants; and schedule, conduct, and analyze the interviews.

**Scope**

The scope of the study refers to the parameters under which the study was operated (Simon & Goes, 2013). This study was focused on the communication strategies utilized during
an organizational change process that affected the beliefs, values, or infrastructure of multiple departments within a collective of universities’ branch campuses. Through the utilization of a semistructured interview, the researcher examined the participants’ experiences of the communication strategies that were implemented during an organizational change. She documented their perceptions of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of those communication strategies and how they affected employees’ matriculation through the organizational change.

The researcher based the understandings and perceptions of the communication strategies within a university on Barrett’s (2002) Strategic Employee Communication Model. The utilization of this model informed some of the interview questions; other questions were based on the findings within the literature review on organizational change resistance and commitment. Both types of questions had a direct correlation to the communication strategies utilized during an organizational change. The researcher utilized participants who had been a part of public or private universities’ branch campus organizational change within the last five years.

Organizational change was identified as any alteration or modification of an organization’s structure or process (Lewis, 2018). The organizational change under investigation within this study was specified as pervasive or a radical shift, meaning it affected multiple departments within the branch campus and directly affected the beliefs, values, or structure of the branch campus. To understand the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the communication strategies utilized during a branch campus organizational change, it was important for the researcher to focus this study on organizational changes that were not isolated to only one department.

Examples of pervasive (radical shift) organizational change include, for example, (a) the implementation of a new policy or procedure, (b) the restructuring of branch campus administrative roles and responsibilities, (c) relocation of a branch campus facility, (d) change in
degree program offerings, or (e) change in course or degree program requirements. Furthermore, only participants from regionally accredited institutions were represented in the final study population. The study duration, which includes the dissemination of qualifying surveys, semistructured interviews, data collection, and analysis, lasted approximately three months.

**Rationale and Significance**

When faced with organizational change, one of the most pertinent areas of concern is the employee’s commitment to that change (Gilley et al., 2009). However, to gain employees’ commitment, leaders must know how to communicate organizational changes in a way that reduces uncertainties by informing employees of the organizational change and its various stages (Howard, 2015). Understanding these effective communication strategies can assist in providing insight into the weaknesses and strengths of an organization during an organizational change (Barrett, 2002).

Many studies have been conducted on organizational change and why communication is important part of this process (Burnes & Jackson, 2011; French & Holden, 2012; Neilsen & van Sale, 2008). However, research on the specifics of the communication strategies needed to implement the organizational change effectively is limited. Therefore, through this study, the researcher has contributed to current literature by addressing employees’ perceptions of effective or ineffective communication strategies utilized during a branch campus organizational change and the way that the utilization of those strategies assisted employees in their matriculation through the organizational change.

The researcher used the Strategic Employee Communication Model (Barrett, 2002) as the conceptual framework for this study so that universities will be able to assess how they are currently utilizing communication strategies during a similar organizational change, where they
can improve, and where they may be succeeding. In addition, the results of this study could assist universities in developing a clear and concise strategic communication plan that will encompass the vision and goals of the organization, while being cognizant of the way that their employees will perceive, interpret, and matriculate through the organizational change. Furthermore, this interpretive phenomenological study design allowed the researcher to explore the employees’ perceptions of the communication strategies utilized during an organizational change that will affect the beliefs, values, or structure of public or private universities’ branch campus settings. Using the Strategic Employee Communication Model, the researcher was able to identify the perceived commonalities in the communication strategies amongst several universities implementing branch campus organizational change to identify the effective and ineffective strategies that were either utilized or needed during the organizational change.

Gaining the perspective of employees on the use of effective communication strategies during an organizational change can improve universities' main campus leaders’ understanding of their ideology of organizational change and can provide space for employees’ thoughts and opinions to be added to the organizational change process (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). The results of this research can inform leaders and increase the success of organizational change and give way to new communication strategies that could be utilized in any organizational change efforts within the university setting.

**Definition of Terms**

The terms used within this study are common in the field of higher education; nevertheless, to ensure complete understanding, the following are definitions of common terms as they are used in this study:
**Branch campus:** A campus or site of an educational institution that is not temporary, is located in a community beyond a reasonable commuting distance from its parent institution, and offers full programs of study, not merely courses is called a branch campus (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2018). The authors in the literature used the following terms as synonymous for branch campus, including *extended campus, satellite campus,* or *off-campus center.*

**Higher education:** All education beyond the secondary level leading to a formal degree is called higher education (ERIC Thesaurus, 1966).

**Not-for-profit (nonprofit) universities:** These universities receive funding from the government, tuition, and endowments. The money is generally used to put back into the curriculum, instruction, and other college operations. Nonprofit institutions can have a variety of offerings, from traditional daytime degrees completely to online programs (ERIC Thesaurus, 1966).

**Organizational change:** The process in which an organization changes its structure, strategies, operational methods, technologies, or organizational culture to affect change within the organization, including the effects of these changes on the organization, is called organizational change (Grimsely, 2015).

**Operational change:** Change that is related to the employees’ day-to-day operations within the organization is called operational change (Bao, 2009).

**Private university:** A private university often operates as an educational nonprofit organization. These institutions are funded mostly by endowments, tuition, and donations; a private university does not receive its primary funding from a state government. Private universities are smaller than public universities and have smaller class sizes. Some private
universities may have religious affiliations (United States Department of Homeland Security, 2013).

*Public university*: A state government primarily funds a public university. Generally, public universities are larger than private universities and have larger class sizes. Public universities normally have a larger selection of majors (Homeland Security, 2013).

*Regional accreditation*: Regional accreditation ensures that an institution’s academic program meets acceptable levels of quality. Institutions must be accredited by a federally recognized accrediting agency to qualify for participation in federal financial aid programs that provide low-cost loans to students (Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, 2010).

*Strategic change*: Organizational-wide change instituted to create a competitive advantage is called strategic change (Arevalo, 2010).

**Conclusion**

The introduction to this chapter encompassed an overview of organizational change within universities’ branch campuses and the role of communication during that process. It has been shown through research that one of the most pressing concerns in the successful implementation of an organizational change is the employees’ perceptions of organizational change and the level of resistance that might occur during that process (Blazenaite, 2011; Codreanu, 2010; Erwin & Garman, 2010). Researchers have noted the importance of communication during an organizational change in combating employee resistance to change (Barrett, 2002; Gilley et al., 2009); however, a gap exists in the literature regarding which communication strategies are effective during an organizational change within universities’ branch campuses and how those strategies can affect the way that employees matriculate through the organizational change process.
When undergoing a branch campus organizational change, employees involved in the process can become consumed with questions, concerns, and uncertainties about their role, the university, and the like—all while having to maintain the day-to-day operations of the branch campus. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of branch campus employees regarding the effective and ineffective communication strategies utilized during a branch campus organizational change and examine how those communication strategies affected the way that employees matriculated through the organizational change process. This study’s conceptual framework was rooted in the Strategic Employee Communication Model that supported the rationale for the study and the methodology utilized. Furthermore, the chapter included the foreseen assumptions, limitations, and outlined the scope of this research. In addition, the chapter included definitions of terms that are required for a better understanding of the topic. Chapter 2 includes a literature review with information related to the topic of study: the understanding of organizational change, factors that cause resistance, the implementation of organizational change in higher education and branch campuses, and commitment to change.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of universities’ branch campus employees regarding the effective and ineffective communication strategies utilized during a branch campus organizational change and to examine how those communication strategies affected the way in which employees matriculated through the organizational change process. This literature review began with developing a spreadsheet that was comprised of peer-reviewed research journals, dissertations, and scholarly articles on the topic of organizational change and communication. The researcher utilized the university library, Google scholar, and found additional sources through the references within the articles being utilized. Keywords used during the literature review process included communication, organizational change, university branch campuses, and higher education. According to Neilson (2008), understanding how to communicate an intended organizational change is one of many challenges for leaders orchestrating these change efforts. The research on organizational change is a growing area of study in recent years (Gilley & McMillan, 2009; Nelissen & Selm, 2008; Suchan, 2006; Turner, 2017), mostly because of internal and external factors pertaining to the overall development and advancement of an organization.

Background

With any organizational change, whether the implementation of new technology, changes in policy or procedure, or physical relocation of a branch campus, without effective communication strategies, change is impossible and likely to fail (Barrett, 2002). Reducing uncertainty is paramount for successful organizational change (Herzing & Jimmieson, 2006). However, when uncertainty is present, employees can become more resistant to change instead
of establishing a commitment to the change effort (Burnes & Jackson, 2011). When placed in positions of uncertainty, employees’ work performance can be affected, the morale within the workplace can change, and a myriad of other concerns can occur, including students becoming uneasy as a reflection of the demeanor of the employees (Sharma, 2010). Research on this topic can assist main campus administrators in relieving employees of uncertainty by communicating the intricacies of the organizational change effectively, establishing the employee’s commitment to change by minimizing their level of resistance to change, and ultimately creating an organizational culture shift that is more accepting and open to organizational change.

Organizational change can play a major role in employee satisfaction concerning their stress level during the process, their uncertainties about the organization or their roles, and exploring their desire to be involved or a part of the organizational change (Sharma, 2010). Furthermore, many researchers have determined that communication to be a key factor in a successful organizational change effort (Gilley & McMillan, 2009; Sharma, 2010; Zafar & Naveed, 2014); however, minimal research has been conducted that identifies what the perceived communication strategies should be and the proper way to utilize those strategies.

The process of communication during organizational change is vital to the overall experience or success of an organizational change (Barrett, 2002). Gallos (2008) suggested that one barrier to corporate excellence is communication problems, specifically, the structure and the quality of the communication. Sharma (2010) suggested that effective communication strategies have a direct alignment with employee commitment, effectiveness, and productivity in their work performance. Therefore, the need to understand the impact of communication during an organizational change can assist in future implementations of change. Sharma (2010) stated that deficits in the communication process could cause detriments to the relationship amongst
colleagues, interpersonal conflict, lack of trust in their employers, and a decline in their work performance or employee attrition.

Researchers have completed a plethora of research to show the importance of effective communication (Chase & Clegg, 2011; Clemons, 2003; Hallsten, 2014; Howard, 2015); however, a gap exists in the current literature on communication strategies that are perceived as effective or ineffective during a branch campus organizational change. Although the literature is very scarce regarding the organizational change and communication strategies in branch campuses, a few researchers have begun to study the implementation and relevance of the creation and need for university branch campuses (Norby, 2006; Rodriguez & Lewis, 2009).

Regarding organizational change, a substantial amount of research exists utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methodologies in which focus groups, in-depth interviews, surveys, and questionnaires have further advanced the perspective of employees during an organizational change effort (Bove & Auh, 2007; Daly, 1995; Gilley & McMillan, 2009; Turner, 2017). Through a review of literature and the researcher’s topic of interest, two main themes were presented for further research: organizational change and communication. Although much research has been conducted on organizational change (Christensen, 2014; Fleming, 2005; Gilley et al., 2009), and many authors highlight the importance of communication, research is yet scarce regarding the communication strategies that should be integrated into the organizational change process. The topic of organizational change led to an exploration of various subrelated topics, which included resistance and commitment to change, organizational culture, and the transformational leadership needed to implement organizational change.

Throughout the review of literature surrounding organizational change, communication was recognized as a pertinent piece to successful change efforts; therefore, understanding
communication during organizational change was explored. The section provided an overview of the definition of communication, the various forms of communication, and the effects of poor communication within the workplace. An additional review of literature surrounding organizational change within the university setting was researched in which the exploration of the creation and advantages of branch campuses. The literature review also presents the conceptual frameworks of Kotter (1996) and Barrett (2002) regarding organizational change and communication, respectively.

**Conceptual Framework**

In this study, the researcher sought to understand the lived experiences of branch campus employees regarding the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of the communication strategies utilized during an organizational change. Furthermore, the study of universities’ branch campuses is seemingly a new phenomenon as research surrounding this topic is becoming more prevalent in closing the gap of literature (Craves, 2005; Fleming, 2005; Norby, 2005; Pharr, 2011). Nevertheless, a paucity in research exists surrounding organizational change within branch campuses, and how key communication strategies should be utilized during those organizational change efforts.

Through this interpretive phenomenological study, the researcher explored the communication strategies utilized during an organizational change within universities’ branch campuses. The conceptual framework for this study was grounded in two key components: organizational change and communication. The conceptual frameworks that guided this research were derived from Kotter’s (1996) eight stages to leading change and from Barrett’s (2002) strategic employee communication model. In this study, Kotter’s (1996) and Barrett’s (2002) models assisted the researcher in exploring the way in which those involved in organizational
change within a branch campus were able to understand the impact of the organizational change and the communication utilized during the change. Ultimately, their models also assisted the researcher to determine whether the techniques that Kotter and Barrett suggested regarding communication and organizational change are efficient and effective regarding organizational change within a university’s branch campus. The concepts are discussed, including their creation and implementation, and the applicableness of the concepts within research.

**Eight Steps to Leading Change and Strategic Employee Communication Models**

Kotter’s (1996) eight-stage process for leading organizational change and Barrett’s (2002) Strategic Employee Communication Model are the basis for this study’s conceptual framework. These two models represent the fundamental areas of the study, which include organizational change and communication during the organizational change process.

Kotter (1996) created an eight-step model to implement and sustain change. Kotter’s model has remained a key reference in the field of organizational change (Appelbaum, Habashy, Malo, & Shafiq, 2012). According to Kotter (1996), the eight steps to transforming an organization encompass leadership that establishes a sense of urgency regarding the need for change and creates a team of individuals that have power and influence, which, in this case, is the university administration leading the organizational change. Furthermore, Kotter (1996) suggested that leaders must develop a vision and strategy that explain why the change is occurring and why it is needed, and more importantly, how it will be achieved. One of the most pivotal concepts of Kotter’s (1996) model as it relates to this researcher’s study is the concept of communicating the change vision through effective strategies that explain the why, what, and how of the organizational change.
As shown within Kotter’s (1996) change model, communication is a fundamental part in leading change; however, the strategy to do so effectively is not heavily present within this 1996 model. Therefore, the implementation of Barrett’s (2002) strategic employee communication model employs those efforts to fill the gap between successful organizational change and the communication needed during the process. Barrett (2002) acknowledged Kotter’s (1996) identifying undercommunication as one of the major reasons organizational change efforts do not succeed, and with that recognition, developed an analytical tool to assess and improve employee communication.

Although researchers of the successful implementation of change discuss the importance of communication during the process, most of them have not explored the specifics of what communication strategies can be considered effective during an organizational change within a branch campus. Barrett (2002) created the strategic employee communication model to assess and improve communication within the organization, which formed the foundation of utilizing this model to facilitate change. Barrett (2002) suggested that change communication has five primary goals: (a) ensuring that the messages being disseminated to employees is clear and consistent, (b) ensuring that it motivates employees to support the new direction of the organization, (c) encouraging the team to increase their performance, (d) ensuring that it minimizes misunderstanding and rumors which can ultimately cause resistance to change, and (e) ensuring that it aligns employees behind the strategic improvement goals.

