DISSERTATION

EXPERIENCES OF A MERGER: THE PERSPECTIVE OF MID-LEVEL

ADMINISTRATORS IN MERGED KANSAS COMMUNITY AND TECHNICAL

COLLEGES

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

EXPERIENCES OF A MERGER: THE PERSPECTIVE OF MID-LEVEL

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COLLEGES

This study was conducted to better understand the phenomenology of mid-level

administrators employed at Kansas community or technical colleges/schools who

experienced the merger process. An interpretative phenomenological analysis was used

to examine individual life experiences. Eight mid-level administrators were interviewed

for this study. The findings from this research confirm merger literature stressing the

importance of leadership, communication, culture, collaboration and integration and how

these factors impact the mid-level administrators' throughout the merger.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Background of Kansas Technical Education

In 1963, Congress passed the Vocational Education Act, legislation granting

states the authority to establish a system of vocational schools. The following year

Kansas enacted legislation for local communities to establish vocational schools. At that

time, the Career and Technical Education division (CTE) was under the authority of the

Kansas State Board of Education. Two types of administrative governance were allowed

for the vocational institutions: a) local school board or community college board, or b) a

board of control overseen by representatives of cooperating school districts (Kansas

Board of Regents, 2006).

By 1968, 14 vocational-technical schools were in operation. Four vocational-

technical school and community college mergers were completed between 1985 and 2001

(Kansas Board of Regents, 2006). The Community College Board of Trustees governed

these four merged institutions. The mergers are comprised of: Central Kansas Area

Vocational-Technical School (AVTS)/Hutchinson Community College; Southeast

Kansas AVTS/Coffeyville Community College; Johnson County AVTS/Johnson County

Community College; and Southwest Kansas AVTS/Dodge City Community College.(See

Table 1).

Technical colleges emerged in 1994 when the legislation (K.S.A. 72-4468) was

passed, allowing technical schools to convert to technical colleges (Kansas Board of

Regents, 2006). This conversion allowed the institutions to begin offering Associate of

Table 1: Merged Institutions

Kansas Community Colleges Merged with Technical Colleges & Area Vocational
Schools

Institution Name	Year Merged
Cowley Community College	1965
Coffeyville Community College & Area Technical School	2001
Dodge City Community College	1994
Highland Community College & Northeast Kansas Technical College	2008
Hutchinson Community College & Area Technical School	1993
Johnson County Community College & Area Technical School	1995
Kansas City Kansas Community College & Area Technical School	2008
Pratt Community College	1983
Seward County Community College & Southwest Kansas Technical School	2008
Washburn University* – Institute of Technology (Formerly KAW Technical School)	2008

*Washburn University is the only 4 year institution affiliated with a technical school

Applied Science (AAS) degrees; however, they continued to operate under their existing governance system. Between the years of 1995- 2001, six technical schools converted to technical colleges. The newly created colleges included: Northwest Kansas Technical College; North Central Kansas Technical College; Flint Hills Technical College; Manhattan Area Technical College; Northeast Kansas Technical College; and Wichita Area Technical College. The technical education system became more convoluted as not all technical schools chose to become technical colleges. As a result, three types of technical education institutions existed: technical schools, technical colleges, and technical schools governed by community college trustees. In 1999, new legislation brought more change. The passing of legislation (K.S.A. 74-32,141) and the enactment of Senate Bill 345 resulted in the supervision and coordination of technical schools/colleges being transferred from the State Board of Education to the Kansas Board of Regents (KBOR). KBOR serves as the governing body for public higher educational institutions in the state of Kansas.

With the new millennium came even more change for Kansas technical schools/colleges. In 2002, KBOR decided all Kansas degree-granting institutions (including technical colleges) should be regionally accredited through the Higher Learning Commission - North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC/NCA). The KBOR supported additional legislation, Senate Bill 7, requiring technical schools and colleges to develop a plan for converting the existing governing board to an independent board. In this plan, the new governing board would operate and manage the school/college independently and separately from its school district. Because of this legislation, two barriers to North Central accreditation were resolved (Kansas Board of

Regents, 2006). The sole focus of the board would be on the postsecondary institution, and the institution's president would now report to a board rather than to a school district superintendent.   Since the legislation has been enacted, four technical colleges have become accredited by HLC/NCA.

In 2007, K.S.A. 4482 authorized the formation of the Kansas Postsecondary Technical Education and Training Authority. The authority is made up members appointed by the Governor of Kansas. This authority was formed to provide recommendations to the KBOR in order to coordinate state-wide planning for postsecondary technical education. This oversight includes program approvals, review of existing programs, and review state funding for postsecondary technical education.

Statement of the Problem

Mergers of all types have become ever present around the world. While the majority of mergers are in the private sector, they are not restricted to only that sector (Eastman & Lang, 2001). For example, municipalities and hospitals have merged in the interest of efficiency and economy (Eastman & Lang, 2001). Mergers in higher education are a reality. According to a July 2009 report in a Higher Education Policy brief, "Given the economic turbulence, characterized, in part, by unprecedented business consolidations, talk of mergers has spread to higher education" (McBain, 2009, p. 1). Although current economics has become a compelling reason for mergers in higher education, bringing universities together is not a new event in the United States and in other countries. Some examples of mergers within the United States are: the University of Wisconsin-Madison and the Wisconsin State University system, 1971; Minnesota community, technical colleges, and state universities, 1995; and the Medical University

of Ohio merged with the University of Toledo, 2006 (American Association of State Colleges and Universities, 2009).

Mergers are generally focused on business strategies and financial issues. These strategies and issues may include increasing market share, gaining of organizations core capabilities, and gaining more capital, knowledge, expertise, and talent all at a lower cost (Hitt, Ireland & Harrison, 2001; McIntyre, 2004). Mergers have become an accepted solution that organizations adopt to improve performance and maintain their competitive advantage (Pablo & Javidan, 2004; Schmidt, 2002). These business strategies and financial issues, while essential in successful mergers, can lead to failure if over emphasized. The failure can occur when the organization overlooks the importance of their human resources and the impact of mergers on people (Gotenhuis & Weggeman, 2002; McIntyre, 2004; Milteon-Kelly, 2006).

Studies in the corporate world have looked at the impact on people. However, there is a gap in United States higher education research on the impact of faculty, staff, and administrators going through a merger. Higher education merger research has been conducted in the areas of strategic management (Rowley, 1997a, 1997b); lessons learned (Fielden and Markham, 1997); higher education mergers in Australia (Harman, 2000); theory and practice (Eastman & Lang, 2001); change (Brown & Humphries, 2003); international perspectives (Harman & Harman, 2003); politics in South Africa (Schoole, 2005); and integrating organizational cultures and developing management styles (Locke, 2007). Pritchard and Williamson's (2008) longitudinal study of a merger in the United Kingdom focused on perspectives of higher education employees and emphasized how the merger affected the faculty and staff. With all that has been learned about higher

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education mergers, including the limited studies of the impact on people, it was my desire to conduct a qualitative research study on the phenomena of mergers, focusing on the lived experiences of participants throughout the merger process.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to understand the phenomenology of mid-level administrators employed at a Kansas community or technical college/school that experienced a merger process. I explored the participants' lived experiences directly related to the merger process. College mid-level administrators were interviewed about how they perceive/perceived the merger process and how results of the merger now influence their daily work.

Significance of the Study

Much attention on higher education mergers has increased over the past decade (Brown & Humphries, 2003; Eastman & Lang, 2001; Fielden and Markham, 1997; Harman, 2000; Harman and Harman, 2003; Locke, 2007; Rowley, 1997a, 1997b; Schoole, 2005). Wilson (2007), in an unpublished dissertation examined the impact on academic programs following a consolidation of a community college and a technical institute. In another unpublished dissertation, Warren (2008) compared the faculty and administrator perceptions of a merger of a Kentucky community college and a vocational technical institute. The sociocultural aspects of mergers have been studied (Harman, 2002) as well as organizational culture as it relates to merger has recently been researched (Locke, 2007). However, research specific to the phenomena of a merger appears to be lacking (Appelbaum et al., 2000) especially in the area of higher education (Pritchard and Williamson, 2008).

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As I reviewed the literature I found little research that specifically addressed the phenomena of the merger experience within higher education mergers. Recent merger studies indicate a need to focus on the participant experience involved in the merger process at all stages. For example, Wilson's study (2007) focused on the merger between a community college and technical institute in Tennessee that uncovered from respondents a feeling of alienation throughout and after the merger process even though steps were taken to include individuals in the facilitation of the merger. The former technical institute employees felt the merger was a "hostile takeover" by the community college (Wilson, 2007, p. 74). A longitudinal study of two higher educational institutions in the United Kingdom focused on the gap in higher education merger research literature by giving "special consideration to the human resource dimension" (Pritchard & Williamson, 2008, p. 47).

One study of particular relevance to my study is an unpublished dissertation by Rhea (2004) who examined perceptions of organizational change resulting from a community college merger in Alabama. The research was a quantitative study of the organizational change process through the assessment of administrator, faculty and support staff perceptions. Rhea (2004) indicated that merger is a process that should be focused on people.

This study was important because it looked at the experiences of mid-level administrators who participated in mergers of Kansas community colleges and technical colleges/schools. Adding to the literature, this study reviewed the personal experiences of higher education mid-level administrators throughout the merger process; examined their stories to describe their experiences of the merger process. Because this study

looked at the experiences of mid-level administrators during a college merger, it may

have implications which will be meaningful and beneficial to higher education leaders,

and other higher education professionals committed to leadership and change within their

organizations. This study provides higher education administrators more information

about the impact on mid-level administrators throughout the merger process and helps

them be mindful about how to navigate knowing the implications of mergers on mid-

level administrators.

Research Questions

Research questions often evolve in qualitative studies (Stake, 2006). The

questions for this study were intended to begin conversations with the participants to gain

a better understanding of the phenomenon of mid-level administrators at a Kansas

community or technical college/school who experienced the merger process. The

overarching research question was:

1. What are the lived experiences of mid-level administrators at community

     colleges/technical colleges as they engaged in a merger?

Potential Limitations of the Study

This study was limited in its generalizability for several reasons. First, the

population for this study included only mid-level administrators from Kansas, public two-

year community and technical colleges, which have recently merged. Political climates,

state policy and higher education resources vary across the state; and as a result, mid-

level administrators of the various institutions responded differently to the mergers.

Second, higher education research suggests that institutional mergers are difficult.

The literature indicates the integration process takes place over a period of time with no

set timeline for completion. In this study, through interview conversation, I gained

insight into the mid-level administrator's experience in the merger process thus far. It is

expected that the mid-level administrator experiences will continue to change over time.

Since the mid-level administrator experiences continue to change, it is expected that the

results of this study could vary if it was conducted at a different time in the merger

process.

Definition of Terms

Merger - Merger is defined as two or more entities combining to form one new entity

(Schraeder & Self, 2003)

Mid-level Administrator - Mid-level administrators are charged with mediating between

faculty and higher level administration (presidents and the board of trustees) (Birnbaum,

1988). The administrative component in an institution includes individuals who

"supervise, control, and provide resources for the operators" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p.

73).

High-level Administrator - High-level administrators "focus on the outside environment,

determine the mission and shape the grand design" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 73).

Researcher Perspective in Relation to Research Area

As an employee of a Kansas technical college, the subject of mergers captured my

interest and attention for several reasons. I was introduced to the idea of college merger,

in 2002, with the announcement of Kansas Senate Bill 7. This bill required all Kansas

technical colleges and technical schools to be regionally accredited or merge with an

institution with regional accreditation. In addition, my employer, a technical college in Kansas, acquired another local college's campuses in 2008. Along with the physical space, my technical college acquired several academic programs, and a significant number of students, staff and faculty. Since I had never been involved in a merger, and because I found myself living these experiences, the topic of merger took on a new meaning and level of importance for me. I experienced a range of emotions from excitement to intrigue to frustration to relief. My doctoral studies in community college leadership, my work experience, and recent mergers of Kansas community colleges and technical colleges led me to the topic of mergers within higher education and its impacts on the workforce. It was my hope to further the literature to promote the case for greater emphasis on the human implications in merger-related strategies.

This study is entirely relevant to my own work experience within a technical college in Kansas affected my dedication to continued personal leadership development. I know for certain this study affected my personal understanding of the intricacies of college mergers, and how to facilitate future mergers in a more effective manner within the higher education realm.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Review of Selected Literature

The sections that follow explore literature relevant to this study. First, literature focusing on organizational theory is discussed. The second section will highlight the definition of merger. Stages of a corporate merger are briefly discussed, and then corporate mergers are compared to higher education mergers. Next, concepts directly related to higher education mergers such as the merger process, reasons for mergers, merger success, implementation timeframe, and leadership are reviewed. Finally, factors that influence the merger experience are explored.

Organizational Theory

Organizational theory describes how individual efforts contribute to the form, function and existence of organizations. Through organizational theory, insight is gained about how organizations use resources, develop and implement policies, manage human resources, provide leadership and reorganize (Greaves & Sorenson, 1999). Organizational theory helps understand the transformation of conflict into cooperation. According to Hui-Chao (2002) organizational theory provides a framework for analyzing the effectiveness of organizational change.

Theories surrounding organizational change are numerous, rich, and varied. First, Burke's (2011) review of the characteristics of open systems will be highlighted. Then, several specific social-cognitive organizational change theories will be described. Sensemaking (Weirk, 1979) and Birnbaum's (1988) theory of cybernetics were selected

for their relevance to higher education. Bolman and Deal's (2003) work describing the four frames or perspectives was included because the frames provide useful ways of conceptualizing organizations.

Open-Systems Theory. Burke (2011) maintains that the foundation for understanding organizational change comes from understanding the basics about organizations. The two overlapping theoretical domains that Burke refers to are open systems and life sciences theory. Open systems theory is understood as the interdependence of the organization and its environment (Scott & Davis, 2007). According to Katz and Kahn (1978), open systems "maintain themselves through constant commerce with their environment, that is, a continuous inflow and outflow of energy through permeable boundaries" (p. 21-22). Organizations are also made up of internal parts such as buildings, equipment, and people. Burke (pp. 57-61) uses Von Bertalanffy (1950) and Katz and Kahn (1978) to outline 10 characteristics that distinguish open systems:

- Importation of Energy. Energy must be drawn from the environment for survival. This energy comes from a variety of sources such as raw materials, bank credit, revenue from work, etc.

- Throughput. Employees use resources from the environment to prepare a product for the customer.

- Output. The employees of the organization deliver the final product and collect a fee for services rendered.

- Systems Are Cycles of Events. Providing a quality final product, collecting a fee for services rendered, leads to increased business and

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ordering/consumption of resources. This ensures the input-throughput-output cycle.

- Negative Entropy. By importing more energy than it expends the organization stores energy and acquires negative entropy. Constant effort must be used for organization maintenance and survival.

- Information Input, Negative Feedback, and the Coding Process. Organizations use customer feedback to identify areas of improvement and to make changes as necessary. Organizational leaders must identify information to be used, to make sense of it, and implement changes.

- Steady-State and Dynamic Homeostasis. There is a continuous flow of energy (external environment and export of products), but the character of the system remains the same.

- Differentiation. Organizations offset the entropic process by growing. This results in differentiation and elaboration or goods and services.

- Integration and Coordination. Differentiation can lead to the "silo effect" if there is inadequate integration and coordination. Integration is accomplished through shared norms and values. Organizational structure, roles and authority are used to achieve integration and coordination.

- Equifinality. This principle maintains that organizations can reach the same goal from a variety of starting points or paths.

Open systems theories have provided a widely used framework for examining organizational behavior for many years. Around World War II, these theories emerged and have since become more widespread and popular (Scott & Davis, 2007). Open

systems perspective has been attributed to ties between differing scientific disciplines and generating new theories such as social cognition models. Social cognition models are insightful for analyzing change within nonprofit organizations such as higher educational institutions.

Social cognition models. The use of social cognition models is growing among scholars in higher education (Kezar, 2001). The appeal of these models is that they lend themselves to the ambiguousness of higher education organizations. Earlier typologies such as teleological, evolutionary, life-cycle and political, were developed out of a functionalist approach to understanding organizations (Kezar, 2001). Functional theorists maintain that organizations have one reality which all individuals within the organization perceive similarly. Conversely, most social-cognition models stem from a "phenomenological or social-constructivist view of organizations" (Kezar, 2001, p. 44). Change, through social-cognition models, comes through cognitive dissonance. The change process is the result of learning, altering paradigms, and is interconnected and complex. Kezar notes several criticisms of social cognition models which include: a de-emphasis of the environment; and an over-emphasis of the ease of change. In contrast, the benefits of social cognition models are that they emphasize individuals and a socially constructed nature.