After conducting research at a high-performing company, Barrett (2002) developed the following strategies for the utilization of communication within an organization. The best practices include (a) strategic objectives, (b) supportive management, (c) targeted messages, (d) effective media and forms, (e) well-positioned staff, (f) ongoing assessment, and
(g) integrated processes (Barrett, 2002). The strategies that Barrett (2002) presented can assist organizations with obtaining tangible communication goals and assist in improving communication across the board. However, Barrett assumed that these strategies would be effective only during organizational change.

The employee strategic communication model has three primary purposes: (a) illustrating effective employee communication in the context of the high-performing organization, (b) providing an analytical tool to diagnose an organization’s communication strengths and weaknesses, and (c) framing the change program and the resulting recommendations to improve employee communications so that communication will be positioned to help drive the change (Barrett, 2002). The implementation of employee communication consists of the organization having strategic objectives in which a correlation exists between the objectives of the organization and the standard that is set regarding communication. The communication must be structured to translate the objectives of the organization. Barrett (2002) suggested supportive management as another basis for effective communication, meaning, leadership must be involved in all aspects of how the vision is disseminated, whether from top-down, down-up, or parallel communication. Without management, communication cannot flow freely.

Targeted messages are another pertinent element of effective communication (Barrett, 2002) because they assist in focusing outreach tailored to specific audiences. Communicating in this manner allows leaders to maintain relevancy and meaningfulness for those who receive the information. Furthermore, effective media and forums are the foundation of Barrett’s effective communication model. Effective communication strategies are the key for leadership to make conscientious decisions about the use of face-to-face, indirect, print, or electronic communication (Sharma, 2010). Well-positioned staff, ongoing assessment, and integrated processes are the final
constructs of the strategic employee communication model. The utilization of this model can assist organizations in creating tangible communication goals to improve employee communication and the overall organizational communication regarding change.

The utilization of Kotter’s eight steps of leading change and Barrett’s Strategic Employee Communication Model can assist organizations in lowering employees’ resistance to change and increase their sense of ownership and involvement in the change process by using effective communication techniques during the organizational change. Both models have an undertone of transformational leadership within their structures. Neither concept takes stance of forcing organizations to look externally, but rather to develop from within, which is similar to Burns' (1978) concept of transformational leadership. Burns (1978) described transforming leadership as an occurrence that not only transforms employees within an organization, but also transforms the organizational culture in its entirety. Both models resonate with the ideology of transformational leadership in which leaders encourage followers (employees) to identify organizational problems, in this case, problems with communication, and determine solutions, creating an atmosphere in which both parties can address problems, implement solutions and make lasting changes to the organization (Filer, 2013).

**Concluding Conceptual Framework**

As universities continue to strive to meet the needs of their students and to maintain marketability, organizational change is a major component of transforming those efforts (Gilley et al., 2009). Examining whether the employees who experience these changes are well-informed of the organizational change process is the foundation of this researcher’s study. By utilizing Kotter’s eight steps for leading change and Barrett’s Strategic Employee Communication Model, this researcher created a framework to understand employees’ perceptions of effective
communication strategies during a branch campus organizational change. The literature review assisted the researcher in developing an understanding of organizational change, resistance to organizational change, creating a culture acceptance of change through transformational leadership, and the importance of these changes to the branch campus creation and implementation within universities. Furthermore, the literature review helped the researcher to examine a myriad of communication forms, and the way in which those forms of communication are utilized within an organization. In Chapter 3, the researcher describes the research design.

**Understanding Organizational Change**

Two main components solidify the basis of this study: organizational change and communication. Therefore, further understanding of organizational change and communication must be developed with context and applicability. For readers to have a collective and comprehensive understanding of organizational change, Cheney, Thoger Christensen, Zorn, and Shiv’s (2011) definition of organizational change is utilized throughout this study. According to Cheney et al. (2011), organizational change is “the process by which alteration occurs in the structure and function of a social system” (p. 235). According to Gilley et al. (2009), organizational change has been the subject of much research. Most of the research surrounding organizational change relates to how leaders should manage change, and why change might be difficult to achieve.

In the early 1990s, most research conducted on organizational change was focused on traditional outcomes (e.g., how well the organization survived the change or how profitable the change was for the organization; Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). However, the focus of organizational change has now shifted to understanding the nature of outcomes described from an affective and behavioral criterion (Gustafsson, 2012). This researcher’s study is geared
towards the latter objective of documenting the perspectives of the employees involved in a branch campus organizational change. Gilley et al. (2009) established the intention of developing any form of organizational change as creating a work environment that exemplifies motivation and in which innovation and development skills are rewarded. Zafar and Naveed (2014) considered organizational change to be a movement of an organization’s current environment or situation to a desired future environment or situation.

The authors in the review of literature on organizational change suggest that change is one of the most important yet difficult problems that organizations must address (Stouten, Rousseau, & De Cremer, 2018; Zafar & Naveed, 2014). An infrastructure such as higher education could be considered a controlled organizational change that entails executive management developing a plan to implement and lead the organization through all of the phases (Cheney et al., 2001).

Codreanu (2010) acknowledged organizational change as a salient feature of organizational development. Continuously developing the ideology of organizations regarding change involves identifying and formulating flexible answers to the economic, social, technological, and other societal dynamics of the organization’s external environment. Regardless of the extent of the organizational changes within the university infrastructure, most of these efforts come to fruition to aid in upholding the vision and mission statement of the university, in maintaining marketability within an ever-globalizing economy, and in increasing the endowment. Hao and Yazdanifard (2015) suggested that organizational change presents a competitive advantage. Organizations have consistently attempted to become flexible and continuous in their change efforts. However, their conundrum lies in the implementation of change and producing the desired results (Codreanu, 2010).
According to Zafar and Naveed (2014), organizational change can be defined in two different formalities: the first-order change is an incremental change, the second-order change is transformational and radical change. Incremental change is considered a shift in functional processes (e.g., communication within an organization, policies, and decision-making processes). When change occurs in this first-order format, it is considered part of a continuous process, meaning it allows more time for the implementers to adjust, process, and shift effectively into the new change effort. Transformational (or radical) change is a multidimensional, multilevel, qualitative, discontinuous change (Zafar & Naveed, 2014).

Resistance to Organizational Change

Resistance to change is often cited as a reason for difficulties in implementing change and for the failure of change initiatives (Erwin & Garman, 2009). Resistance is expected in every organizational change process and considered a natural part of it (Zafar & Naveed, 2014). When an organization goes from the known to the unknown, resistance can occur. Researchers have indicated that, when change occurs within an organization, many employees begin to feel uncertainties, particularly regarding their role or position in the organization. This feeling of uncertainty has a direct correlation with their productivity (Zafar & Naveed, 2014). Employees begin to ask how this change will affect their workgroup and what benefits they will receive from this change (Boohene & Williams, 2012). Although change may be implemented for positive reasons, employees often respond negatively and resist change efforts, partly because of the organizational culture, which is discussed further in this literature review.

Resistance has been understood as a foundational cause of conflict that is undesirable and detrimental to the infrastructure of an organization (Waddell & Sohal, 1998). Although it may be difficult to pinpoint the exact causes, resistance to change can take on a myriad of forms.
Researchers have suggested some common reasons that include lack of communication, unawareness of change objectives, knowledge and skill obsolescence, organizational structure, and limited resources (Zafar & Naveed, 2014). Lack of communication is a major cause of resistance in organizations because employees have a minimal understanding of why the change is occurring, how it will work, and what approaches will be used (Zafar & Naveed, 2014). Furthermore, when employees are unaware of the goals or objectives of the change, they will start to resist. When employees feel that they lack the skillset or knowledge to handle the change effort, they might resist the change. Lack of quality managerial skills is another reason that Zafar and Naveed (2014) suggest that employees resist change, specifically, regarding the feeling of unsupportiveness from their leadership. Lastly, limited resources might lead to abandonment of the desired changes, for the initiative might call for a surplus of capital or skill sets that organizations might not possess (Zafar & Naveed, 2014). Literature has shown the importance of communication during a change effort to reduce resistance. However, it does not present strategies that can be perceived as effective during an organizational change.

One can assume from the current literature on resistance to change that employees do not resist change per se, rather they resist uncertainties and potential outcomes that change can cause (Waddell & Sohal, 1998). According to Judson (1996), “Resistance to a change is not the fundamental problem to be solved; rather, any resistance is usually a symptom of more basic problems underlying the particular situation” (p. 69). Therefore, resistance is a symptom to consider when examining the aspects of change that might be considered ineffective or not well thought out. The organization’s method of communication must attempt to eliminate resistance as soon as it arises (Zafar & Naveed, 2014). Although resistance to change can show that there is a place of uncertainty for employees, it behooves the organizational leaders to derive alternative
methods that might become a critical source of innovation in change processes (Waddell & Sohal, 1998).

**Commitment to Change**

In understanding the reasons why employees resist change, it is also important to understand the implications of committing to change. The overall level of commitment of employees towards their organization is directly correlated with how change will be accepted (Stouten et al., 2018). Unlike other forms of work commitment, being committed to change indicates an employee’s level of attachment to implementing to new ideas, policies, procedures, or physically relocating their work infrastructure (Meyer & Allen, 1991). It is evident through research that employee commitment to change is related to the level of support that higher-level administrators provide them during an organizational change effort (Meyer, Srinivas, Lal, & Topolnystky, 2007). More importantly, change administrators must understand that employees are more receptive to committing to change when they understand the nature of the change as it relates to their job role or performance (Meyer, Srinivas, Lal, & Topolnystky, 2007). In 1991, Meyer and Allen created a three-component model to navigate change and determine employees’ commitment to that change. The model was comprised of affective, continuance, and normative commitment (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

Affective commitment refers to the emotional attachment, identification, and involvement the employee has within the organization. Continuance commitment refers to the effects associated with leaving the organization, and normative commitment refers to the employees feeling of obligation to continue employment (Meyer & Allen, 1991). Although each of these components has some implication on the likelihood of employees’ possibility of leaving the organization during a change effort, it is important to distinguish the differences in what their
behavior might resemble within the workplace. Meyer and Allen (1991) suggested that employees who operate under the affective commitment would possibly attend work and perform the necessary job task assigned to them. However, they would not do anything that would go beyond what is required of them. Those who remain under the premise of normative commitment would deem their stay with the organization an obligation and normally would commit to completing tasks as a part of their duty or as a benefit to having the job (Meyer & Allen, 1991). However, those who exemplify continuance commitment remain in their position and might go beyond their duties to maintain their employment (Meyer & Allen, 1991).

The three-component model of organizational commitment that Meyer and Allen (1991) created has been accepted in many studies as a true representation of the various forms of workplace commitment; however, the researchers do not conclude that these models are still effective when incorporating the idea of change efforts within an organization. In an effort to make this concept more widely accepted, Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) developed the idea of commitment to multiple foci, meaning that employees could become committed to many different workplace aspects, including their teams and supervisors instead of or in addition to the organization itself. Herscovitch and Meyer (2002) demonstrated that the three-component model (Meyer & Allen, 1991) correlated positively with compliance in committing to change; however, this is only the case with affective and normative commitment.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture has been seen as one of the main factors to be investigated in relation to an organization’s ability to integrate successfully organizational goals and changes (Aktas, Cicek, & Kiyak, 2011). A clear understanding of what culture means in the context of an organization must be defined. Schein (1992) defined organizational culture as a pattern of shared
basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to proceed. Furthermore, when referencing the basic assumptions of an organization, Schein (1992) suggested that it is the most fundamental level of organizational culture.

Aktas et al. (2011) defined culture as a model of norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes that affects organizational behavior; however, the definition of organizational culture exists in a myriad of versions. Kilmann (1985) recognized organizational culture as the shared philosophy, ideology, values, assumptions, and beliefs that bind the organization together. Robbins (1984) developed the definition of organizational culture as common perceptions that are held by the members of an organization, a system of common meaning. George and Jones (2002) described organizational culture as the informal design of values and beliefs that control the way people and groups within the organization interact with each other and other parties. Research has shown that a myriad of organizations often operate under the premise of saying one thing but do another (Buch & Wetzel, 2001). Organizations might attest to having policies and procedures in place; however, because of the organizational culture, they are presented formally, but may not be enacted in practice.

Within the literature, several forms and types of organizational cultures are described; however, the most influential is the competing values framework (CVF), which is used extensively in the study of organizational culture. Cameron and Quinn developed this framework in 1999 to determine whether an organization has a predominant internal or external focus. The framework is based on six organizational culture dimensions and four dominant culture types, which include the Clan, Adhocracy, Market, and Hierarchy (Cameron & Quinn, 1999).
The clan culture represents an organization that is full of shared values and common goals. It is an atmosphere of mutual help and an emphasis on empowerment and employee evolvement. This organizational culture focuses on teamwork and effort, in which leaders are more so mentors and their objectives are to maintain stability, loyalty, and cohesiveness (Cameron, & Quinn, 1999). Adhocracy culture is considered a temporary institution that comes and goes based on new tasks that emerge. This form of organizational culture gives a way for individuals to develop and process information in their own ways as long as it is consistent with the goals of the organization (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). This type of culture is open to organizational change as leaders are always searching for an opportunity to learn from outside influences and other external environments about ways to improve.

Cameron and Quinn (1999) discussed market culture, which focuses more on external environments than internal management. The premise of this culture type is to maintain profitability by remaining marketable to their audience; therefore, this culture is very driven by achieving goals. In addition, this culture thrives on competition, which leaves minimal flexibility for personal relationships because success is based on meeting goals and objectives based on its market or stakeholders. Lastly, the hierarchy culture could be considered the more standardized culture with rules, procedures, strict control, and defined responsibilities. Success in this type of culture is based on how well individuals can complete their tasks based on the procedures in place and also maintain stability in the system (Cameron and Quinn, 1999). Literature has found that there is a clear relationship between organizational culture and the effectiveness of the organization. Kotter and Heskett (1992) found that organizational culture influenced organizational effectiveness. Furthermore, research has proven that organizations with strong,
well-balanced cultures achieve higher levels of effectiveness than organizations with a lack of balance (Gregory et al., 2009).

**Transformational Leadership and Organizational Change**

Effective leadership is a pertinent construct in managing change within an organization and can be considered a major factor in the motivation and encouragement for employees to accept organizational change and continuously conform to the idea of change (Hao & Yazdanifard, 2015). When effective leadership is in place, it allows the opportunity for employees to trust their leadership, which can make the concept of change easier to accept (Freifeld, 2013). Furthermore, Abou-Moghil (2015) suggested that effective leaders can direct their employees towards the correct direction that leads toward the organization’s mission and vision.

Research shows the true correlation between transformational leadership and organizational change is heavily reliant upon changing the organizational culture surrounding employees’ perception of change (Sarros, Cooper & Santora, 2008). In addition, research has also proven that leadership and change within an organization are correlated when dealing with the implementation of those efforts (Kotter, 1998). Organizational change and commitment to the successful execution of said change go far beyond having a positive attitude towards change but also encompass the intention to willingly support its successful implementation (Herold et al., 2008).