Sensemaking. Weick's (1979) model of organizational theory is an open systems theory that focuses on the environment at the social psychological level. This model is concerned with "how people interpret their world and reconstruct reality on an ongoing basis" (Kezar, 2001, p. 47). Individuals within organizations organize information to: process, reduce uncertainty, and cope with equivocality in an effort to make sense of the

environment (Weick, 1979). A key premise of sensemaking is that it is connected to situations in which stimuli are noticed, interpreted, and acted on (Weick, 1995). Weick (1995) distinguishes sensemaking from interpretation emphasizing the focus on how people generate what they interpret.

Information gathering takes place in three non-linear phases which include entactment, selection, and retention (Weick, 1979, 2001). Entactment refers to those processes that impact the environment, in an attempt to explain how organizations construct knowledge of those environments. Selection is an understanding of prior events or activities and involves selective interpretation to make sense of a given situation. Retention is the process by which individuals remember an event, situation or activity in order to refer to it in the future. According to Weick (2001), individuals "construct, rearrange, single out, and demolish many of the objective features of their surroundings" (p. 164). The singling-out of events is significant when considering college mergers since the organization is experiencing unique and increased activity. Because it is impossible for employees to absorb all activity occurring in the organization as a result of the merger, employees must focus on experiences they find most important.

Cybernetics. The cybernetics model is also relevant when considering higher education mergers because it is one of the best known models of change in higher education (Kezar, 2001). This model is a complex, open systems approach in which multiple organizational realities exist simultaneously, depending upon the organization. Birnbaum's (1988) cybernetic perspective is grounded on the notion that colleges and universities exist within the context of a larger environment. Birnbaum (1988) contends that institutions that utilize the cybernetic frame have "self-correcting mechanisms that

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monitor organizational functions and provide attention cues, or negative feedback, to participants when things are not going well" (p. 179). The premise of this model is that action should be avoided and instead, focus should be placed on feedback loops and self-correcting mechanisms, called thermostats. According to Morgan (1986) feedback loops and thermostats are features of evolutionary models that reflect responses of living systems. For example, in our homes thermostats regulate temperature, keeping temperature at a desired level. Birnbaum (1988) believes that colleges and universities have self-correcting mechanisms that regulate environmental factors by keeping them within a given range so that organizational harmony is maintained.

The cybernetic perspective is based upon various frameworks and holds that leaders can benefit from integrating the perspectives four system models such as collegial, bureaucratic, political, and anarchical (Birnbaum, 1988). The collegial system model emphasizes consensus and shared power, there is a de-emphasis of differences, and individuals are considered equals. The bureaucratic system model proposes a hierarchical structure along with values, rules, policies, and regulations. Birnbaum (1988) indicates that bureaucratic "structures are established to efficiently relate organizational programs to the achievement of specified goals" (p. 107). The political system is characterized by power dynamics, uncertainty, dissent, and conflict. Basically, political systems compete for power and resources. Finally, the anarchical system model is characterized by "problematic goals, unclear technology, and fluid participation" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 154). These four models, collegial, bureaucratic, political, and anarchical, represent traditional ways of understanding colleges. The cybernetic model of organizational change proposes the integration of these four models. It is unlikely for

any one of the four system models to reflect a college all of the time. For this reason, it is important to take these four models into consideration in order to have a better understanding of the college as an open system, constantly faced with environmental demands.

Organizational frames. Similar to Birnbaum's (1988) cybernetic perspective, Bolman and Deal's (2003) four frames are useful to draw upon when considering organizational change. Bolman and Deal's four frames are: structural, human resource, symbolic, and political. These frames or perspectives, rather than presented as fragmented, are pluralistic, allowing an assorted view of an organization. According to Bolman and Deal, organizations are complex and ambiguous; by understanding the four frames managers and leaders are able to "find clarity and meaning amid the confusion of organizational life" (p. 40).

The structural frame assumes that the correct formal structure will minimize problems and maximize performance (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Typically structures in stable organizations are grounded in rules and are hierarchical. Since the emergence of new technology and business innovations, organizations grounded in a structural frame, have become more flexible in implementing new technology and business plans (Bolman & Deal). Saturn, a former General Motors company, is a prime example of an organization with high employee autonomy and participation which led to a successful car company. In general however, the structural frame has its roots in efficiency, rationality, roles, and policies.

The human resource frame "highlights the relationship between people and organizations" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 132). The concept of needs – specifically how

needs are satisfied or frustrated at work – is a key attribute of the human resource frame. Organizations that adopt a human resource frame, aim to align workforce needs and organizational needs, and in addition, view the workforce as an investment. Bolman and Deal (2003) outline six human resource principles of organizations: "(a) build and implement an HRM (human resource management) strategy, (b) hire the right people, (c) keep them, (d) invest in them, (e) empower them and (f) promote diversity" (p. 136). Organizations that prescribe to the human resource frame utilize activities and practices that are guided by a comprehensive resource management philosophy.

Unlike the structural and human resource frames, the political frame is concerned with a scarcity of resources, the distribution of power, and diverging interests. The political fame emphasizes that organizations are coalitions made up of diverse individuals and groups (Bolman & Deal, 2003). These individuals and groups have their own values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Conflict within organizations is common due to scarce resources and divergent interests. According to the political frame however, "conflict is not necessarily a problem or a sign that something is amiss" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 197). Alternately, conflict is seen as normal and is expected. In organizations characterized by the political frame, goals and decisions "emerge from bargaining, negotiation, and jockeying for position among competing stakeholders" (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 186).

The symbolic frame is grounded upon meanings, beliefs, hopes, and faiths, and utilizes these symbols to define the organization's culture (Bolman & Deal, 2003). This frame centers on complexity and ambiguity, whereas traditional views emphasize rationality and objectivity. Activity and meaning are loosely connected because differing

interpretations of events have multiple meanings. To deal with uncertainty and ambiguity, symbols are created to as a way to alleviate confusion and find direction. Organizations characterized by the symbolic frame use rituals and ceremonies as ways to take action when faced with success or failure (Bolman & Deal, 2003). According to Bolman and Deal (2003), individuals who understand the influence of symbols are more likely to understand their organizations.

The ability to apply each of Bolman and Deal's (2003) frames helps individuals to appreciate and understand organizations. In addition, by using the four frames leaders can more accurately assess situations and provide effective solutions to organizational problems (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Reframing helps leaders to gain clarity, new perspectives, and ultimately build strategies that effectively deal with organizational change.

Organizational theories provide a framework from which to consider the diverse structure and function of community and technical colleges. According to Collins and Hill (1998) the ability to effectively implement organizational change theory affects the failure or success of the change. When it comes to organizational change, one size does not fit all (Birnbaum, 1991; Bolman & Deal, 2003). The sections that follow discuss mergers and the challenges resulting from these organizational changes.

Definition of Merger

According to the American Heritage Dictionary (2001), to merge is "to blend together or cause to be absorbed, in gradual stages" (p. 532) and merger is defined as "the act or instance of merging, the union of two or more commercial interests or corporations" (p. 532). Mergers are described as two or more entities combining to form

one new entity (Schraeder & Self, 2003). The entities join assets, liabilities and cultural values (Horwitz et al., 2002). Eastman and Lang (2001) define a merger as when "two or more institutions combine to form a new single organization with a single governing body and chief executive" (p. 17). An academic merger is defined as "a creative opportunity to combine significant and powerful educational resources and academic cultures as well as books, microscopes, and sports equipment" (Martin & Samels, 1994, p. 5).

Eastman and Lang (2001) believe the term merger is used interchangeably with a variety of arrangements, such as "consortia, federation, and affiliation" between colleges and universities (p. 15). While these terms are used loosely or interchangeably, they do not have the same meaning. A continuum was developed by Grant Harman (1988) to outline a "series of mergers that were instigated as a matter of public policy by the government of Australia" (Eastman & Lang, 2001, p. 15). One end of the continuum begins with a high level of institutional autonomy in the form of a voluntary cooperative agreement, next on the continuum comes consortium, then federation, next affiliation, then management by contract and finally merger, which can be described as more of a unitary control. Within a consortium, membership is voluntary and incorporated separately from its members. A CEO is appointed by a board and employed by the consortium, and the consortium is responsible for its own staff and budget. Federations are organizationally and managerially complex. Each organization in the federation remains independent and autonomous; only one organization actually grants degrees and sets academic standards for the federation. Member institutions within a federation continue to offer services and programs outside the federation. Affiliations are bilateral,

but an institution may be involved in several affiliations simultaneously. One partner in

the affiliation grants academic degrees and program offerings do not overlap.

Management by contract occurs in highly centralized public systems of higher education.

The government delegates managerial, fiduciary, and accountability responsibilities for a

smaller specialized organization to a larger host institution. Finally, mergers, according

to Eastman and Lang (2001), can be defined as the following:

a) Two or more institutions combine to form a single new organization with a single

   governing body and chief executive;

b) At least one institution and potentially all merging institutions relinquish

   autonomy and separate legal identities;

c) All assets, liabilities, legal obligations, and responsibilities of the merging

   institutions are transferred to a single successor institution, and;

d) Mergers are virtually impossible to reverse (p. 17).

The term "merger" is often loosely used to reference different types of institutional

arrangements among colleges and universities, but a true merger, at the extreme end of

the continuum is associated with a loss of institutional identity and autonomy (Eastman &

Lang, 2001).

Stages of a Merger

There are three primary stages in the merger process. Bibler (1989) outlines the

three stages as pre-acquisition, due diligence and negotiations, and post-acquisition. The

first stage is concerned with the analysis of the merger partners. This phase is usually

carried out in secret with the highest levels of leadership. The confidential nature at this

stage of the process leaves little, if any, communication regarding the merger with other

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individuals in the organization. The second stage of the merger process is focused on due

diligence and negotiations. Most companies analyze financial strength, market position,

management strength, and other "health" aspects of the company (Cartwright & Cooper,

1995). The goal of this phase is to develop a merger resolution and timeline for

implementing the merger plan. The detailed merger plan should anticipate all aspects of

the merger and should include internal and external communication plans (Kee, 2003).

The post-acquisition phase is when the financial and physical integration plans are

implemented.

Corporate Mergers in Relation to Academic Mergers

There is an abundance of scholarly research on the topic of corporate mergers.

Research indicates conceptual framework of corporate mergers can be applicable to

higher education mergers. Martin and Samels (1994) advocate higher education merger

to achieve academic excellence, strengthening financial health, improving administrative

efficiency, stabilizing enrollments and other desirable outcomes. In higher education

mergers, leaders have a responsibility to identify the most advantageous combination of

academic programs and academic personnel to "carry on the mission and vision of the

institution" (Martin & Samels, 1994, p. 141).

Higher Education Mergers

Process of a merger. The merger process can be compared to an avalanche. In

the beginning it is minimal with a small amount of snow moving. As the avalanche

continues it gathers more snow to make a larger wave of impact (which cannot be

stopped) and soon the avalanche encompasses the entire mountainside. Participation in

the merger process seems to follow the same pattern. In the beginning, a small number of

key players begin the discussions and suggest possibilities. As the process continues more and more players are involved and soon there is no turning back. Once the merger takes place, participation (voluntary or involuntary) is encompassed by all employees.

Eastman and Lang (2001) identify two sets of steps for a merger. The first set of steps consists of the process steps involved in the agreement through the implementation of the new organization. The second set of steps are the substantive steps by which the features of the merged institution are determined. In the following paragraphs, the process steps and substantive steps are described.

Process steps. The merger process begins with private, informal gatherings. Information on enrollment, academic programs, accreditation, human resource issues, and governance systems are collected. This preliminary meeting process allows the potential merger partners to determine if merger is a possibility before investing time and money into formal negotiations (Eastman & Lang, 2001). When deciding whether to pursue the merger, both parties must evaluate the merits of the merger. For instance, leaders must determine "whether the proposed merger is a better means of realizing one's own mission and strategic goals than the alternatives" (Eastman & Lang, 2001, p. 218). Institutions must ask difficult questions about the academic, financial and organizational rationale for the merger. If negative answers are determined about any of the above items it is advised that the organization rethinks merger intentions.

According to Eastman and Lang (2001) when entering into merger negotiations, merger partners should consider their relative positions. The sources and extent of power can have a significant impact on the outcome of the negotiations; therefore, it is recommended that smaller organizations use a formal approach to negotiations. The

formal negotiations should include comprehensive agreements between merging partners. In the long run, these comprehensive agreements will help build trust, and have a positive impact on morale and productivity.

Due diligence in a merger usually begins early in the merger process and continues in the background throughout the merger. Due diligence during a merger consists of the collection an analysis of information and records of the respective institutions. When both parties recognize a merger is in sight, data and records are analyzed. This is usually a difficult step in the merger process because disclosing previously confidential information may cause feelings of vulnerability and exposure of the individuals within the merging institutions (Eastman & Lang, 2001).

A merger agreement must be created once the institutions make the decision to merge (Eastman & Lang, 2001). The merger agreement is a written document which outlines the shared vision of the institutions, clarifies the purpose and objectives of the merger and sets a timeline for the merger implementation. This is a legally binding document presented to the governing bodies and is the foundation on which the merger is implemented. The implementation planning should include structure and staff to guide the transition. Transition teams should be put in place to collect information and make recommendations to the governing board on merger related issues.

At this point in the merger process, it is important to recognize that a new institution exists. Employees of the institution that is disappearing should be encouraged to recognize and accept the passing of the old organization and to identify and embrace the new institution. It is important to also formally recognize this new institution through a symbolic gesture. Eastman and Lang (2001) give examples of one institution having a

party before merging with another institution and another case where the organization used convocation to mark the end of their old order passing.

The last step in the merger process "involves bringing the merged institution to life in all its aspects" (Eastman & Lang, 2001, p. 230). Bringing the institution to life will require acceptance and change for all constituents. This is the time when the new governance and leadership teams are launched and the functional units for academics and support are integrated. Processes and systems are also developed or integrated; and finally, relationships are built or sustained.

Substantive Steps. While going through the merger process steps, the substantive steps must also be addressed. The order in which the substantive steps are completed is not predetermined and can even take place during the process steps outlined above. Some of the important items to be considered for substantive steps include: the name and administrative structure of the new institution, personnel decisions, budget framework and financial decisions, and academic planning.

Reasons for Mergers. Mergers within higher education have occurred for various reasons. Eastman and Lang (2001) maintain that publicly funded, centralized higher education systems in countries including Australia, Great Britain, and the Netherlands most often merged institutions because of pressure or incentives from the countries' governments. These governments sought mergers for a variety of reasons such as: building capacity, improving efficiency, achieving economies of scale, and sharpening the peak of the organizational pyramid. Research has been conducted in the private sector regarding mergers and its impact on the financial strength, management strength, market position and other measurable areas related to the health of an

organization (Cartwright & Cooper, 1995). Privately funded higher-education

institutions, meanwhile, most often merged to address financial distress.

Harman (1988) maintains there are reasons other than "bankruptcy/bailout"

scenarios that prompted private schools to merge. The first non-financial reason for

merger was to collapse several small women's colleges into larger coeducational

institutions. Second, higher education mergers consisted of consolidation of public

institutions into state systems. Third, there have been court-mandated mergers for

purposes of racial desegregation. Fourth and finally, there have been mergers of

institutions with complementary missions and strengths. Many of the higher education

mergers discussed in the literature (Curri, 2002, Harman, 2002; Neave, 1995; Warren,

2008; Wilson, 2007) developed because of governmental pressure or outright demands.

Efficiency, economies of scale and cost-reduction often serve as reasons behind

government advocacy for mergers. While governmental policy is usually a strong reason

for merger government policy "may actually put individual HEI (higher educational

institutions) at greater long-term risk" (Locke, 2007, p. 100). Research echoes a

seemingly universal efficiency drain that various governments apparently never

anticipated (Curri, 2002, Harman, 2002; Neave, 1995; Warren, 2008; Wilson, 2007;).

For example, Prichard and Williamson (2008) noted that extra layers of bureaucracy

within higher education followed the merger and absorbed any would-be cost savings and

economies of scale.