Therefore, being committed to a successful organizational change requires a psychological alignment or an attachment to the change rather than just a favorable disposition towards it (Herscovitch & Meyer, 2002). Self-concept-based motivational theories such as transformational leadership increase the receptiveness of change efforts, due in part to leaders
and their effect on employees’ identification with the organization, as well as the values
associated with the organization (Sashkin, 2004). Transformational leadership appeals to the
employees’ sense of values, their ability to understand and support higher visions, and encourage
them to exert themselves in service to achieve those visions (Herold et al., 2008). Shaskin (2004)
determined that creating and communicating a vision and creating empowering opportunities are
the most common aspects of transformational leadership as it relates to completing a change
effort.

**Communication during Organizational Change**

Communication is a vital concept in effectively implementing organizational change
(Elving, 2005). DeRidder (2003) acknowledged that organizational communication has two
goals. The first goal is to inform employees of their objectives and responsibilities as it relates to
the policies and procedures within the organization. The second goal is that communication is
used to create a sense of community. Without effective communication, change is impossible,
and it will fail (Barrett, 2002). Argenti et al. (2005) revealed in their research that organizations
and their leaders had neglected effective communication skills and strategies as they relate to
organizational change. Understanding communication and its use within an organization can
assist in understanding its utilization and role during an organizational change.

Furthermore, once communication is understood, implementing effective communication
strategies becomes easier to identify for organizational teams working to create successful
organizational changes (Elving, 2005). Communication strategies consist of four major areas,
communication goals, target audience, communication plan, and channels (DeRidder, 2004).
Communication goals are recognized as the desired end-result of the communication objective
organizations have set and should be measurable (DeRidder, 2004). Communication strategies
should also have a target audience, which can include a certain market, department, or customer (DeRidder, 2004). The communication plan consists of an outline of when information will be released, who will be responsible for disseminating the information, the format in which the information will be delivered and the channels that will be utilized (DeRidder, 2004).

**Defining Communication**

Researchers have established a need for leaders, as well as their subordinates, to have a clear understanding of the many forms that communication is disseminated and received. Sharma (2010) identifies communication as the process of sharing ideas, information, and messages with others in a particular time and place. When organizations establish clear communication strategies, they are able to build working relationships that develop a level of trust between leader and subordinate (Sharma, 2010). If leaders are not well-versed in the communication process, it can ultimately lead to breakdowns in communication that can negatively impact the productivity of their employees. One of the most important skills to have in any organization is the ability to communicate (Howard, 2014). However, research has not challenged the idea that understanding of communication and its process is one that is innate or learned. Communication is described as a “process of exchanging information, from the person giving the information through verbal and nonverbal methods, to a person receiving the information” (Reyes & Hoyle, 1992, p.72).

For leaders to understand how to communicate effectively, they must have an understanding of the process in which communication transcends as well as have an understanding of the different types of communication that happen within their organization. Sharma (2010) reiterates the communication process, which includes sender-message-channel-receiver-feedback-context. Barriers can occur at every stage of the communication process,
however, the intent is to lessen those barriers by having a clear understanding of what, how, when, and to whom the communication is transpiring. Aguirre (2003) identified six forms of communication that every leader must identify and recognize to establish the best communication strategies for their organization which include 1) verbal communication, 2) nonverbal communication, 3) electronic communication, 4) interpersonal communication, 5) internal communication, and 6) generational communication. Each form of communication represents a different level of need within an organization for leaders to develop a cohesive plan to improve communication, especially in higher education in which there are many different moving parts.

**Forms of Communication**

**Verbal communication.** Verbal communication is one of the most traditional forms in which communication occurs, specifically in the university setting (Baris, 2018). Departmental meetings, one-one evaluations, and open institutes (professional development) are verbal communication settings in which information is disseminated. The challenge arises when leaders are not effective in sending--or communicating--information. Aguirre (2003) suggests that leaders must understand their message, their audience, and how it will be perceived. Verbal communication needs two parties to work at the same time; while one is sending a message, another must be receiving--active listening--must happen. Verbal communication skills are developed through several avenues, including discussions, meetings, and presentations, to name a few (Walmsley, 2011).

**Nonverbal communication.** Nonverbal communication is presented in the form of body language, facial expressions, or gestures (Sharma, 2010). Nonverbal communication is just as important as verbal communication as it shows support for the verbal communication being
delivered (Aguirre, 2003). Leaders delivering verbal communication with poor body language can come across as a weak leader to their subordinates or considered to be detached and disengaged (Baris, 2018). A barrier that will be discussed later in this review is a result of poor verbal and nonverbal communication. When leaders’ nonverbal communication supports the verbal information, they have conveyed information so that subordinates can view their disposition as honest, regardless if it is in support of their goals or if vice versa (Aguirre, 2003).

**Electronic communication.** In the university arena, most have created policies that suggest the importance of the utilization of electronic communication and some have made this their official form of communication (Blazeniate, 2011; Chase & Clegg, 2011). Electronic communication can consist of emails, CRM databases, memorandums, and the like. Leaders face a multitude of challenges when using with electronic information, mainly dealing with the divergent interpretations by the receiving party of the information that is disseminated (Chase & Clegg, 2011).

**Interpersonal communication.** Most communication in the university setting happens in the form of interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication is an extension of verbal communication as it consists of face-to-face in the same space and time (Baris, 2018). As previously mentioned, when interpersonal communication occurs, researchers have challenged the premise that leaders can sometimes be ineffective in one of the forms of communication. In Halston’s (2015) research, a survey was conducted at a university to gain the opinion of employees of the best ways to receive information, and it resulted in the majority of the options being interpersonal via meetings and even outings.

**Internal communication.** When it comes to a university presenting a collective front to their students, community and other stakeholders, the university’s internal communication must
be intact. Because of the level of complexity in the higher education market, consistent internal communication is more pertinent than ever before (Wingert, Bradfield, & Marriott, 2013.) Internal communication doesn’t need to be extensive for it to be effective. Clemons (2003) suggests that the most important factor is the continuous flow of information. Those who work for the organization or in this case, the university, are the face of the organization, therefore, the more informed they are, the better than can represent the university (Clemons, 2003).

**Generational communication.** One of the biggest mistakes leaders make in their communication is assuming that there is a “one size fits all”, that is not the case in today’s organizational systems (Cheney et al., 2011). Currently, several generations are working alongside each other. Effective leaders must have a myriad of communication strategies that can reach all ages most effectively (DeRidder, 2004). As aforementioned, it is a leader’s responsibility to understand their audience, and furthermore, to understand how their audience will receive the information (DeRidder, 2004).

**Effects of Poor Communication in the Workplace**

When there is a deficit in one of the stages in the communication process, it can cause a severe detriment to the relationships between colleagues, erode trust of their leaders, and create a significant decline in employees’ work productivity and performance (Clemons, 2003). Researchers suggest that “unclear communication not only results in errors and missed deadlines, but also lies at the root of many other serious workplace issues” (Sharma, 2010, p. 6). Effective communication has a direct alignment with employee commitment, effectiveness, and productivity in their performance (Elving, 2005). One could suggest that these effects are the result of leaders’ ability to possess communication competencies. Ustuner (2014) studied the competencies of communication which included empathy, social relaxation, and support
behaviors. Researchers have given particular attention to the effects of poor communication from the leaders, more so than cross-communication or peer-to-peer communication, leading researchers to suggest the establishment of effective communication comes from the top-down (Sharma, 2010).

When leaders do not acknowledge their ineffective communication, they also minimize their power to influence their subordinates (Finch, Gregson & Faulkner, 1992). Minimizing influence occurs when ineffective communication brings about low morale amongst employees. Subsequently, low morale is an effect of employees’ lack of trust for their direct supervisors as well as their organization (Gizir & Simsek, 2005). “Leader communication is the bridge that transmits behavioral intent to employees, thus creating trust” (Mayfield, & Mayfield, 2002, p. 90). In addition to the lack of confidence, employee commitment to their employer is also obstructed when there is an ineffective communication plan established. Lack of trust is also the result of minimal or too little communication on the operational decisions that can have either a direct or indirect impact on employees (Gilley et al. 2009). Leaders must be able to share information readily and involve employees in the decision-making and implementation of the developments happening within an organization (Zemke, 2002).

Furthermore, when communication is ineffective, it can ultimately result in a change in an employee’s job performance (Barrett, 2002). Hart et al. (2017) suggest that if leaders are not effective in what they are communicating, employees do not believe in their ability to convey information which causes a feeling of disconnect from their supervisor and the organization. Furthermore, as important as interpersonal communication is to the higher education arena when a stage in the communication process is not handled appropriately, it can result in interpersonal conflict (Gizir & Simsek, 2005).
De Raeve, Jansen, and Vasse (2008) describe interpersonal conflict as a process that happens when interdependent parties experience negative emotional reactions because of their perceived understanding of information they are receiving. Interpersonal conflict can be the result of a multitude of perceived interpretations that can include perceived unfair work conditions, feeling over-worked, feeling underpaid, and ineffective communication (De Raeve et al., 2008). Interpersonal conflict is a result of parties feeling a lack of social support (communication competence) from their peers or supervisors (Frone, 2005).

Organizational Change in Higher Education

Although universities have sustained relative stability and a level of growth throughout the years of their establishment, higher education has approached a new era that encompasses an array of challenges and forces for change (Stoberg-Walker, 2004). Welsh and Metcalf (2003) suggested environmental forces such as advances in technology, surrounding institutions’ competitive marketing, and the current workforce have impacted the future of how higher education institutions function and move forward with their educational vision and mission. Current literature suggested institutional leadership, stakeholders, institutional culture, fiscal constraints, growth in technology, and marketability as key factors in the changes implemented within a university setting (Boyce, 2003; Howard, 2015; Stoberg-Walker, 2004; Trowler, 2008).

As it relates to leadership, research suggests that institutions’ boards of trustees, administrative teams, and faculty have a substantial impact on shaping the change process that occurs within an institution (Howard, 2015). Each leadership area has a unique understanding and responsibility for the overall effectiveness of the institution. Boards of trustees are able to be stewards and protectors of the broader public interest; university administrators are responsible for leading and managing the university, and faculty are knowledgeable of the continuous
changes and pedagogy of the academics (Stoberg-Walker, 2004). However, the leadership of any university is also responsible for managing the roles and relationships between the institution and its stakeholders.

Howard (2015) suggested that universities have both external and internal stakeholders. External stakeholders include the public, elected government officials, local and national businesses, foundations, the media, and a host of other public and private sector entities (Howard, 2015). Internal stakeholders are those who are a part of the university, including students, administration, faculty, and the governing body (Howard, 2015). Stakeholders inevitably influence the dynamic of change in higher education (Stotberg-Walker, 2004). Welsh and Metcalf (2003) conducted a study that determined stakeholders were more receptive to change when they felt their perspective was embedded in the planned change process.

Creation of Branch Campuses

In the mid-1960s, the growth of colleges and universities began to stagnate and leveled off; however, outreach facilities and branch campuses began to spread throughout the United States (Deegan & Tillery, 1985). Initially, community college systems were historically responsive to meeting the needs within the community (Norby, 2005). It is pertinent to note that, although there was a need for branch campuses within the community college system, universities also responded to this need. Community colleges are only accredited to award certifications, diplomas, and associate degrees, whereas, universities are provided the opportunity to confer baccalaureates and higher degrees. In 1988, the Higher Education Coordinating Board recommended the creation of branch campuses in the infrastructure of higher education (Norby, 2005).
Branch campuses have become a popular asset to nontraditional students as they have the flexibility to offer educational programs that are directly based around the needs within the community they are located (Cohen, 1995). Branch campuses have made it possible for a college education to be accessible to community students that are commuters and who are also able to maintain employment while completing a college degree (Norby, 2005). Furthermore, branch campuses utilize adjunct instructors or utilizing interactive technological structures that allow for streaming of classes from main campus to branch campuses (Hoyt & Howell, 2012). Branch campuses also ease the overcrowding in the classrooms at main campus by providing these branch campuses within local communities (Atkins, 2015). Despite the increase of branch campuses within the United States over the past few decades, there are very few research studies that focus solely on branch campuses (Burke, 2017). Atkins (2015) would suggest that because of the lack of development and documentation related to branch campuses, it has created the current disposition and misunderstanding of the relevance of branch campuses.

The NABCA (2018) conducted a study to develop a more cohesive definition of the infrastructure of branch campuses. According to NABCA, a branch campus is a part of a public or private, 2- or 4-year institution of higher education. The branch campus is geographically separate from the main campus and has on-site administration. Furthermore, the research determined that most branch campuses service no more than 1000 students, with at least three full-time faculty that teach at least half of the courses offered (NABCA, 2018). NABCA concluded that branch campuses could also be identified as centers, satellites, or regional campuses. Although this descriptive of branch campuses has recently been developed by NABCA, there is no universally accepted definition (Atkins, 2015).
Aside from being embedded within local communities, effective administration is also important in meeting the enrollment and retention needs of the branch campus (Atkins, 2015). Atkins (2015) continued to acknowledge that most branch campuses are comprised of academic advisors, recruiters, and counselors to name a few. NABCA (Bebko & Huffman, 2010) also conducted a research study to determine that most branch campuses consist of minimal full-time faculty, but adjunct instructors teach most courses.

Although branch campuses have made great impact within the communities they are structured, as well as, aiding in the enrollment of their main campuses, they also experience many challenges. Branch campuses may be extensions of their main campus; however, the allocation of funds are distributed from one budget, which may cause a conflict in branch campuses fighting for funds (Burke, 2017). Furthermore, there is a continuous struggle between balancing the needs of the community versus the goals of the main campus (Burke, 2017). Other areas of concern relate to the limited resources or student service departments present at branch campuses such as a career services, financial aid or veterans affairs department. According to Hoyt and Howell (2012), some universities have attempted to rectify this deficit by providing free streaming software such a Zoom video conferencing or Handshake for students at branch campuses to have access to those departments remotely.

**Conclusion**

While there is a collective of research as it pertains to organizational change at a global level, there is limited research surrounding organizational change within universities’ branch campuses, and an even smaller pool of literature as it relates to effective communication strategies during a branch campus organizational change (Meyer et al. 2007; Norby, 2005; Pharr, 2011; Stouten et al., 2018). Although research has shown great strides in presenting information
regarding the importance of effective communication strategies, there is still a need to understand how these strategies should be implemented within the higher education arena (Suchan, 2006). Researchers have established that there is a direct correlation between effective communication and worker’s performance, but not how that is assessed through the lens of higher education (Jachowicz, 2016). Although higher education institutions have budget goals and departmental objectives, the results of communication breakdown and employee performance may show itself through more qualitative research such as this study that focuses on the perceptions of employees during organizational change.