Success in Higher Education Mergers. Institutional performance in both the

short and medium term depends on employees' response to the merger (Eastman & Lang,

2001). Pritchard and Williamson (2008) specify four variables they believe determine

employees' cooperation: (a) the degree to which they accepted the merger; (b) their stance regarding the new organization; (c) the efficacy of new structures, systems and resources; and (d) successful orientation and whether the employee was in a suitable role (p. 174). A phenomenon in the corporate world as described by Buono and Bowditch (1989) is a "post-merger slump," which tends to include slides in productivity, revenues, opportunities and human resources. Eastman and Lang (2001) assert that the "human factor" looms even larger in higher education because independent, well-spoken, highly educated employees are influential in academic ventures and drives its cost structure. Therefore, Eastman and Lang believe a post-merger slump would be even more pronounced in an academic setting than in a corporate one if faculty and staff experienced a post-merger decline in motivation, morale and commitment. Eastman and Lang (2001) believe that:

> Given the collective power and the individual autonomy enjoyed by faculty members, and the extent to which institutional success depends on their performance and achievement, it is especially important to attend to the human side of higher education mergers (p. 176).

Corporate research literature on mergers offers consistent themes for success. Habeck, Kroger, and Tram (2000) suggest seven rules for successful post-merger integration: (a) vision; (b) leadership; (c) growth; (d) early wins without exaggeration; (e) accurately addressing cultural differences; (f) honest communication; and (g) proper risk management - embracing it contrary to avoiding it. Appelbaum et al., (2000) believe that the leadership team determines the success of a merger. Over time, open and honest leaders will help to accomplish a successful merger and culture change.

Merger Implementation Timeframe

It takes a significant amount of time to conduct and complete the merger process.

Harman and Meek (2002) state the following:

In the literature on mergers, it is generally agreed that it can take up to ten years

for the wounds to heal and for the new institution forged from previously

autonomous identities to operate as a cohesive and well integrated whole. This

may be one reason why it takes so long for many of the efficiencies expected of

mergers to appear. The negotiations leading up to a merger can be long and

protracted and those individuals and groups who feel that they have lost

advantage because of the merger may continue their opposition long after

agreements have been formalized (p.4).

Appelbaum (2000) states that "five to seven years are typically needed for employees to

feel truly assimilated in a merged identity" (p. 653). However, research by Prichard and

Williamson (2008) provides a rare long-term view of mergers in higher education that

suggests that even two decades of time did not fully integrate component institutions.

Instead of becoming one seamless institution during its first 22 years of existence,

Northern Ireland's University of Ulster which resulted from the merger of New

University of Ulster and Ulster Polytechnic exhibited stitching or piecing together.

Prichard and Williamson (2008) noted that "a much longer time is needed for a merger to

achieve a corporate unity than the merger's architects…could have anticipated" (p. 66).

Leadership in Higher Education Mergers

Strong leadership to guide the human element throughout the merger process is

important (Curri, 2002; Eastman & Lang, 2001; Harman, 2002; Pritchard & Williamson,

2008). This leadership must pay special attention to communication. Two mergers

analyzed by Eastman and Lang (2001) provide the opportunity to compare and contrast

the result of different merger approaches. When Dalhousie University and Technical

University of Nova Scotia merged to become Dalhousie University Polytechnic, merger

communication plans for faculty and staff were integrated into their transition

management. However, the merger of Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE)

and University or Toronto (U of T), did not incorporate consistent merger communication

plans for employees. Participants in the Dalhousie merger indicated that the effort of

establishing formal communication plans had been worthwhile (Eastman & Lang, 2001).

This contrasted with the uncertainty that surrounded the OISE – U of T merger. During

this merger the problem was that many employees' questions were not immediately

answerable. Leadership shared little information in fear of speaking in error. Silence

leads employees to believe there is ambivalence or lack of knowledge on the part of the

merger leadership. Eastman and Lang (2001) believe "the longer the silence lasts, the

more skepticism and disaffection build up and the harder it becomes to communicate" (p.

191). Curri (2002) echoed this sentiment by emphasizing the importance of leaders using

open communication to reduce or eliminate fears associated with the merger.

Effective leadership and management are seen as one of the most important

factors before, during and after a merger. "Firm management techniques and clear

reporting relationships" are necessary to a successful merger, along with "enlightened

personnel policies and good communication channels between management and staff"

(Pritchard & Williamson, 2008, p. 62). It is suggested that transformational leadership,

which includes generating intrinsic commitment and translating self-interest into a larger

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goal of creating a new institution, be encouraged by leaders engaged in a merger (Middlehurst, 1993).   Much like transformational leaders, in regard to leaders in the academic setting, Harman (2002) believes "it would do well to put the human factor high on the agenda if the merged institution is to grow healthily" (p. 111). This should include empowerment, delegation, and the development strategies to create a sense of community and loyalty (Harman, 2002).

Factors that Influence the Merger Experience

Because literature exploring the factors that influence merger experiences is limited within higher education research, I chose to explore these considerations as outlined in business merger focused research. Organizational change theory in general terms was discussed in the first part of this chapter, while this section focuses specific organizational change concerns resulting from a merger. First, this section of the literature review will highlight the issues of communications during a merger. Second, it will examine the issues of organizational culture during a merger. Third, change and its impact upon employees during a merger will be discussed. This last section will also review the coping strategies or support strategies leaders should implement to support employees throughout the merger process.

Merger communications. According to the literature, communication is the most important factor throughout the merger process (Appelbaum, et al., 2000). Vecchio and Appelbaum (1995) indicate that communication uses verbal and nonverbal cues to facilitate understanding.   Communications and communication vehicles should be considered before, during and after a merger due to the high levels of uncertainty and insecurity associated with the change involved with a merger (Buono & Bowditch, 1989).

"Merger Syndrome", a phenomenon introduced by Marks and Mirvis, (1986, 1997) is characterized by increased centralization and decreased communication by management. The lack of communication from the top encourages employees to become preoccupied with themselves and thus the rumor mill begins. The key to successful communication, according to most researchers, is to be open and forthright in the communication process (Daniel, 1999; DeVoge & Spreier, 1999; DeVoge & Shiraki, 2000; Habeck et al., 2000). Inaccurate information, however, "is worse than no information at all" (Buono & Bowditch, 1989, p. 199). Bastien (1987) indicated that the comparison of communications with what is taking place is as important as the quality of the communication. For example, credibility will be lost if management goes back on their word, which could in turn lead to an unsuccessful merger (Appelbaum, et al., 2000).

There are many aspects to consider with employee communication during a merger. One such issue is timing (Balmer & Dinnie, 1999; Buono & Bowditch, 1989; Burke, 1987; Daniel, 1999; Lloyd, 2009). Delayed communication may cause employee apprehension and hostility, which make subsequent communication ineffective (Kelly, 1989). Sometimes delays in communication are due to employer fears that advance notification of events could cause a "reduction in productivity, sabotage, or an exodus of employees" (Applbaum, et al., 2000, p. 650).

In addition to the timing of communication, the forms of communication during a merger should be considered (Lengle & Daft, 1988; Richardson & Denton, 1996). Communication can take a variety of forms: email, memos, websites, newsletters, videos, and face-to-face meetings. These forms of communication do not have the same effect. Appelbaum et al., (2000) state that "face-to-face contact is clearly the richest

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medium available" (p.650). Lengle and Daft (1988) believe that routine messages should be sent through lean forms of communication (email or memos), and non-routine messages should be shared through rich forms of communication (face-to-face contact).

Honesty of the communications is critical. Bell (1988) suggests that organization keep people informed even at the risk of being overly informed. Distrust is inevitable, but if communication is handled properly the level of uncertainty can be lessened. The key is to address uncertainty and resolve as much uncertainty as quickly as possible (Appelbaum, et al., 2000).

As part of the merger plan, leadership should develop a plan for communications. Davy et al. (1989) recommended six guidelines for effective communications during and throughout the merger process. First, information should be timely. Employees need to be kept up to date as the merger related issues arise. Second, information should be as comprehensive as possible, but should not exceed the known facts of the situation. Leadership should acknowledge the lack of information and indicate the intent to share information as it becomes available. Third, information should be repeated in multiple media such as newsletters, meetings and memos. Fourth, communication must be perceived as credible. Credibility is based on truth and the leadership must have the facts in order to be truthful with employees. The fifth guideline maintains that rationale for organizational changes should be communicated to employees. Without explanation and rationale, employees will fill in the gaps with their own perceptions. Finally, it is recommended that communications be well-planned and continue throughout the merger process. Leadership should be prepared to clarify inaccuracies and to reinforce accurate information.