Furthermore, the methodology to obtain data has shifted throughout the years from a mixed-method to majority qualitative research (Howard, 2015; Jachowicz, 2016; Norby, 2005). This is essentially beneficial to the research of effective communication strategies in the higher education setting as most researchers recognized surveying and interviewing employees could assist in gaining perspective on the perception of a university and its policies and procedures through the lens of their employees. Although researchers have recognized communication as being a pertinent factor in the success of organizational change within higher education, there is minimal research pertaining to employees’ perception of what communication strategies were effective during the organizational change. This interpretive phenomenological study will close the gap in literature by focusing on a collective of university branch campuses employees’ perception of the effectiveness and ineffectiveness of the communication strategies utilized during a branch campus organizational change and how those strategies assisted them in matriculating through the organizational change. Chapter 3 presented the methodology being utilized to examine this phenomenon with an in-depth look into the setting, population, research design, and data analysis.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This interpretive phenomenological study attempted to gain understanding of a collective of university branch campuses employees’ perceptions and experience of the communication strategies utilized during one major (pervasive) organizational change that occurred within their respective branch campus settings. Organizational change was defined as a process in which an organization changes its structure, strategies, operational methods, technologies, or organizational culture to affect change within the organization (Grimsley, 2015). Pervasive organizational change encompasses those same concepts; however, the change affected multiple departments within the branch campus (Grimsley, 2015). Research suggested that an emphasis on change is a critical driver of organizational success (Gilley et al., 2009). Furthermore, research revealed that additional barriers to organizational change include poor communication skills and the inability to induce others to change (Baris, 2018; Burnes & Jackson, 2011; DeRidder, 2004). With any organizational change and the vast amount of moving parts, effective communication strategies are a fundamental component of the implementation of an organizational change (Barrett, 2002). DeRidder (2004) recognized communication strategies as a plan that will achieve the communication objectives set by an organization and consist of four major concepts which include, communication goals, target audience, communication plan, and channels.

Over the past few decades, the existence of branch campuses provided a better reach to their targeted student populations (Kiley, 2012). However, as time, growth, and advances occur within a university, branch campuses are presented with an opportunity to implement organizational change efforts to enact the continued success of the university and its service to
their student population (Lunenburg, 2011). As many organizations implement change within their structure, there is a dire need to make sure the implementation of those organizational changes are communicated in such a way that the organizational members are allowed to adapt to the change with minimal confusion or uncertainty during the process (Gizir & Samsek, 2005). The utilization of effective communication strategies during organizational change is a key component as to how and when organizational change will be accepted and perceived as appropriate by those who are involved in the process.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of universities’ branch campus employees regarding the effective and ineffective communication strategies utilized during a branch campus organizational change and examine how those communication strategies affected the way in which employees matriculated through the organizational change process. According to Barrett (2002), effective communication is the glue that holds the organization together. Therefore, during a branch campus organizational change, the glue becomes a critical component. Understanding the role of communication strategies is essential during organizational change because it links all other organizational processes (Christensen, 2014).

**Research Questions**

This interpretive phenomenological study sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of branch campus administrators receiving key communication strategies from a main campus during a branch campus organizational change?
2. What key communication strategies do branch campus administrators perceive are most effective during a branch campus organizational change?

3. What key communication strategies do branch campus administrators perceive are least effective during a branch campus organizational change?

**Research Design**

The interpretive phenomenological approach was used in this study to address the research questions. Utilizing the interpretive phenomenological methodology to research the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of communication strategies provided insight into the lived experiences of employees and assist main campus leadership with strategies that will aid a successful organizational change with minimal resistance from employees. An interpretive phenomenology is a form of qualitative research that focused on an individual’s lived experience within a certain context (Neubauer, Witkop & Varpio, 2019). The use of this research design was pertinent to this study as the purpose was grounded in understanding the essence of the phenomenon (communication strategies utilized during a branch campus organizational change) and exploring this topic from the perspective of those (branch campus employees) who have experienced it. Neubauer et al. (2019) determined three contemporary approaches to phenomenology, which include lifeworld research, post-intentional, and interpretive.

**Site Information and Population**

This interpretive phenomenological study was conducted with branch campus employees from public and private universities across the United States that have regional accreditation. The researcher sought an equal number of employees represented from both public and private institutions’ branch campuses. The study focused on branch campuses that have been established within their respective university’s infrastructure for a minimum of ten years. The branch
The campuses were comprised of an administrative staff that included the campus president or director, other departmental administrators, such as advisors, admissions teams, and faculty, all of whom were eligible to participate in this study, as long as they were employed as a full-time staff member during the time of the organizational change. For the purpose of this study, the aforementioned population was representative of the management team of a branch campus and their subordinates who worked for the branch campus during the time of an organizational change. The branch campus organizational change occurred within the last five years. The study encompassed employees who are over eighteen years of age, who were employed full-time during the branch campus organizational change. The focus population selected to participate were members of a university and who were a part of the day-to-day functioning of the branch campus and were directly impacted by the organizational change implemented.

**Sampling Method**

Based on the interpretive phenomenological methodology, the researcher disseminated a qualifying survey, and then conducted 10 semistructured interviews with branch campus employees who experienced a pervasive organizational change, meaning, a change that affected the beliefs, values, or infrastructure of several departments within the branch campus, within the last five years. The researcher obtained permission from the NABCA to recruit participants from their membership for this study. The membership of this listserv is approximately 1,000 branch campus administrators, representing approximately 800 branch campuses within the United States. The researcher completed a request and received approval from NABCA to conduct research. Furthermore, the researcher completed the University of New England IRB process prior to conducting research.
The researcher gained permission from the NABCA Research Committee’s chair to be the direct contact for the dissemination of the email correspondence that built awareness of the study, invited members to participate in a qualifying survey, and invited the selected members to participate in the semistructured interview. As a member of NABCA, the researcher had direct access to the membership directory. The researcher included a statement within the email correspondence of NABCA’s approval to conduct the research and share the results with membership upon completion. The invitation provided an overview of the study’s purpose, the targeted population, and the methodology utilized.

Because of the potential population of participants expanding across the United States, a qualifying survey was created that encompassed closed-ended questions pertaining to the type of university at which the employee worked (public or private), their position or title, the department in which they worked, type of organizational change they experienced, their experience of communication during the change (effective, ineffective, or neither), as well as, made sure the change they experienced happened within the last five years, and lastly, confirmed their willingness to participate in an interview as a part of the research study. The researcher disseminated the qualifying survey to the entire NABCA membership which is approximately 1,000 constituents. The invitation to the qualifying survey included a consent statement regarding their willingness to participate in the surveying portion of this research. If they continued on to the survey, they were in agreement that they met the requirements to participate.

Two weeks after the invitation was disseminated, the researcher received contact from ten participants who were willing to participate in the semistructured interview portion of the study. Other qualifiers such as department and position were needed as a description and provided the researcher with context and understanding of the participant’s experience. The main
factor focused on the effectiveness of the communication strategies utilized. An invitation (Appendix B) was disseminated to the selected participants to request their participation in a 45 to 60-minute interview. Each interview lasted an average of 52 minutes. The invitation email encompassed similar preliminary information from the qualifier survey. Within the second invitation, participants were given copies of the Consent for Participation in Research form (Appendix D) which encompassed an explanation of the study and the confidentiality agreement about participating in the research study.

**Instrumentation and Data Collection**

Once the researcher obtained ten participants that represented each of the communication strategies (effective, ineffective, neither), the researcher conducted 45 to 60-minute semistructured interviews. The qualifying surveys were disseminated and collected through the University of New England’s IRB approved surveying system, REDCap. The qualifying survey was comprised of six closed-ended questions that pertained to the scope of the study and one of which asked of their willingness to participate in the interview portion. Those selected to participate in the semistructured interview received an invitation to link through Zoom video conferencing software. The interviews were recorded via the researcher’s MacBook pro computer and saved in a password protected folder on the computer.

The semistructured interview (Appendix E) format was selected as it balanced prescreened questions and allowed the researcher to ask follow-up questions to the interviewees' responses. The interview questions directly correlated with understanding their experience of communication during and organizational change, how they perceived main campus administrators' use of communication (effectiveness or ineffectiveness), and their level of resistance during the change process. The semistructured interview consisted of 10 open-ended
questions, with possible follow up questions embedded depending on the participants’ responses to the established questions. Within the Consent Form, the interviewee was made aware that the audio and video of the interview will be recorded. The researcher also took notes to describe the nonverbal communication of the interviewee, including body language, long pauses, laughs, and other features worth documenting (Smith & Osborne, 2007).

**Data Analysis**

With the utilization of an interpretive phenomenological approach (IPA), the researcher’s goal was to determine the common themes presented from the semistructured interviews that respond to the research questions as it related to the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the communication strategies utilized during a branch campus organizational change. IPA aimed to explore in detail how participants make sense of their personal and social world (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The data from the qualifying survey generate a report for the researcher and the results were utilized in determining the employees’ experiences of communication and then deciphered to select interview participants based on the additional survey requirements in an attempt to have a balance in perspectives. In addition, the interviews were transcribed via Rev.com, an online transcription service and then coded through QDA Miner, a software system that analyzes textual data. The study was consistent with an interpretative analysis of the data discovered from preliminary work within the literature review, but also with the data collected during the research process. Once the researcher received the transcripts from Rev.com, each individual transcript was given back to the corresponding interviewee to check for accuracy. The researcher allowed three days for interviewees to review their transcription before proceeding with data analysis.
A key concept of utilizing IPA is for the researcher to understand the content and complexity of the meaning behind the beliefs and constructs that manifest or were suggested from the interviewee’s conversation (Smith & Osborne, 2007). Although the implementation of the QDA Miner was utilized to complete a qualitative analysis of the interviews, the researcher also read the transcripts of each interviewee three to four additional times to make sure the transcript and the context of the interviewee’s statements were reported as accurately as possible. Furthermore, the researcher utilized a marginal area within the transcription to identify interesting or significant information from the interviewee. The researcher took the results of the interview transcription and the review of those transcripts to define common themes between the interviewees. The process mentioned above identified clusters of themes and captured the stronger viewpoints of the interviewees' concerns on the topic of communication strategies utilized during an organizational change (Smith & Osborne, 2017).

The clusters of themes presented were given a code and represent superordinate themes. The researcher analyzed the results to understand the level of pertinence placed on communication during an organizational change within a branch campus. Furthermore, the researcher analyzed the transcribed data for themes related to what the participants identified as being effective communication strategies during the change and how it affected their matriculation through the change implementation, as well as understand the perceptions of those who may have felt communication was ineffective and analyze how they moved through the organizational change (Miller & Minton, 2016). In continuation, the researcher produced a table of the themes in a coherent and concise order that is representative of the final themes outlining the lived experiences of the interviewees (Miller & Minton, 2016).
Participants’ Rights

Prior to the collection of data, the researcher gained approval from the NABCA’s Institutional Review Board and the University of New England’s Institutional Review Board. The researcher also completed CITI training. Each participant was informed of their rights through the Consent Form (Appendix D). All participants received a written copy of the consent form prior to the collection of any data. Participants were asked to sign the written copy and return to the researcher prior to their scheduled interview. Once the copy was received, prior to the scheduled interview, the researcher read the agreement and requested for a signature after a verbal agreement was received. The participants also retained a copy of the consent form. The consent form included information regarding the purpose of the study, the research questions, the benefits of the study, confidentiality, the data collection process, the participants’ rights to withdraw from the research, and the consent. Each participant and their respective universities received pseudonyms. Data were kept in a locked file cabinet within the researcher’s storage room for a period of seven years.

Limitations of the Research Design

As with any research study, there were some inherent limitations that are pertinent to address to understand the purpose of the study. One pertinent limitation was the utilization of IPA as the methodology utilized for this study. While the researcher attempted to engage in an interpretive relationship with the transcript, the researcher may not interpret or accurately capture the experiences or the meanings of the experiences. Because of the nature of the research, there were a limited number of qualified participants who have experienced an organizational change within a branch campus. Furthermore, because this research focused on perceptions of participants, they may not remember everything in the most accurate account of the
organizational change they are discussing. Lastly, during the time of the research, a national pandemic was occurring which affected the work structure and livelihood of potential participants. The occurrence of this pandemic potentially limited the amount of participants and their ability to participate in the interview portion of the study.

**Credibility and Transferability**

Because of the specifications of the participants of this study, the researcher utilized a qualifier survey to align participants’ experiences with the purpose and research questions of the study. The wording was very important when disseminating the study to prospective participants as the researcher was requesting a specific population, employees who work at a public or private university’s branch campus, specifically branch locations that have been in existence for over ten years and experienced an organizational change within the last five years. Credibility issues of the research population can exist if those who participate in the study have not been involved in an organizational change based on the description of what the research was requesting. Although interviews are common when conducting phenomenological studies, questions may be altered depending on the topic of interest of other universities, however, the foundation of this research can be utilized when seeking to understand an experience from the perspective of a target audience (Smith & Osborne, 2017).

Although the research is specific to higher education, organizational change happens across many organizations and corporations. The researcher’s description of the scenario and methodology is important to understanding if the research is transferrable. The transferability of the study to other settings or other populations will be limited if the researcher’s description is too broad or general. If the researcher presented the specifics of the information thoroughly, then
the person who is responsible for transferring the results becomes responsible for the judgment of how sensible the transfer is.

**Conclusion**

The interpretive phenomenological study is qualified to obtain the scope of the data needed through qualifier surveys and semistructured interviews that met the researcher’s goal in understanding the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of communication strategies utilized during universities’ branch campuses’ organizational change, and how those communication strategies affected the way employees matriculated through an organizational change. In addition, it met the research goals to become a device of continued learning. The data collected from the participants who have been involved in a branch campus organizational change guided the analysis in which the researcher used an interpretive method to measure the research findings. Chapter Four provides a voice to the lived experience into branch campus administrators’ perception of the effective and ineffective communication strategies utilized during an organizational change.
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this qualitative, interpretive phenomenological analysis was to understand the lived experiences of branch campus administrators’ perceptions of the effective and ineffective communication strategies utilized during an organizational change. The analysis utilized the Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) processes outlined by Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009). This chapter discusses the findings of the data collected from the semistructured interviews and notes taken by the researcher. All participants were recruited from the NABCA and have experienced an organizational change within their branch campus in the past five years.

The researcher collected data over the course of three weeks through a qualifying survey, and semistructured, audio and video recorded interviews. The qualifying surveys were created and disseminated through the UNE’s secure surveying system, REDCap, and the interviews were professionally transcribed through the Rev.com online transcription service. Once the researcher received transcripts, an initial read through of the transcripts was completed. Transcripts were then reviewed by participants for accuracy and given the opportunity to correct and make changes to any area that did not convey the message of their lived experience. The researcher requested participants to turn on the tracking tool in Microsoft Word so that the researcher could be aware of the areas in which the participant changed. Three participants sent in minimal changes to their transcripts and the other participants responded with an approval of accuracy.