Merging cultures. In addition to improving productivity and morale, communication helps with the successful integration of the merging cultures (Balmer & Dinnie, 1999; DeVoge & Sprier, 1999). Denison (1996) defines culture as the deeply embedded structure of an organization which has its foundation in values, beliefs and assumptions of the individuals in the organization. According to Habeck et al., (2000) culture is used as a term to "catch-all covering behaviors, objectives, self-interest and ego and any other reasons people do not want to discuss openly" (p. 81). Schein (1985) and Hatch (1993) believe culture is assumptions that a group has invented, developed or discovered to adapt and integrate to their situation. These assumptions work well and are considered to be valid and are passed along gradually over time as new members enter the group.

Schein (1985, 1990) identifies three levels of culture. The three levels of culture are: observable artifacts, values, and basic underlying assumptions. Observable artifacts are symbols within an organization, such as a company logo. Values are truths and norms employees believe are important to the company or organization. The basic underlying assumptions are unconscious assumptions that only come to consciousness when these assumptions are challenged.

Buono and Bowditch (1989) believe culture change should be explained and justified to the employees. According to Ernst and Young (1994) cultural incompatibility within the organization is the single largest cause of lack of projected performance, departure of employees and time-consuming conflicts. A strong sense of organizational culture is critical to overall merger success (Kotter & Heskett, 1992). Leaders must consistently articulate the new organizational beliefs and values to get

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employees to adopt them (Buono & Bowditch, 1989). It is important to note that cultural change is a process that is incremental and evolutionary (Sathe, 1985).

Changing culture is more than posting slogans and posters or announcing a new and improved way of doing things throughout the workplace (Sherer, 1994). True culture change is the implementation and adoption of the slogans as your own. Changing cultures is difficult, requiring consistency from leadership, demonstration of new rules and priorities, and reinforcement of these new rules and priorities. Houghton, Anand and Neck (2003) state the "concept of cultural compatibility in the merger process is often presented in terms of an acculturation model" (p. 102).

Acculturation refers to the merging of two cultures as the result of extended exposure (Houghton et al., 2003). Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1988) adopted the anthropology concept of acculturation and were the first to suggest this concept in the context of mergers. The extent to which the merging organizations agree on the approach to acculturation will determine the success of the merger. Further, Nahavandi and Malekzadeh suggest that incongruence of the acculturation method can lead to loss of staff and resistance to integration.

Berry and Sam (1997) defined acculturation as a "set of internal psychological outcomes including a clear sense of personal and cultural identity, good mental health, and achievement of personal satisfaction in the new cultural context" (p. 299). There are two dimensions that lead to four possible strategies of acculturation or types of adaptation. The first dimension is called cultural maintenance. With cultural maintenance the individual entering a new culture decides how much of his culture of origin he will keep. When individuals enter a new culture of origin, they are faced with

the need to adapt. Because all individuals are different, they vary in their level of

adaption and their desire to retain their cultural values and traditions. This can be viewed

as a continuum where on one end an individual gives up their culture completely and on

the other end the individual wants to preserve their heritage. The second dimension is

contact and participation (Berry & Sam, 1997). This dimension refers to the

identification of the adopted culture.

According to Berry (2003) being high or low in the two dimensions leads to four

possible strategies of acculturation. Nahavandi and Malekzadeh (1988) incorporate the

model used by Berry (1983, 1984) which identifies these four modes of acculturation,

which take place in the optimized model of organizational culture. The four strategies of

acculturation include: integration (when employees want to retain important aspects of

their culture, but they also adopt what their new culture has to offer); assimilation (on the

extreme end of assimilation, the new culture is adopted and the values from the old

culture are discarded); separation (high cultural maintenance characterized by attempting

to preserve one's culture by remaining separate and independent of the new culture); and

marginalization (is the most problematic strategy, compromising low identification with

both the new and old cultures) (Berry, 2003).

Change process during a merger. Appelbaum et al. (2000) describe the

importance of a good individual and organizational fit. For example, a job applicant

takes a job "if the culture fits their psychological needs" (Appelbaum, et al., 2000, p.

651). After time the employee builds expectations that the organization either does or

does not live up to. The authors believe that over time psychological contracts are

created from these expectations. Schein comments (Makin *et al.*, 1997) that even though

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a psychological contract is not written, it is a strong predictor of behavior in organizations. Levinson (1976) uses psychoanalytic theory to describe how identities stem from people, places and things we believe are important in our lives. It makes sense then that our relationships with individuals at work are an integral part of our growth and development. Lowered self-image, a feeling of loss of control, and a sense of helplessness are all results brought by change (Levinson, 1976).

New cultures are developed during times of difficult change via a merger. This period of change, since it is difficult, should be managed. Bell (1988) maintains that employees feel powerlessness when their company no longer exists or finds themselves no longer associated to the company that provided their meaning in the world. "Action must be taken to prevent employees from feeling the sense of helplessness that now pervades these situations" within the merger (Appelbaum, et al., 2000, p. 655). Bibler (1989) cautions companies to prepare for a loss of enthusiasm about work; drop in morale and organizational pride; an increase in rumors and people who waste time waiting to see what will happen next.

Employees' readiness for change is an important factor in change success as related to the merger. If an employee does not feel the change is necessary, or if they feel the change will not be successful, then the change initiatives may fail (Armenakis, Harris & Mossholder, 1993). Armenakis et al., (1993) suggests that change readiness requires influencing individuals' beliefs, values, intentions and behavior. In addition, the authors argue that change readiness involves changing the way people think. They also believe that the social system of the individual may be shaped by others in the environment.

According to Bridges, (1991) it is essential to help employees prepare for the merger by eliminating surprise. First, the primary changes of the merger should be communicated (what is ending and who is losing what). Second, clearly identify what will likely change as a consequence of the primary changes. Third, identify those who will be affected by the changes. Fourth, recognize what everyone will lose. Being told of the changes employees will more likely feel a higher level of trust toward the employer (Bridges, 1991).

Change, according to Levinson (1976), is a loss experience. Leadership within the organization needs to allow employees the opportunity to experience and process this loss. Employers must be "prepared to let their employees mourn" (Appelbaum et al., 2000, p. 651). The best way to help employees go through this mourning process is to acknowledge the loss and bring the real and perceived losses out into the open. Ignoring the loss will exacerbate the problem and heighten feelings of loss felt by employees (Bridges, 1991).

Employees attempting to digest a merger will have varied responses. Bell (1988) maintains there are two types of reactions to a merger: a) the individual experiences grief and eventually works through the problem; or b) the individual does not deal with or confront the grief. Those employees who do not deal with the merger positively experience depression, aggression and unresolved conflict (Levinson, 1976). Some employees may be actively or unconsciously denying that the changes will occur (Maurer, 1996; Pritchett, 1994). Employees may deny or resist the changes.

In addition to dealing with the loss and implementing the change prompted by a merger, it is important to bring closure to the old way of doing business. Bridges (1991)

and Daniel (1999) suggests dramatizing the end of the old way of doing business by having employees watch the old rules burn in a fire. Those items not burned should be carried to the future. It is important; however, not to treat the past with disrespect. The past helped make the organization what it currently is and will help it get to where it wants to go as a new entity (Bridges, 1991; Daniel, 1999).

Resistance to change is easily escalated and the response to resistance should be handled fairly and carefully. According to Maurer (1996) resistance can be broken down into three levels of intensity. The first level is the easiest to overcome. This resistance is directed at the change itself because employees are not sure the idea is a good one. To get past this level of resistance, it is recommended that leaders communicate the new idea in a clearer way. The new idea should be simple, visual, and beneficial. The second level of resistance involves deeper issues concerning the change such as distrust, the culture, loss of respect, and the fear of the actual loss. Employers should not attempt to address this resistance until the exact reason for the resistance is identified. Level two resistance can be overcome by getting the employees involved, have their voices heard, and by helping them feel valued and protected. Level three is the strongest form of resistance which involves more deeply-embedded issues. With level three resistance, employers are seen as the enemy. Level three is difficult to overcome and should be resolved with extreme caution.

Social support and coping strategies. Social support during a merger is important (Cooper, 2000; Marks & Mirvis, 1986). This support should provide information and advice that will allow the employee to confront and solve problems (Cooper, 2000). Marks and Mirvis (1986) contend that social support helps employees

cope with stress created by mergers. Locke (2007) suggests staff development by using

subtle approaches to support by implementing support groups and project work.   While

there is no guaranteed way to deal with all mergers, Sherer (1994) suggests that

employees should be equipped with the tools to help them to deal with the concept of

constant change, to develop new relationships, and to engender the support of new

managers.