After the allotted three days for participants to review and return their transcripts, the researcher read and listened to the audio recording of the transcripts and watched the video recording of each interview on several occasions prior to completing the coding process. The
researcher utilized QDA Miner, a qualitative data analysis system to code transcripts and imposed the utilization of IPA to analyze the data. Chapter Four includes a brief description of each of the ten participants to allow readers an opportunity to develop a better understanding of each branch campus professionals’ unique perspective. Following the description of the participants, emergent themes will be discussed that portray the phenomenon of the branch campus administrators’ experiences of communication strategies during an organizational change. Lastly, a discussion of the ineffective and effective strategies utilized during an organizational change were constructed based on the research questions and the data collected in the study.

**Participants**

Of the 35 participants who completed the qualifying survey, ten of those participants responded to the request to participate in the semistructured interview portion of the research. Seven of the participants were women; three were men. Each participant has worked in branch campus settings for a myriad of higher education infrastructures for more than five years and up to 39 years. The participants, on average, have worked in their current branch campus setting for approximately eight years. As described further in the chapter, most participants held leadership roles that were directly aligned with being responsible for the day-to-day, enrollment management and supervision of their respective branch campuses.

This sample of ten branch campus administrators across the United States was utilized for this study as Creswell (2013) suggested that in a phenomenological research study, it should involve in-depth interviews with as many as ten individuals. The summarized descriptions below are intended to provide a description of the professional background of each participant and allow the reader to obtain insight into the perspective of each branch campus administrator.
Table 1 provides generalized information taken from the participants’ qualifying survey. To protect the privacy of the both the participant and their institution, pseudonyms were utilized to replace actual names and the researcher eliminated all institution names. General information regarding the university infrastructure was asked in the qualifying survey to understand the location of the organizational change.

Table 1

**Participant Qualifying Survey Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant name</th>
<th>Position in branch campus</th>
<th>Institution infrastructure:</th>
<th>Organizational change experienced:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Larry</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>4-year public college/university</td>
<td>Other (consolidation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enoch</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>4-year private college/university</td>
<td>Change of leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tianna</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>4-year public college/university</td>
<td>Elimination of degree programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cecilia</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>4-year private college/university</td>
<td>Change of leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brad</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>4-year public college/university</td>
<td>Expanding of degree programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miami</td>
<td>Assistant Director</td>
<td>4-year private college/university</td>
<td>Change of location</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leigh</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>2-year public college/university</td>
<td>Major policy change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sally</td>
<td>Program Manager</td>
<td>4-year private college/university</td>
<td>Budget cutting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sophia</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>4-year public college/university</td>
<td>Change of leadership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sharon</td>
<td>Director</td>
<td>4-year public college/university</td>
<td>Elimination of degree programs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Larry

Larry has worked in higher education, specifically with his current institution for 39 years. In his current role as a vice president, he is responsible for the oversight of four regional campuses. Although Larry is responsible for the oversight of four campuses, he has only two direct reports. Nevertheless, it is his task to continuously make sure he is aware of the issues and concerns of the regional campuses and facilitate that information back to the main campus. As it relates to this research, Larry presented his experience of being a part of two institutions consolidating into one unified system.

Although Larry’s office is located within one of their branch campuses, he played an intricate role in the overall leadership during this organizational change of consolidating two institutions into one. He quickly acknowledged the abruptness both institutions felt when they were informed of the consolidation. Larry compared his and his colleagues’ initial reactions to dealing with grief. However, even in their grieving, Larry and others in main campus administrative roles made sure to encourage their colleagues by acknowledging their anxieties but welcoming the opportunity to be a part of creating a new university system.

Larry spoke to the effective communication strategies that administration utilized to help employees remain knowledgeable about the changes that were occurring. He spoke to the frequency in which main campus administration would continuously travel to the branch campuses to speak with staff and to listen to their concerns. During this consolidation, it was also important for employees at both institutions to feel involved in the decision making, which as Larry suggested, “gave a sense of ownership” to the organizational change they were experiencing. He continued to reiterate how important it was to convey the message that “we are all in this together”.

Larry was in a dual position as he is a key leader within the main campus administration, yet he worked and was stationed within a branch campus. This setting informed his perspective in being able to hear and know the needs of the branch campus during this consolidation and then being able to carry that voice to the main campus. The consolidation took a year and a few months to come into fruition. Although it may have been an adjustment for some internal and external stakeholders, Larry is thoroughly impressed by the enrollments of the new university, the diversification of students, and the new partnerships that are continuously being developed.

**Enoch**

Enoch has worked in several branch campus infrastructures prior to his current role as an executive dean of two branch campus locations. Enoch was also involved in an after-school program that consisted of approximately 25 locations and he was responsible for 17 of those. Additionally, he spent time as an instructor within a branch campus for three years until the location closed. These years of experience led him into his current position as the executive dean, his role for the past eight years. Enoch shared his organizational change experience of a change in leadership as current administrators were retiring and seeking new external candidates to take the institution toward a new and promising direction.

Enoch spoke of his institution with such respect and admiration for those who are a part of the main campus administration. He reiterated continuously the amount of years that the administrators that were leaving had dedicated to their university. However, he also recognized that because of the longevity of the current leadership, things had become routine or stagnant and the university acknowledged it was time to seek external candidates to assist in revamping and rejuvenating the institution. Enoch took on a disposition of proactiveness by making sure his
voice was heard and that he was always informed on the intricacies occurring during this organizational change.

On Enoch’s qualifying survey, he suggested that the communication strategies were ineffective; however, he clarified during the interview that the communication strategies utilized were simply nonintentional, which he felt was a result of the various silos across the infrastructure. He considered some of the communication strategies as a bare minimum effort, but from the presumption that main campus administrators were possibly not well informed themselves. Despite not having the ability to control the dynamic of the communication being disseminated from main campus, Enoch dedicated himself to providing a forum for his branch campus employees to be able to express concerns and ask questions. During this change of leadership, Enoch recognized the importance of bringing in fresh perspective, while also acknowledging the angst of being in the unknown; however, he also strongly believed the only thing that is constant is change.

**Tianna**

Tianna has worked extensively in higher education. Prior to her current position, Tianna worked in more traditional university settings; however, she has worked in her current branch campus setting for the past 13 years and serves as the campus director at one of eight branch campus locations. Although Tianna shared her experience of dealing with the elimination of degree programs, she also described another organizational change the university is currently implementing in which an elimination of a few administrative positions, hers being one of them, transpired. Since 2012, Tianna had experienced the elimination of degree programs as she watched her branch campus go from offering 25 on-campus degree programs to currently offering only two programs.
Tianna acknowledged that low enrollment played a major part in this continuous elimination of degree programs as the university had begun to focus more efforts in establishing an online community. She had become used to dealing with these changes. However, she shared that the way in which she would learn of the elimination of the degree program could be through a random email or by happenstance. She expressed her deep level of sadness when degree programs would be removed, and she would be made aware after the decision was already made. Tianna felt there was a lack of support and a lack of relationship between the branch campuses and their main location. Because of the lack of communication, she shared that she and the other branch campus employees could only judge reasons the decisions were made from assumptions, as there was never clear or concise communication between locations. During the interview process, it was discovered that her branch campus plus two other campuses will now fall under another campus director’s leadership.

Cecilia

Although Cecilia was in a completely different profession prior to joining her current institution, she has remained in education, working at her extended campus location for over 18 years as the director. The university is comprised of only two campuses, the main campus and the branch campus. It was clear through the interviewing process that one of her main goals as the director of her location is to make sure the voice of their branch campus is continuously heard by the administration within their main campus. She strongly believes that the relationship between the main campus and branch campus has everything to do with how involved the branch campus is within the main campus infrastructure. Cecilia shared her experience of dealing with a change of leadership.
Retirement was the leading factor in this change of leadership, which gave Cecilia and her branch campus staff the ability to process the change more naturally. Nevertheless, Cecilia began to deal with the concerns of her staff as they related to the unknown of new leadership. Throughout the entire organizational change process, Cecilia continuously encouraged her team to embrace this change and view it with excitement, rather than fear. During the interview, Cecilia spoke to more than just this specific experience, she spoke to the mindset of branch campus administration, especially during organizational change. She shared her experience of being afforded the opportunity to go on a sabbatical in which she researched a specific area of branch campus settings. Because of the research she conducted, she formed the ideology that branch campuses must have a voice and make their value known to their main campus. Cecilia believed the relationship between her main campus and her branch campus is a dual effort, not one-sided.

She believed in the idea of branch campuses having a voice and she expressed how diligently she worked to spread this mindset to her staff. She spoke very positively regarding the communication strategies that main campus utilized during their organizational change that consisted a frequent communication, especially face-to-face meetings with leadership, but also recognized the importance of the informal, “couch” conversations in which the branch campus staff could express ideas and be as open as possible about whatever they were feeling; all of which assisted them in being able to matriculate through this change of leadership with minimal resistance and increased positivity.

Brad

Since 2004, Brad has worked in university branch campuses; first, as a faculty member, then, joining administration shortly thereafter. He is currently the regional director for one of
eight branch campuses within his university infrastructure. Brad’s responsibilities vary across a multitude of areas within higher education; however, a focus in his role as the regional director is establishing community relationships that will assist in the enrollment of their student population. He is also responsible for developing the educational modalities utilized for each program to make their presence attractive in the marketplace. Brad shared his experience of expanding degree programs.

Brad was very adamant about the responsibility he had in making sure his branch campus remained viable not only within the marketplace, but also within the university infrastructure. Brad made sure he was known by main campus administrators by visiting the main campus monthly, even if it was to just show his face. He is so adamant about maintaining viability that he presented the idea to main campus administrators about adding more degree programs to his branch campus location. He expressed that during those times, communication between the main campus and branch campus was successful; however, once Brad took the initiative to go out into the community and build partnerships with local business, he began to see a disconnect with the main campus.

He felt that there was a lack of trust from the main campus and so he continued to work quietly in the background. During the interview, Brad’s conversation switched from discussing the imperfections of the main campus leadership’s communication strategies and focused on what he implemented within his branch campus to counteract them. He emphasized the importance of making sure his team felt valuable to the efforts of the branch campus. He hosted weekly informal meetings, disseminated newsletters that recognized the work of faculty and staff, and developed other strategic initiatives that were clear, compelling, and achievable.
Miami

Miami is very familiar with the branch campus infrastructure as she has worked for several universities that have branch campus operations. Although Miami has experience in working in financial aid, her focus has been in recruitment and enrollment management. Prior to her current position, she worked as the director of adult enrollment. She is currently the assistant director of admissions in which her goal is to assist in the marketing, recruitment, and enrollment of prospective students. In addition, Miami is responsible for developing business partnerships throughout the community. She shared her organizational change experience of the relocation of the branch campus location.

Although there were rumors floating around the different branch campuses that there would possibly be a relocation of one of their branch campuses, Miami was completely shocked and surprised to find out that the relocation also included her location, which resulted in a consolidation of two branch campuses into one. From the moment of the announcement up until the present moment, Miami described the process as completely unorganized, mostly because of main campus leadership’s inability to successfully communicate the logistics of the relocation. During this organizational change, Miami expressed how important it was to have detailed communication; however, that was not the case. Miami discussed the short notice of the relocation announcement and how she and her branch campus colleagues had to complete the entire relocation process within a matter of weeks.

A year after the relocation and consolidation change occurred, Miami expressed a sense of relief that the branch campus finally felt organized. Construction is complete, administrative positions were reorganized and structured; however, Miami made it clear that these were all efforts of the branch campus administration; the main campus leadership did not play an active
role in assisting them with reestablishing themselves as this new location or team. Although Miami felt the communication strategies utilized during the organizational change were ineffective, she is focused on making sure the branch campus communication is effective for the staff, faculty and students.

**Leigh**

For the past six years, Leigh has been employed as the supervisor over the only branch campus of her institution. Leigh was brought into the university during a time in which the branch campus mission was being revamped and the main campus administrators were deepening their commitment to understanding and developing services that benefit the nontraditional, adult learner student population. Leigh has a small team of four that she supervises at this off-site location. During the interview, Leigh shared her experience of a major policy change which occurred during the revamping of the mission and structure of the branch campus.

Leigh was hired during her branch campus restructuring process. The main campus administrators had already begun the work on deepening their commitment to the branch campus and developing a more focused agenda for their specific student demographic (adult learners). Although their enrollment did not improve as they would have hoped, Leigh spoke highly of how effective the communication strategies were utilized during this organizational change. Leigh shared that main campus leadership was very intentional and very inclusive regarding feedback and input from branch campus administration.

**Sally**

Sally recently matriculated from the K-12 educational sector. She is currently employed as a program manager of library services for a specific region within her institution, which
encompasses over twenty branch campuses. She is responsible for directly assisting the students of those branch campuses with any needs they may have regarding the online library databases, proper citation formats, and research. She has been in this role as well as with the university since January. Sally shared her experience of matriculating through budget cuts that resulted in several employees being terminated from the university.

During the interview, Sally had just been informed that her university would be closing a few of their branch campuses because of budget concerns. She was very distraught as she was not clear if she was included in the layoffs as her supervisor was located at the main campus. Sally expressed how cold and disconnected the announcement of the closures was communicated. The outcome of the branch campus closures was not clear as the process was still occurring during the time of the study. Sally mentioned the announcement was made and weeks went by without hearing any further communication. She contacted her main campus supervisor, who was not aware that the closures were occurring; however, she could not receive confirmation if she was included in the terminations. Sally did follow-up with an email to inform the researcher that her supervisor was able to create a position for her so that she could continue her employment with the university.

**Sophia**

For the past eight years, Sophia has worked within the branch campus infrastructure as the assistant vice provost for distance education. Although she utilized the terminology branch campus for her specific area, she recognized seven other off-site locations as a part of the university’s infrastructure. Prior to her current role, she worked for another university that encompassed the branch campus structure; however, she worked on the main campus, therefore, she has was able to share, during her interview, both aspects and understandings of processes
within universities with branch campuses. During the restructuring process of her institution, a change of leadership also occurred. Sophia shared her experience of the communication strategies utilized during this organizational change.

Sophia’s university underwent a restructuring originally when the academic unit and the branch campus were combined into one. The university leaders decided to divide the academics into their own unit. Sophia believed the rebranding occurred so the branch campus could be more marketable across the country. The restructuring created a division between the faculty and the administrative staff. There was a disconnect in the way in which communication was utilized during the organizational change. Main campus leaders that had a research/faculty background would communicate through modalities that were effective for other faculty members, but not for those who worked in administrative roles.

Although Sophia spoke highly of the main campus leadership, she felt the communication strategies that were implemented could have been more effective. One of her key reflections related to the timing of communication. She acknowledged that there were instances in which the information was beneficial, but it came at the wrong time. Sophia decided to become what she looked for from her main campus leadership for her branch campus team. The team began to confide their concerns to her and she was able to assist them in their matriculation through the organizational change.

Sharon

Sharon is very well versed in branch campus infrastructures as she has spent over 25 years working in branch campuses of multiple universities. Sharon’s university is located on the campus of a community college and housed within their University Center in which five other universities are also located. Originally, Sharon worked for another university within the
university center, but left to work for the community college in which they are housed; however, she returned to the university center to take on her current role and works for a different university than before. During the interview, Sharon discussed her experience of the elimination of degree programs that occurred within her institution because of the same program being added to one of the other universities that is housed in the University Center.