Appelbaum et al. (2000) suggests that leadership should make a supportive

working environment available to help the employees deal with feelings of insecurity or

threat. Intervention programs should encourage increasing the employees' perceived

control, confidence level and self-efficacy regarding the new culture (Cooper, 2000).

Harman (2002) believes that it is important to implement strategies that will "develop

new loyalties, high morale, and a sense of community in the newly created institution" (p.

111).

Often time mergers result in loss, which can also include layoffs. In order to help

employees heal, Noer (1995) outlines four stages of interventions, which are helpful in

aiding employees left after a downsizing. While this process is normally used during

downsizing, it has application to the merger as well. Stage one involves managing the

top layers of the merger process. Simply put, the leaders need to be seen and heard

throughout the merger process. Employees become "information junkies" without which

they go through withdrawal, eventually manufacturing the information for themselves

(Noer, 1995). Stage two uncovers repressed feelings. It is suggested that small

discussion groups are formed and meet several times over the merger. Employees are not

always aware of how they feel so discovering true feelings about the merger and having

an outlet to release their feelings can be beneficial. Stage three encourages the

employees to take control of their lives and their new situation. Writing a personal

mission statement and reading it aloud to get feedback is suggested to help employees

feel empowered. The final stage, stage four, is the wrap up. This stage helps the

employee embrace the new way while leaving the old way behind.

Summary

As higher education institutions become more complex, employing staff with

varying backgrounds, expertise and life experiences, and respond to a greater need within

the communities in which they serve, it will become more important to explore human

factors as they relate to higher education mergers. Higher education mergers do not

follow a set timeline or step-by-step guide and take years to complete. The research

presented indicates that many factors impact the experiences of those going through a

merger. The relevant literature served as a foundation to explore the experiences of mid-

level administrators who participated in a merger between a Kansas community college

and technical school.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN

Theoretical Framework and Design Rationale

This study was grounded in a qualitative research paradigm. Qualitative research

designs are based upon experiences, images, observation, assumptions and interpretation

(Pinnegar & Daynes, 2008). In addition, Miles and Huberman (1994) contend that

qualitative research is the "best strategy for discovery, exploring a new area, developing

hypothesis" (p. 10). The goal of qualitative research is to understand, not to hypothesize

(Pinnegar & Daynes, 2008). Qualitative research is used to explore problems using an

inductive approach with the researcher identifying themes and interpretation of the data

(Pinnegar & Daynes). There are several qualitative approaches such as, case study,

ethnography, narrative, grounded theory, and phenomenology (Merriam, 2009).   Using

a qualitative research method is advantageous when the research focuses on a

phenomenon. Phenomenology according to Moustakas (1994) is based upon the

assumption that the person and their surroundings should be considered when examining

meaning.

Phenomenological studies focus on a group of people with similar characteristics

to help explain an experience. These individual stories are aligned to the phenomenon to

create a "description of the universal essence" (Creswell, 2007, p. 58). Willig (2001)

believes that phenomenology is "interested in the world as it is experienced by human

beings within particular contexts and at particular times" (p. 51). Initiated by Husserl,

phenomenology was intended to be descriptive (Eatough & Smith, 2008). These

descriptive narratives are used to help the reader visualize the data to create a narrative picture of the phenomenon.

Mode of Inquiry

The qualitative research method, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), was selected for this study to examine individual life experiences and to help the individual make sense of his or her experience (Eatough & Smith, 2008). Interpretative phenomenological approach helps the participant explore their experiences to tell their stories and not just answer interview questions. According to Eatough and Smith (2008) researchers using IPA are led to "surprising and unanticipated arenas" (p. 189). As a result, this research method allows the researcher to investigate the stories of participants in areas where the participant may be reluctant to discuss.

This study looked at the lived experiences of individuals who went through a merger process in the higher education setting. The individuals selected were college mid-level administrators who were employed prior to and after the completion of the merger. To be considered for the study, the mid-level administrator had to have been employed at either institution prior to the merger.

The overarching research question for this study was:

1. What are the lived experiences of mid-level administrators at community colleges/technical colleges as they engaged in a merger?

Open ended interview questions listed below were asked of participants to gain insight into their experiences of the merger process.

a. How have you been impacted personally and psychologically by the college merger process?

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b. What are the challenges and obstacles or rewards you have

experienced as a result of the merger at your community

college/technical college?

c. How were you impacted personally and psychologically by the college

merger?

d. How could your institution have helped you with the merger

experience?

Follow-up questions were posed based upon the participants' responses to the

initial questions. These follow-up questions were conducted for clarification purposes

and to bring out more detail of the actual experience.

Method

Recruitment and Sampling Procedures. In preparation for participant

recruitment, I mailed a letter to college presidents of recently merged institutions

requesting permission to conduct research on their campus and with their mid-level

administrators. This letter of intent (Appendix A) included a copy of the research

proposal, Participant Consent form (Appendix D), and Participant Questions (Appendix

C). Presidents were requested to provide a formal letter indicating approval to conduct

research. A template was provided as a guide for the approval letter. I focused on four of

the recently merged institutions to conduct research: Kansas City Kansas Community

College and Area Technical School, Highland Community College and Northeast Kansas

Technical College, Seward County Community College and Southwest Kansas Technical

School, and Coffeyville Community College and Area Technical School. In order to gain

permission for research, each letter was followed with email and phone calls. Three of the

four institutions responding favorably by providing an electronic letter of approval for research on their campus and with their mid-level managers. Permission to conduct research was not provided by Coffeyville Community College & Area Technical School.

After receiving permission to conduct research at an institution, I shifted focus to determine how to recruit mid-level administrators for the study. In some cases, the college presidents provided lists of mid-level managers, while at other colleges I reviewed the website for organizational charts and directories to locate mid-level administrators.   I contacted the mid-level administrators to determine if they were interested in participating in the study via a request to participate letter either mailed or emailed to the mid-level administrators. Purposeful sampling, with a criterion of three years employment, was used to select 8-10 participants for the study. This criterion was used so all participants will have experiences relating to the phenomenon of the merger. In some instances snowball or chain sampling was used to direct me to another mid-level administrator within the institution. Miles and Huberman (1994) also call this method "conceptually-driven sequential sampling" (p. 27). In total over 25 individuals were emailed to participate in the study. The emails sent generated 10 prospective participants for the study.

When prospective participants responded with an interest in the study, I conducted screening via phone and/or email to evaluate their appropriateness for the research study. As outlined in the initial request to participate in the study, I asked prospective participants if they were administrators with direct reports, determined if they reported to an administrator at a level lower than that of the president, and confirmed they were employed three years prior to the merger.

Those prospective participants who met the criteria for the study were provided a detailed description of the study and were asked about their interest in participating. If the individual was agreeable to participating in the study, I provided the Participant Consent form (Appendix D), and Participant Questions (Appendix C) for their review. I encouraged participants to contact me with questions or concerns about participating in the study and assured their anonymity throughout the research process. In person interviews were established for gathering information for the research project.

Participants. On inception of participant recruitment, I set out to recruit 8 to 12 mid-level administrators from across the recently merged institutions. However, due to the nature of the topic, it was anticipated that mid-level managers with high levels of conflict might choose to not be involved in the study. With this in mind, my goal was to interview at least two mid-level administrators from each institution with a total of at least eight mid-level administrators across the institutions. The terms "community college" and "technical college" are used to describe the participants institution of origin in this study; although the participants are now of the same institution it was noted that the participants' institution of origin, either community college or technical college, was significant. This research project included a total of eight participants, three female participants and five male participants. Three of the participants originated from the technical college or technical school merged with the community college. Five of the participants originated from the community college.

Data Collection: Interview Structure and Questions. The data for this research study resulted from in-depth, in person interviews I conducted with each participant. Interviews with each mid-level administrator took place either at the participant's office

or another public setting. I practiced opening and closing the interview to become more comfortable with the interview questions and probes. There is a balance required for using probes within interviews. According to Eatough and Smith (2008) "probing spontaneously is difficult and demanding and requires considerable skill" (p. 188).