Because of the competing institution offering the same program with more accessibility to online delivery within the university center, it completely impacted the prospective enrollment of Sharon’s institution. When Sharon’s team was unable to reach a certain enrollment number, the main campus administration decided to eliminate the degree program, although there was a cohort of students ready to begin the program. Sharon tried to request a phase out year for those students who were ready to begin the program, but to no avail, the main campus leadership did not oblige. Sharon felt the communication strategies that were utilized lacked empathy or understanding for the students, staff, faculty, and community partners. She was made aware of the change via email. Sharon was adamant about allowing her branch campus staff go through the grieving process of this degree program elimination. It is her belief that, when experiencing any form of organizational change, it is important for those impacted to go through every emotion they may feel.

**Thematic Findings**

Based on the researcher’s analysis of the data, review of interview notes, and the reports pulled from QDA Miner system, three themes emerged as they relate to the phenomenon of the lived experiences of branch campus administrators regarding communication strategies during an organizational change. Contextual statements that support each theme include excerpts from the participant’s transcripts are provided.
Organizational Relationship Between Main Campus and Branch Campus

Throughout the data collection process, the researcher listened to each participant’s dialogue as it relates to their experience of their organizational change. Through extensive reading and reviewing of the transcriptions and video recordings, it was clear across all participants’ accounts that their perception of the change, whether positive or negative, aligned with their current relationship between the branch campus administration and their main campus. Throughout the interviewing process, branch campus administrators acknowledged how they feel their main campus leaders perceived their branch campus facility, both the physical location and the infrastructure. Based on the data analysis in QDA Miner, there were connections between the current relationship that the main campus has with their branch campus and the successful implementation of organizational change within the branch campus.

It could be inferred from the data analysis that the communication strategies utilized by main campus administration coincided with their perceived relationship and their perception of the branch campus infrastructure. The following statements are direct quotes from participants who perceived the communication strategies utilized during their organizational change to be effective and aligning those statements with their perception of their relationship with the main campus:

- Mutual respect, collaboration, and cooperation is the dynamic we have created with our main campus. We are not an organization, but more like a living organism where we are always morphing and changing but doing it together. (Cecilia)
- So, for me it was refreshing to have the support of the main campus in helping us make those changes to become more integrated in the institution. (Larry)
The university looked at our branch campus and decided to completely change the mission and purpose so that it could be viewed as an integral piece to the overall community and that has helped us so much in staying viable. (Leigh)

The next group of statements are from participants who perceived the communication strategies utilized during the organizational change as ineffective and their perceptions of the relationship dynamic they have with their main campus:

- We are a cash cow, we just bring in money for the institution left and right. And because of that, just like a degree completion program or something like that, we're making money, they're using us, and we’re abusing adjuncts. (Enoch)

- They [main campus] would have said the impression of the branch and the academic unit when they were together was that it was very much a watered-down version of the institution. It wasn't as rigorous. We had grade inflation, our students weren't as smart, our faculty weren't doing the kinds of research that the faculty at the main campus was doing. (Sophie)

- You already feel like you’re not a part of the institution and you don’t get the support or recognition for all the things that you would if you were on the main campus. (Sharon)

**Branch Campus Leadership**

The theme of branch campus leadership derived from the researcher’s examination of the impact that branch campus leadership has on their subordinates as they are matriculating through the organizational change with either optimism or pessimism/passiveness. Throughout the data collection process, there were connections between resistance to or acceptance of the organizational change and branch campus leadership’s ability or lack thereof, to motivate their
team throughout the organizational change process. The attitude of those in leadership roles within the branch campus greatly impacts how the branch campus administration see their impact within their respective university infrastructures and also how receptive they are to the organizational changes that occur within the university.

The following statements are direct quotes from participants in leadership positions within the branch campus that perceived the communication strategies utilized during their organizational change to be effective and aligning those statements with their leadership style within their branch campus:

- And so, I think, from the branch campus perspective, not being the victim and not playing the victim card is probably one of the things we did best. In my experience, it is way too easy for us [branch campus administration] to say, “well the main campus never tells us anything”….I refuse to let my team take on that positioning and that’s on purpose. Taking a victim posture is a very dangerous thing for communication with a branch campus especially during times of change. (Cecilia)

- I think that the messaging we send to our colleagues is very important and it would be very easy to say “oh, we don’t know what’s going to happen, this is going to be terrible”. If we [leadership] say things are going to be awful, then yeah, they will be. (Brad)

- Do we want to be these downtrodden victims that get jumped on by the main campus? Or do we want to be these proactive, positive, involved branch campuses that are every bit as important to the mission of the institution as the main campus? Have a different philosophy, have a real positive philosophy. (Larry)
The next group of statements are from participants in leadership positions within the branch campus who perceived the communication strategies utilized during their organizational change to be ineffective and aligning those statements with their leadership style within their branch campus:

- We were just really disregarded. No one made sure we were involved in the process [organizational change]; we were very upset and just felt they didn’t care about us, so we started not to care and just deal with whatever was coming our way. (Sally)
- We have a “we’re just winging it” culture. (Miami)
- They [main campus administrators] don’t even know our names, but they are making decisions that affect what we are doing here in the branch campus and I have to sit with that frustration just like my colleagues. It’s easy for them to eliminate this degree program, and now we’re left with picking up the pieces. (Sophie)

**Empathetic Communication During Organizational Change**

While participants spoke in detail regarding the communication strategies implemented by their main campus administration during an organizational change, they also acknowledged that empathetic communication is valuable to the successful matriculation of branch campus administrators through an organizational change. Communicating information in a way that showed care and concern was considered just as important as the message itself. Empathetic communication played a major role in every communication strategy utilized during the branch campus administrators’ lived experiences of organizational change.

The following statements are direct quotes from participants that perceived the communication strategies utilized during their organizational change to be effective and aligning those statements with their perception of empathetic communication from their main campus:
• But one of the things that we really looked at, as far as the level of engagement, is that there was an opportunity for everyone to feel involved at all levels. We wanted them to feel a part of this new opportunity. It’s amazing, the things that people will do when you provide an environment for them to do really great things. (Leigh)

• They [main campus] made sure that if somebody needed to talk, they would have somebody for us to talk to. They continuously reiterated to the university community “we are going to get through this together”. (Larry)

• Our president was extremely transparent with us. When our higherups didn’t have an answer to our concerns, they let us know, but they were diligent enough to try to at least find the answer. The administration was very transparent during the entire process, which helped my branch campus staff trust that they were leading us in the right direction and what we were doing [organizational change] was for a greater purpose to our students, faculty and community. (Cecilia)

The next group of statements are direct quotes from participants that perceived the communication strategies utilized during their organizational change to be ineffective and aligning those statements with their perception of empathetic communication from their main campus:

• I don’t think there was that much thought given to it. I think it was just “we’re doing the things that we know we’re going to do”, and it was almost dismissive. As if they were saying “they [ branch campus administrators] don’t really need to know, so we’re just going to move along with the process, and they’ll know when they know” kind of thing. It seems like a disregard for the employees and the faculty who’ve given so much of their time to this university. (Sophie)
• The fact that they [main campus administration] were so disconnected from the branch campus staff, it was really easy for them to just make the decision and move on. Where if they had been a little more caring and engaged, it wouldn’t have been as easy for them to just cut ties and move on. (Tianna)

• When I tried to follow-up with a phone call that didn’t go anywhere, I sent an email to my boss looking for a number of different options, but to no avail. If you make this huge decision via email and then you’re not available for a phone call, that’s just really difficult. And then when we did have a phone call, I felt like there was not a lot of empathy regarding the emotions that everyone was feeling around it. (Sharon)

Understanding the Effective and Ineffective Communication Strategies

The impetus of this research was to understand the effective and ineffective communication strategies utilized during an organizational change within a university’s branch campus. With the conceptual framework in mind, a series of questions were compiled to develop an understanding of what those communication strategies consist of and how they assist branch campus administrators’ matriculation through the organizational change process. During the analytical phase, the researcher constructed common strategies that were consistent across the participants’ responses. The following section provides the effective and ineffective strategies that were extracted from the interviews of each participant. Figure 1 shows a Venn Diagram that would suggest many of the communication strategies utilized during an organizational change may overlap; however, how those strategies are implemented during the organizational change determined the difference between their level of effectiveness or ineffectiveness.
Figure 1. Ineffective and effective communication strategies diagram.

The qualifying survey results consisted of five participants that deemed the communication strategies utilized during their organizational change as ineffective, four participants considered it effective and one participant determined the communication strategies were neither effective nor ineffective. During the coding phase, the communication strategies that emerged were consistent across the collective of the participants’ experiences. Across all five accounts, participants that deemed the communication strategies to be ineffective expressed commonalities of feeling anxious, lost, confused, and shocked as they matriculated through the organizational change process; whereas, all four participants who deemed the communication to be effective expressed common terms such as motivated, excited, involved/included and proactive. It is pertinent to note that nine of the ten participants felt some level of anxiousness as it related to entering the “unknown” of the organizational change; however, those who felt the communication was ineffective also felt anxious from the lack of the communication being given regarding the organizational change.
One of the prevalent communication strategies that was deemed ineffective related to the utilization of email as a first line of communication of the organizational change. Four of the five participants that deemed the communication strategy ineffective experienced being informed of the organizational change via an email first. However, the four participants that deemed this communication strategy effective acknowledged email communication being effective only as a follow-up method or a way to revisit information that was discussed in person. Secondly, communication strategies that lacked detailed information was also recognized as causing feelings of confusion for four of the five participants that deemed the strategies to be ineffective. All four participants that experienced effective communication suggested that there was a defined organizational chart that determined who would disseminate the information, the timing in which they would disseminate, and what communication modalities would be most effective to utilize.

To continue, as it relates to an organizational chart, eight of the ten participants felt the announcement of any organizational change would be most effective if delivered to them by their immediate supervisor. The timing of when communication was given emerged as a major factor in the participants’ ability to accept and matriculate through the organizational change with minimal resistance. Four of the participants presented feelings of resistance, shock, and confusion when the organizational change was communicated sporadically or suddenly with no defined organizational structure. However, six of the participants expressed a more positive matriculation and acceptance of the organizational change when made aware of the change within six months to a year prior to the organizational change occurring. The frequency of communication emerged as an important factor as it relates to participants’ ability to matriculate through the organizational change successfully. All ten participants felt a level of anxiousness
when several weeks or months would pass without receiving any updated information regarding the organizational change.

It is pertinent to note that all ten participants acknowledged face-to-face communication as the best communication strategy to utilize when disseminating information regarding any organizational change. Four of the participants that determined the communication strategies were ineffective, but desired more face-to-face communication, presented codes of *impersonal*, *disconnected or lacking empathy*; whereas, five of the participants that deemed the communication strategy effective, presented codes of *support, cared for and involved* in the organizational change. Informal communication also emerged in the coding phase as an effective communication strategy to utilize during an organizational change within a branch campus according to eight study participants. Informal communication was coded to statements that expressed feelings of transparency, empathy, and care as it related to conversations that were had with main or branch campus administrators that lacked formal settings (i.e email, official meetings).

**Conclusion**

This chapter provided summaries of the lived experience of branch campus administration as it related to the communication strategies utilized during an organizational change. The presentation provided a depiction of ten study participants’ experiences to allow the reader to become acquainted with the stories of those working within a university’s branch campus during a time of organizational change. The researcher examined how participants were able to matriculate through the organizational change process. Furthermore, the chapter identified communication strategies that study participants deemed both effective and ineffective during an organizational change. The chapter also revealed thematic findings that were
constructed as an outcome of the data collection and analytical process that was outlined in Chapter Three.

Branch campus administrators recognize that timing is very crucial when implementing organizational change. They are more receptive to organizational change when they are given six months to a year’s notice prior to the occurrence of the organizational change, which ultimately gives them time to process what will occur. They prefer to be informed of organizational changes via in person, face to face communication, and only utilizing email as a follow-up to conversations, never the first line of communication.

Branch campus administrators believe in organizational charts that inform when information will be shared, who will share it and what communication modality will be the most effective. In addition, the relationship between the main campus and branch campus plays a major role in how these communication strategies are implemented. Branch campus administrators’ perceptions of how their main campus views the branch campus infrastructure had a connection with how study participants viewed the communication strategies utilized during the organizational change.

More importantly, branch campus leaders’ perspectives and outlook regarding the organizational change impacted the resistance, motivation, and matriculation of their staff through the organizational change process. The way in which branch campus leaders were able to motivate their team, as well as be the voice for their branch campus with the main location, was pertinent to how valued the branch campus staff felt during the organizational change. However, regardless if participants found the communication strategies utilized to be effective or ineffective, all branch campus administrators desire empathetic communication when delivering communication that can impact the staff, faculty, and students of a branch campus. Chapter Five
will provide a more detailed discussion of the findings as they relate to the study’s research questions, literature review and the conceptual framework established for this study. In addition, the chapter will provide recommendations for future studies as it relates to the lived experiences of branch campus administration.


CHAPTER FIVE
DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter Five presents discussions of the study’s research questions as it relates to the literature review and the conclusions from the findings developed in Chapter Four. This chapter gives perspective to the lived experience of branch campus administrators regarding the communication strategies utilized during an organizational change. A qualifying survey identified the participants who were a part of a semistructured interview. The interview transcripts were coded in the QDA Miner software system and then utilized by the researcher to recognize thematic findings by conducting an interpretive phenomenological analysis. The coding process also led to the researcher recognizing common communication strategies that participants deemed to be effective and ineffective. This research sought to fill the gap in existing literature as it relates to the communication strategies utilized by main campus administrators that will aid in the matriculation of branch campus administrators through an organizational change process. In Chapter 5, the researcher will discuss the thematic findings and correlate these findings with the current literature regarding this topic. Furthermore, she provides a synopsis of the research questions, implications of the study’s findings, and recommendations for future research. The participants were given an opportunity to share their experiences of working within a branch campus and sharing how the communication strategies that were implemented impacted their matriculation through the organizational change.

Discussion of the Research Questions

This section will provide an overview of the research questions established for this study and give meaning to them based on the interpretive phenomenological analysis of the data collected and the current literature.
Research Question 1: What are the lived experiences of branch campus administrators receiving key communication strategies from a main campus during a branch campus organizational change?

Branch campus administrators who participated in this study expressed varying dispositions regarding organizational change within their branch campus when receiving key communication strategies. According to the data collected, there is a connection between the effectiveness of the communication strategies utilized and the branch campus administrators’ ability to matriculate through the organizational change with minimal resistance. This aligns with findings of Zafar and Naveed (2014) who suggested that, when communication is not adequate during an organizational change process, it creates resistance from employees; mostly in part to minimal understanding of why or how the change will occur. Branch campus administrators that described their experience with the communication strategies as ineffective felt their experience was impersonal, anxiety-filled, confusing, and perceived a lack of empathy from their main campus administrators. However, branch campus administrators that described their experience with the communication strategies utilized as effective felt that, while their experience was relatively anxiety-filled because of the fear of the unknown, they felt supported, informed, and included in the organizational change process.

There were three thematic findings that are discussed later in this chapter; however, it is pertinent to acknowledge their emergence when answering the research question regarding their experience during the branch campus organizational change. The themes that emerged were the organizational relationship between the main campus and the branch campus, branch campus leadership, and empathetic communication during an organizational change. Each of these thematic findings played a part in the overall experience of the branch campus administrators as
it required them to explore their perception of the organizational culture they currently operate in and the organizational culture regarding the dissemination of information, specifically during an organizational change.

Furthermore, the thematic findings of this research required branch campus administrators to undergo an evaluation of themselves and their branch campus leadership. The study required branch campus leaders to recognize their level of impact and how they can assist their branch campus employees in matriculating through the organizational change process. Lastly, branch campus administrators ultimately seek for their main campus administrators to utilize communication that shows care and concern for branch campus students, staff, faculty, and other stakeholders.

**Research Question 2: What key communication strategies do branch campus administrators perceive are most effective during a branch campus organizational change?**

It should be stated at the beginning of this discussion that there was concise agreement across all participants that the communication strategies and their modalities are consistent from all perspectives of participants (ineffective, effective, neither); however, the method in which these communication strategies are utilized determined their level of effectiveness. There is very minimal alignment to current literature as it relates to the effective and ineffective communication strategies utilized during an organizational change because of the lack of research regarding this specific topic. Nevertheless, one of the most effective communication strategies that emerged during this research related to face-to-face communication. More specifically, branch campus administrators preferred to learn of any organizational change through an in-person or video conferencing platform with their immediate supervisor. Receiving information from individuals with whom they have built a rapport aided in branch campus
administrators’ ability to understand the situation, receive information, and matriculate through the organizational change effort with minimal resistance.

Furthermore, branch campus administrators value the impact and utilization of an organizational chart. For the purposes of this research, an organizational chart represents the logistics of who will disseminate the information, when they will deliver the communication, to whom they will share it, and the modality that will be utilized. During an organizational change, detailed information emerged as an effective communication strategy. To eliminate the possibility of resistance, confusion, or anxiety, main campus leadership should attempt to have the logistical aspects in place prior to disseminating communication to the branch campus staff, faculty, and students. This aligns with DeRidder’s (2004) research, who suggested that communication strategies must be composed of four areas including communication goals, audience, communication plan, and channels. In continuation, timing of the communication was also an important factor into how branch campus administrators were able to matriculate through the organizational change. According to the research study, providing branch campuses six to twelve months’ notice before the implementation of any organizational change allowed them time to grieve, express concerns, and accept the change that occurred.

Email as a communication strategy was effective only as a follow-up method to in-person meetings. Branch campus administrators found emails to be of value to revisit the information that was discussed during an in-person conversation. Emails that provide the logistics, reminders or memorandums of the organizational change were considered helpful information. Lastly, informal communication strategies such as “couch conversations”, one-on-one sessions with supervisors or other colleagues was also deemed as an effective communication strategy during organizational change. Allowing branch campus administrators an open forum and space to
discuss the organizational change without reservation or reprimand assisted them in matriculating through the process with minimal resistance.

**Research Question 3: What key communication strategies do branch campus administrators perceive are ineffective during a branch campus organizational change?**

As mentioned in the discussion above, the communication strategies utilized during an organizational change did not differ; however, the way in which the strategies were utilized determined their level of effectiveness. One of the first forms of communication strategies that was deemed ineffective related to learning of the organizational change via email. Utilizing email as a first line of communication regarding any organizational change left branch campus administrators feeling lost, confused, and anxious. Furthermore, branch campus administrators felt this method showed a lack of empathy or concern for their team when information of an organizational change that will impact them greatly would occur through this means.

Communication that lacked detailed information or the utilization of an organizational chart was also deemed as ineffective during an organizational change. Branch campus administrators who received communication regarding the organizational change from main campus leadership with whom they did not have a rapport was found to be ineffective. Furthermore, when the information that was shared lacked logistical information as to when the change would occur, who would inform, and the like, it left branch campus administrators in a state of anxiety, which ultimately impacted their ability to matriculate through the organizational change with minimal resistance.

**Interpretation of Findings**

After an analysis of the data collected, three themes emerged that provided introspect to the lived experiences of branch campus administrators during an organizational change and the
communication strategies utilized. In chapter four, direct quotes were utilized to support the relevance of each theme throughout the data collection process. In chapter five, the thematic findings are discussed in greater detail and provide insight to existing literature and research. Furthermore, the thematic findings added alignment to the conceptual frameworks of John Kotter’s (1996) eight steps to leading change and Barrett’s (2002) strategic employee communication model.

**Organizational Relationship Between Main Campus and Branch Campus**

One of the dynamics that emerged during the interviewing process of this research is the importance of the organizational relationship between the main campus and its branch campuses. The research study determined there is a relationship between the organizational culture within the university and the branch campus administrators’ perceptions of the effectiveness of the communication strategies utilized during the organizational change. This theme spoke to current literature regarding the topic of organizational culture. This finding aligned with the research of Aktas et al. (2011), who found that the organizational culture influenced the organizational effectiveness.

Branch campus administrators who perceived the communication strategies to be effective during an organizational change spoke to the positive relationship held between the branch campus and its main location. Branch campus administrators discussed the value and importance they felt their main campus leadership provided which aligns with Cameron and Quinn’s (1999) research on clan culture. Clan culture represents an atmosphere in which there is an emphasis on empowerment and employee involvement (Cameron & Quinn, 1999). Furthermore, the perceptions of branch campus administrators of the relationship with their main campus reflected their overall viewpoint of how the organizational change was communicated,
the modalities in which main campus leadership used, and the implementation of the organizational change within the branch campus.

George and Jones (2002) suggested that an organization’s culture was an informal design of values and beliefs that controlled the way people in the group interacted with each other. This is reflected in the findings of this research. When the relationship between the main campus and branch campus was perceived in a negative light, the study showed a connection to branch campus administrators’ perception of the communication strategies as ineffective. Branch campus administrators believed that main campus leaders utilized communication strategies in correlation with their connection to the branch campus. Those who perceived the communication as ineffective were not surprised by the way in which they received information regarding the organizational change. The same could be said for individuals who perceived the communication strategies to be effective; they believed they received this effective communication because of their cohesive relationship with their main campus. This aligns with the work conducted by Meyer et al. (2007) which suggested that employees’ commitment to the organizational change as well as their ability to matriculate through the organizational change was related to the level of support from higher-level administration provided during the change.

**Branch Campus Leadership**

The leadership within the branch campus was a pertinent factor in how well branch campus administrators were able to receive and understand information, and matriculate through their organizational change. This aligns with Yazdanifard (2015), who found that effective leadership is a pertinent construct in managing change and considered a major factor in the motivation and encouragement for employees to accept organizational change. It was evident through the data collected that the branch campus leadership’s ideology impacted not only how
their team perceived the organizational change, but also impacted their perception of the main campus. Many branch campus leaders spoke about refuting the “red-headed, step-child” treatment they perceived branch campuses needing to endure. When branch campus leaders took on an active role in making sure they developed a relationship with their main campus and showed the value of their branch campus, those individuals perceived the communication utilized during their organizational change was effective.

Freifeld (2013) acknowledged this concept as he suggested that, when effective leadership is in place, it allows the opportunity for employees to trust their leadership, which can make the organizational change process easier to accept. Nevertheless, it can be implied by the research that when branch campus leaders do not take an active role in showing their value to their main campus or believe that they are an “outsider” in their infrastructure, they perceived the communication strategies utilized during an organizational change as ineffective. Both dichotomies align with the research of Abou-Moghil (2015) who suggested that leaders can lead their employees towards the mission and vision of the institution; or lead them away from it.

**Empathetic Communication During Organizational Change**

Regardless of the effectiveness of the communication strategies utilized, across all accounts, branch campus administrators expressed a desire for empathetic communication. The ideology of empathetic communication is one that did not align with current literature, perhaps because it is unchartered territory. According to Rosenzweig (2012), this form of communication has mostly been utilized in patientcare within the medical field. Empathetic communication recognizes the impact actions or decisions can have on others. It was recognized through the research study as communication that was expressed with concern, understanding, and transparency. This revealed itself through a myriad of communication forums such as informal
“couch conversations”, transparent conversations with team members and supervisors, face-to-face communications, and the like. This concept aligns with Halston’s (2015) findings, who suggested that university employees preferred interpersonal communication via in-person meetings and even outings.

Branch campus administrators believed their ability to matriculate through an organizational change was impacted by the level of empathy, care, and concern that their main campus leadership expressed during the process. When the initial communication of the organizational change was disseminated, branch campus administrators who felt the delivery was effective acknowledged the main campus leadership’s ability to inform them in a timely manner, in-person, and allowed them the time to grieve the loss of what once was, and accept what was to come. Furthermore, main campus leaders who created time and space for any branch campus administrator to express their concerns showed a level of empathy that branch campus administrators deemed as important.

Branch campus administrators who expressed a desire to receive empathetic communication felt as if they did not matter or their work and dedication to the institution was not valued by their main campus leadership. Their disposition towards the organizational change reflected higher levels of resistance as they did not trust the decisions or implementations of their main campus leadership. This aligns with Clemons (2003), whose research suggested that a deficit in communication can cause a severe detriment to the relationship and trust of employees’ leaders, and potentially create a decline in employee’s performance.

**Implications of Research**

In understanding the lived experiences of branch campus administrators matriculating through an organizational change and their perception of the communication strategies utilized,
this study sought to address the gap in existing literature identified by Hancock and Algozzine (2017) and French and Holden (2012). These researchers acknowledged organizational change within higher education is minimally researched; however, the study of organizational change within branch campuses of post-secondary institutions is even more underdeveloped. This research explored branch campus administration’s perceptions about the communication strategies utilized by main campus leadership during an organizational change. It was the researcher’s goal to provide insight that can serve as a foundation for further research into this phenomenon.

The results of this study showed that the relationship between the main campus and branch campus is related to the effectiveness of the communication strategies utilized during an organizational change. This aligns with the work of several researchers that suggest how an organization’s culture dictates the relationship and interaction between employees (Aktas et al., 2011; George & Jones, 2002). When there is the perception of a positive relationship between the two entities, communication is considered effective as branch campus administrators expressed feelings of being valued during an organizational change. Furthermore, branch campus leaders made an impact on their team’s ability to accept and matriculate through their organizational change with minimal resistance. Regardless of the branch campus administrator’s perception of the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the communication strategies utilized, all participants desired main campus leadership to utilize empathetic communication when delivering information. Utilizing empathetic communication created a sense of value and concern for the branch campus administrators, which resulted in them accepting the changing, even if they don’t agree with the change.
Furthermore, communication strategies emerged across the collective thoughts of branch campus administrators that were deemed effective to utilize during organizational change. Main campus leaders’ utilization of an organizational chart was found to be an effective communication strategy. Organizing who would disseminate information, to whom it would be delivered, and the modality in which they would inform employees was pertinent to reducing any confusion, anxiety, or stress during the organizational change process. This aligns with Barrett’s (2002) strategic employee communication model that recognized communication should be clear, concise with a strategic plan, and present a vision for the organizational change. In addition, Barrett’s (2002) strategic employee communication model aligned with this study as it also reiterated the importance of creating communication strategies that motivated employees to commit to the organizational change. This aligned with the study’s findings regarding the impact and influence branch campus leaders must possess to aid in the matriculation of their branch campus administrators through the organizational change process with minimal resistance.

As Kotter’s (1996) eight steps to organizational change acknowledged, leaders should disseminate information through effective strategies; however, this research study recognized what those strategies could be for an institution experiencing organizational change. Timing of the organizational change, as well as timing of when information was disseminated, emerged as a pertinent factor in providing branch campus administrators time to process what would be occurring and provide enough time for any logistical aspects to be implemented. This segment outlined the implications for practice through the recommendations for both branch campus administrators and their respective main campus leadership.
Recommendations for Action

In a response to the lived experiences of branch campus administrators during an organizational change, the following recommendations were designed by the researcher for institutions with branch campuses to employ. Through the utilization of these recommendations, leaders have an opportunity to implement successful matriculation of their employees through the utilization of effective communication strategies. As it relates to the organizational relationship between main campuses and their branch campuses, the researcher recommends a transparent conversation between the leadership within both infrastructures that discusses their perception of their position within the university.

This conversation began with the dissemination of an anonymous survey to branch campus administration, so they might feel more comfortable expressing their true perceptions via an anonymous platform than in-person. As a follow-up, a face-to-face meeting in which main campus leadership addresses those perceptions could take place. It is the researcher’s recommendation that this initiative occur prior to any future organizational changes being implemented within their respective infrastructures. Once this initiative is complete, main campus leadership would have more knowledge and understanding of how their employees will perceive the organizational change based on their perception of the relationship they have with their main campus leadership. Having this conversation will allow main campus leadership to understand how their branch campus employees perceive them, their value, and their impact within the institution. Furthermore, this conversation affords the branch campus employees to feel heard, cared for, and have their thoughts and feelings recognized as valuable.

The second recommendation is related to communication strategies that main campus leadership should utilize during the implementation of an organizational change. It is
recommended that an organizational chart be created by main campus leadership prior to the implementation of any organizational change. The organizational chart should consist of dates and times of the dissemination of each phase of the organizational change, who will be responsible for delivering the information, the target audience, and the communication modality that will be utilized to inform different stakeholders. Based on the research study, it is recommended that main campus leadership allow six to twelve months’ notice to branch campus administrators prior to any organizational change implementation. The appropriate empathetic communication allows those impacted time to grieve the loss of their existing infrastructure and time to accept the change.

Furthermore, it is recommended that branch campus administrators be informed of the organizational change in a face-to-face (in-person or video conferencing) meeting that is conducted by their immediate supervisor. This allows an opportunity for those impacted to receive the information from individuals with whom they have built a rapport, who are aware of the dispositions and reactions of their team members, and who can deliver the information in an empathetic tone. In addition, email communication should be utilized only as a follow-up to any in-person meeting as it allows the branch campus administrators a forum to revisit pertinent information that has been discussed. It is also recommended for main campus leaders to coordinate space and time to allow transparent and open conversation with branch campus administrators who have concerns or questions.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

During the analysis phase of this research, three areas were identified as potential opportunities for future research. The first opportunity involves the study population. Although this research represented individuals across the United States, the researcher believes this study
could be more impactful if developed and utilized within individual institutions. This will allow main campus leaders to understand exactly what is considered effective or ineffective as it relates to their communication strategies for their institution. A second opportunity for future research would be to explore this concept of effective and ineffective communication strategies from the perspective of the main campus leadership, which could potentially aid in understanding the parallels and/or the disconnects between both entities. Lastly, a third opportunity for future research would be to explore the communication strategies needed during crisis management.

**Conclusion**

This interpretive phenomenological study sought to explore the lived experiences of branch campus administration as they matriculated through an organizational change and their perception of the communication strategies utilized by their main campus leadership. The phenomenon indicated that branch campus administrators believe there is a connection between their relationship with their main campus and they level of effectiveness of the communication strategies that were utilized. Those who perceived the communication strategies to be effective also felt their relationship with their main campus was purposeful and valuable; whereas those who deemed the communication ineffective felt their relationship was undervalued.

While the relationship between the main campus and branch campus is pertinent to the way in which information is communicated; branch campus leadership also made an impact on how well the branch campus administration matriculated through the organizational change. Branch campus leaders’ ability to show their impact and value to their institutional infrastructure can provide the necessary motivation and proactive nature to their team to matriculate through the organizational change with minimal resistance. Lastly, empathetic communication is needed across the board when disseminating pertinent information regarding the organizational change.
Ultimately, branch campus administrators want to feel valued, cared for and appreciated; therefore, any communication strategies implemented during an organizational change should encompass a level of empathy in their delivery.
REFERENCES


doi.org/10.5539/ibr.v8n2p198


doi.org/10.1179/026217104000409


doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2011.09.092


https://doi.org/10.1177/1050651903260800


https://doi.org/10.1108/02621711211253231


doi:10.1080/714042520


https://doi.org/10.1016/1053-4822(91)90011-Z

https://doi.org/10.1348/096317906X118685


doi:10.1097/01.NPR.0000408626.24599.9e


Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education. (2010). What is regional accreditation and why is it important? Retrieved from https://www.wiche.edu/knowledge/14295


APPENDIX A:

PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH:
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BRANCH CAMPUS ADMIN
January 8, 2020

Dear Ms. Stallworth,

I am writing to inform you that your Request to Conduct Research on the following topic:

*The Communication Strategies Utilized during an Organizational Change within Universities’ Branch Campuses*

has been granted by the National Association of Branch Campus Administrators (NABCA) Research Committee. This approval is granted with the understanding that you will share the results of your work with our committee and membership. We encourage you to do so in at least one of the following ways:

1. Send final report/dissertation to the NABCA research committee representatives (cyndee.moore@ung.edu and gary.adcox@ung.edu);
2. Submit an article based on your work to the NABCA Access Journal for publication and distribution to our membership;
3. Present your findings at our 2021 annual conference.

I will be your contact during this time for the purposes of navigating NABCA, reaching out to members, etc., so please feel free to contact me when and if you have questions or need assistance. I am most easily reached via email at Cyndee.moore@ung.edu.

We look forward to working with you. Best of luck as you begin your research.

Regards,

Cyndee Perdue Moore, Ed.D.

Chairperson, NABCA Research Committee

Cc: Dr. J. Gary Adcox, Vice Chair, NABCA Research Committee
PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH:
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BRANCH CAMPUS ADMIN

Request to Conduct Research

Portia Stalcworth

Thank you, Dr. Moore for the clarification! Talk with you soon, Portia

Tue 3/3/2020 11:58 AM
Portia Stalcworth

Cyndee Moore <Cyndee.Moore@ung.edu>

Tue 3/3/2020 11:59 AM
Portia Stalcworth

Portia —

We would prefer that you send it out, but will be happy to assist in any way you might need. You may mention in your intro/invitation email that the project has been approved by NACCA’s Research Committee and results will be shared with the membership. Further, if they have concerns or questions, they can contact me as Chair of the committee. Make sense?

Thanks,
Cyndee

Dr. Cyndee Perdue Moore
Executive Director
University of North Georgia - Oconee

Oconee Campus | 117
1891 Bishop Ferns Parkway | Watkinsville, GA 30677
706-810-8139 | cyndee.moore@ung.edu

UNG UNIVERSITY OF NORTH GEORGIA

-----

Portia Stalcworth

Tue 3/3/2020 11:52 AM
Cyndee Moore <Cyndee.Moore@ung.edu>

Good Morning Dr. Moore,

I hope this message finds you in great spirits! I am almost ready to begin conducting my research and I just needed to clarify for my committee chairs on who will be responsible for disseminating the invitations to participate in the survey and interview of this research. Will be communicating directly to the members utilizing the membership directory or will I send the information to you and you will disseminate? There is a line in the approval letter that they are interpreting as you will be sending out to NABCA members; however, I thought you and I discuss I would handle that. Let me know your thoughts.

Portia

-----

See more messages
Request to Conduct Research

Cyndee Moore 
West 1/10/2020 9:43 AM
Portia Stallworth

Looks good Portia. You have permission to proceed as proposed.
Best, Cyndee

Dr. Cyndee Moore
Executive Director
University of North Georgia - Oconee
Oconee Campus - 117
1801 Bishop Farm Parkway | Watkinsville, GA 30677
706/395-5391 | office.ung.edu

Are the suggestions above helpful? Yes No

Portia Stallworth

Good evening Dr. Moore, I wanted to resend you the information that will be disseminated to the NASCA membership once again for a final review. I changed the email to include your statements ...

Tue 1/10/2020 9:27 PM

Portia Stallworth

1/2-19 Dr. Cyndee Moore Chair of NASCA Research Committee Re: Permission to Conduct Research Study Greetings Dr. Moore I am writing to request permission to conduct a research...

Mon 12/2/2019 2:15 PM
APPENDIX B:

EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE

Invitation to Qualifying Survey:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Email Subject Line:</th>
<th>Invitation to Participate in Qualifying Survey - Dissertation Study on Communication during Organizational Change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hello Branch Campus Administrators:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>My name is Portia Stallworth and I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership program at the University of New England. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of universities’ branch campus employees regarding the effective and ineffective communication strategies utilized during a branch campus organizational change and examine how those communication strategies affected the way in which employees matriculated through the organizational change process.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This is an invitation for branch campus administrators to participate in a qualifying survey regarding an organizational change experience during your tenure. I am seeking participants who meet the following criteria:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Must work or currently work in a branch campus of an accredited university in the United States.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The branch campus must be an established infrastructure within their respective universities for over 10 years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The organizational change experienced within the branch campus must have occurred in the last 5 years.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- The organizational change must have affected more than one department within the branch campus (i.e. branch campus relocation, change of policy or procedure, the elimination or adding of new degree programs, implementation of a university-wide software system, etc).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consent to Participate in Survey:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your participation in this research study is voluntary. The survey involves completing an online survey that will take 5 minutes to complete. The qualifying survey will involve 6 closed-ended questions that correlate with the scope of this study and one question regarding your potential participation in the semistructured interview portion of this research. Your responses will be confidential. All data will be stored in a password protected electronic format. By clicking the link below to participate in the survey you are agreeing to the following:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have read the above information. You voluntarily agree to participate. You are at least 18 years of age.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em><strong>insert link</strong></em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This research study has been approved by the NABCA Research Committee and the results will be shared with the membership.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thank you and I look forward to learning from you all soon,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portia Stallworth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Invitation to Participate & Schedule Interview:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Email Subject Line:</th>
<th>Invitation to Participate in Interview -Dissertation Study on Org Change &amp; Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Hello (name),

Thank your agreeing to participate in the semistructured interview portion of my doctoral study for the Educational Leadership program at the University of New England. The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of universities’ branch campus employees regarding the effective and ineffective communication strategies utilized during a branch campus organizational change and examine how those communication strategies affected the way in which employees matriculated through the organizational change process. Prior to conducting our interview session, please review and complete the attached consent form and return to me prior to our scheduled interviewing time. Once I have received your agreement and consent form, I will send you an email with a list of dates and times that will be available for you to select the most convenient time to converse. The interview will last between 45 to 60-minutes and will be conducted via Zoom video conferencing. The interview audio will be recorded during this time.

Thank you for your efforts,

Portia

---

**Confirmation of Interview Email:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Email Subject Line:</th>
<th>Interview Confirmation for Dissertation Study- Org Change &amp; Communication</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Hello (name),

This is to confirm our scheduled Zoom meeting on ________ at _________. The interview should last between 45 to 60-minutes. The interview audio will be recorded to make sure your thoughts are conveyed and interpreted as accurately as possible. I will send a reminder email to you prior to the day and time of the agreed upon interview time.
APPENDIX C:

QUALIFYING SURVEY

For the purpose of this study, please focus and choose only **one organizational change** that impacted several departments within the branch campus.

Q1. The university in which I experienced a branch campus organizational change:
   - A public 4-year college/university
   - A private 4-year college/university

Q2. The position in which I worked or currently working during the branch campus organizational change:
   - Director
   - Assistant Director
   - Manager
   - Assistant Manager
   - Advisor
   - Coordinator
   - Program Manager
   - Staff Assistant

Q3. The department in which I worked or currently work during the branch campus organizational change:
   - Admissions
   - Student Affairs
   - Financial Services
   - Academic Affairs (Faculty)
   - Residence Life
   - Technology
   - Other

Q4. The type of organizational change in which I experienced working at a branch campus encompassed:
   - Change of location
   - Change of leadership
   - Elimination of degree programs
   - Expanding of degree programs
   - Major Policy change
   - Budget Cutting
   - Other _______________________

a.

Q5. My experience of the communication strategies utilized by main campus leadership regarding the organizational change:
   - The communication was effective
   - The communication was ineffective
   - The communication was neither effective nor ineffective
Q6. Do you wish to participate in a possible 45 to 60-minute Zoom interview in which we discuss your experience of communication during the organizational change?
  o Yes
  o No
Name: _______________________________ Email: _______________________
Phone _______________ 
Preferred Contact: ___ Phone ___ Email
APPENDIX D:

CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND
CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: The Role of Communication during an Organizational Change within Universities’ Branch Campuses

Principal Investigator(s):
Portia R. Stallworth,
Doctoral Student
University of New England
pstattworth@une.edu

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?
Universities’ branch campuses are continuously developing and changing to remain marketable in the higher education arena. Understanding how to effectively communicate those changes to branch campus administrators will assist in successfully completing organizational change that results from minimizing resistance and potentially increasing commitment to change or to a change culture. This study will determine the perceived effective and ineffective communication strategies utilized during an organizational change within a branch campus.

Who will be in this study?
Participants in this study will be individuals who full-time administrators within a branch campus during the time of the organizational change. The following are additional requirements of both the university branch campus and the employee participating:

- Must work or currently work in a branch campus of an accredited university in the United States.
- The branch campus must be an established infrastructure within their respective universities for over 10 years.
- The organizational change experienced within the branch campus must have occurred in the last five years.
- The organizational change must have affected more than one department within the branch campus (i.e. branch campus relocation, change of policy or procedure, the
elimination or adding of new degree programs, implementation of a university-wide software system, etc)

**What will I be asked to do?**
Agree to participate in a 45 to 60-minute interview regarding your experiences.
Your interview will be recorded and transcribed.
You will not be compensated for participation in this study.

**What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**
There are no foreseeable risk as it pertains to participating in this study.

**What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?**
You will be able to assist in the discovery of information that is pertinent to the field of communication and organizational change within universities’ branch campuses, an area in which has been minimally researched.

**What will it cost me?**
There are no costs to participate in this survey.

**How will my privacy be protected?**
There will be no use of your name or your institution during the data collection of this research. Pseudonyms will be utilized instead.

**How will my data be kept confidential?**
Interview recordings will be transcribed by a professional transcription service, Rev.Com and analyzed with MDQ Miner. Once transcribed, the interview recordings will be destroyed. This is anticipated to occur within 7 years of taping.

All records related to this study will be kept at the home of the researcher on a secure external hard drive that will be stored in a locked file cabinet.

All individually identifiable data will be destroyed once the study is complete.

Participants in the study may request a copy of the findings.

A copy of the signed consent form will be maintained by the principal investigator of at least 7 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a secure location that only the researcher will have access to and will be affiliated with any data obtained during the project.

**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 researcher or your respective institution.
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 will be informed of any significant findings developed during the course of the research that may affect your willingness to participate in the research.
**What other options do I have?**
You may choose not to participate.

**Whom may I contact with questions?**
The researcher conducting this study is Portia R. Stallworth, Doctoral Candidate at the University of New England.

- For more information regarding this study, please contact Portia Stallworth at pstallworth@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:**
I have reviewed the information above regarding my consent to participate in this research study and agree to take part in the research voluntarily.

____________________________________  ____________________
Participant’s Signature                Date
APPENDIX E:

INTERVIEW FORMAT AND QUESTIONS

Interview Format for Doctoral Study
The Communication Strategies Utilized during an Organizational Change within Universities’ Branch Campuses

Introduction: The researcher will re-introduce herself to the interviewee and thank them for participating in this study. The researcher will give an overview of the purpose of the study, what the attended goals are of the interview, the length of the interview and a general overview of what topical areas will be covered during the interview.

“The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of universities’ branch campus employees regarding the effective and ineffective communication strategies utilized during a branch campus organizational change and examine how those communication strategies affected the way in which employees matriculated through the organizational change process. As someone who has been a part of a branch campus organizational change, you may be able to provide key insight into what that experience is like. During our time together, I plan to ask you a round of questions about the organizational change you experienced and how it impacted your ability to matriculate through the process. I would also ask that you review the consent form again and make sure it is in fact the same form in which you agreed to via email a few weeks prior. If you have any questions, please feel to ask before we move forward. If you do not have any other questions, I will begin the interview.”

Interview Questions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Follow-up</th>
<th>Nonverbal Communication/Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I’d like to begin with just learning a bit more about you and your role with the branch campus? How long have you worked with your university? Have you ever worked at a branch campus before or was this your first experience?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. In your original qualifying survey, you mentioned you were a part of (list type of organizational change). What do you think lead to this type of change?</td>
<td>Was the reason for the change communicated or is this your assumption as to why?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. When you were informed of the occurrence of this organizational change, what was your initial reaction?</td>
<td>How do you feel the main campus administration reacted to you (or other employees) feelings towards change?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. You also mentioned that the communication during your organizational change was (list option they chose). Can you explain to me what occurred during this change that caused you to take this position?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Deborah Barrett conducted a study in which she determined key communication strategies needed for effective communication within an organization. I am</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. Interested in knowing your experience of these areas during your organizational change: “messages are clear and concise regarding objective of change…” “motivated employees to support new direction”… “limit rumors or misunderstandings”

2. Considering the idea that communication can occur in several formats: verbal, electronically and even nonverbal. Tell me about the way in which main campus administrators decided to disseminate the communication to you all regarding the change? How effective do you think communication format was to your experience.

3. As you think about this organizational change and the communication that you received regarding it, what strategies implemented by the main campus do you think were effective? Can you provide examples?

4. In opposition to the previous question what do you think was ineffective regarding the communication strategies you received as you matriculated through the change process? Can you provide examples?

5. From your perspective, how do you think the communication strategies that were utilized during your organizational change assisted in you matriculating through the process?

6. Is there anything else you’d like to share that you may have felt or experience during this organizational change?

**Conclusion:** The researcher will thank the interviewee for their time. If the participant has any additional questions or concerns, they can reach out to the researcher at any time.