At the interview, I once again explained the study, asked if the participant had any questions, and asked the participant to read and sign the consent form (Appendix D). Once the consent for was read and signed, I provided a copy of the participant questions (Appendix C) and explained that the research questions would evolve and change during the interview as the participant shared their personal experiences of the merger. In qualitative studies, questions are posed to draw out conversations and to open the door to experiences. As a result, the questions evolve to help create a better understanding of the experience and context in which the experience takes place (Moustakas, 1994).

Semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions were conducted to gain participants' perspectives about the college merger experience. Open-ended questions encouraged the participant to expand upon their experiences and tell more in depth stories. Mack, et. al (2005) state that open-ended interview questions give "participants the opportunity to explain their position, feelings, or experiences" (p.42). Follow-up questions and probes were used to confirm understanding, encourage explanation or explore other avenues of the participant's merger experiences.

Each interview lasted about 60 minutes, and all interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed verbatim. The research assistant who assisted with the transcription was given instructions about the confidential nature of the recordings and was instructed to transcribe in a private setting, keeping others from hearing the interviews or allowing

them to gain access to the interviews. I reviewed each transcript for accuracy and made

necessary corrections as needed. Although no compensation was given, a thank you

email was sent to each participant within three to five days following the interview. I

also provided each participant their interview transcript within several weeks of the

interview as a form of member checking (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

A field log was used during the data collection phase to help me note a range of

observations such as body language, mood, and attitude. In addition, I noted the

participant's ideas and concerns during the interview process. Ideas for follow-up

questions were developed from notes within the field log and incorporated into future

interviews.

Data Analysis

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used to understand the merger

phenomena. I used transcribed interviews to identify themes and patterns by integrating

all participant narratives. Once themes were identified they were grouped in clusters to

develop a structure. Conceptual terms were then created to describe each cluster. Data

analysis used for this study is fully described in chapter 5.

Ethical Considerations. My role as an administrator within higher education was

taken into account for the study. While my experiences in higher education and merger

help me understand and relate to the mid-level administrators' experiences, there is the

concern of "backyard" research. Backyard research can involve a researcher conducting

interviews with colleagues or friends within higher education. Creswell (2009) believes

that backyard research could lead to "compromises in the researcher's ability to disclose

information and raises difficult power issues" (p. 177). To alleviate this possibility,

individuals with direct ties (i.e., employment) to my college were not considered for the study.

Trustworthiness. According to Creswell (2007) validity of a qualitative study should address the researcher's purpose for the study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) describe four criteria for evaluating qualitative findings. The four criteria are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Every effort was made to keep from influencing or leading the participants' with interview questions or verbal and nonverbal responses. Each conceptual theme was reviewed for plausibility by questioning if the themes did or did not make sense in the context of the interviews.

Peer review and member checking was used to establish credibility of the interview analysis. Credibility is comparable to internal validity because it focuses on the variables within the study and how they impact one another (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The first interview was coded and provided to the methodologist for the peer review. During conversations with the peer reviewer, the coding of the interview was reviewed and discussed. New thoughts and ideas about the meaning of the conceptual themes were considered. Member checking was used to verify data and the interpretations formulated by the researcher (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As a form of member checking, the interview transcripts were provided to the participants to check for accuracy. Revisions and deletions of confidential information were made to the transcripts as requested by the participants.

The goal of transferability is to generalize the findings with other cases or to tie the findings to theory (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Because it is difficult to know whether external validity has been established with qualitative studies it is essential to

review the study for transferability. Some of the transferability queries addressed in this study included a fully described sample, interview settings and processes so that the study can be replicated.

According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982) dependability is analogous to reliability. For example, are we able to observe the same finding under similar circumstances? Dependability was established by implementing clear research questions with a congruent research design and by performing data quality checks and coding checks. Peer review was utilized to check that the study has been completed with care.

Confirmability can be compared to external validity and means that others are able to replicate the study (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). To ensure confirmability, I was aware of personal assumptions and how they may play a role in the study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition, the study methods and procedures provided were detailed and in an audit trail. The audit trail for this study consisted of digital interview recordings, transcribed narratives, field logs, and documented analysis of the narratives.

Summary

This chapter has provided a review of the adopted theoretical framework and design rationale using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). In addition, this chapter outlined the method and criteria for research participants, data collection, and data analysis. Finally, ethical considerations and trustworthiness of the study were discussed.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Approach to Analysis

I utilized a qualitative, social constructivism view from which to understand the participants' stories. According to Creswell (2007) the goal of social constructivism qualitative research is to utilize the study participants' views or stories. Rather than starting with a theory, as in the postpostivism view, I used the stories to generate a pattern of meaning. I used the stories to develop meanings mid-level administrators have about higher education mergers and their experiences they went through during the merger.

A sociological lens was utilized to explore the mid-level administrators' responses by asking follow-up questions to draw out the events or memories in regard to their merger experience. As I interviewed the participants, using a semi-structured approach, the questions were broad so that the mid-level administrators could construct meaning out of their merger experience. I used open-ended questions and carefully listened to what the mid-level administrators said about their experience. These semi-structured interviews allowed for open analysis of the "participant's social experience but also of multiple truths and shifting identity" (Rogers, 2007, p. 102).

Using a social constructivist view, the distinction between the researcher and the participant is less clear (Rogers, 2007). It is assumed my background will influence the interpretation of the data; however, the utmost care was taken to tell the participant stories, knowing

that the study takes place in a "social world, and can have real consequences in people's lives" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 277).

Interpretation of the Data

An interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was utilized to analyze the data for my study. Willig (2001) believes that IPA is a "version of the phenomenological method which accepts the impossibility of gaining direct access to research participants' life worlds" (p. 53). Mead (1934) and Blumer (1969) maintains we as humans are creative agents who construct the world through interpretative activity. In IPA the researcher attempts to tell the story from the participants' view; however, it is to be expected that the researcher's perspective of the world will influence, to a certain extent, the interpretation of the story.

Interpretive phenomenology is used to create a meaning of the information (Creswell, 2007) through engagement with each participant, and by integrating participant stories into research (Willig, 2001). Themes, patterns, and concepts were extracted from the administrators' narratives. Careful consideration was used when making a judgment about a code or theme. The result was a conceptual understanding surrounding the themes and patterns which emerged from the study.

Coding

Initial coding began from transcribed interviews while data was still being collected so that emerging themes could be addressed with participants and follow-up questions developed. The analysis for the interviews involved reading the text, identifying themes, clustering themes, generating a summary table of the themes, integration of all narratives and writing the analysis of the results using "illustrative

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quotations from participants" (Willig, 2001, p. 60). The following paragraphs describe the process in more detail.

After the interviews were transcribed, the text was read multiple times. Riessman (1993) believes that narratives should be read for more than content and that researchers should look for structure and organization of the story. During the reading of the text, initial thoughts and observations (Willig, 2001) were noted in the left hand margin. To identify patterns or themes, the interview transcripts were analyzed for words, phrases or concepts that distinguish sections of the narrative (Willig, 2001). These labels or themes were noted in the right hand margin of the text.

Once these themes were identified, they were grouped together in clusters to begin to develop a structure. Clustering is a process for logically creating categories or theoretical concepts (Miles & Huberman, 1994). After organizing these clusters, more conceptual terms (or labels) were created to describe each cluster. According to Willig (2001) the terms used for the clusters should capture the themes' essence to create a holistic picture of the theme. As the themes were identified, they were compared to the transcribed text so the themes were reflective of the mid-level administrators' experiences. A summary table of the clusters was created for each participant (See Table 2).

Table 2: Summary Table of Clusters by Participant

Participant	Amanda	Bradley	Fred	Georgia	Randy	Scott	Sonia	Zach
Demographics/ Attributes	-Female -Technical college	-Male -Community College	-Male -Technical College	-Female -Community College	-Male -Community College	-Male -Technical college	-Female -Community College	-Male -Community College
Leadership								
Individual leadership characteristics	- Participatory leader. Wants to get involved, share information with others.	-Manage expectations	-Shared trust of new college president with staff which helped build trust throughout the merger.	-No comments	-Tried to help staff understand new roles and responsibilities.	-Positive leadership style encourages others to be part of team even if it means you don't care for your role on the team.	- "Wait and see" what happens approach to leadership.	-Tried to lead by example.
High-level administrator leadership characteristics	-Leadership should have provided a timeline and communicate more about their intent over the course of the merger -Technical college president not perceived as strong leader. -Felt leaders did not advocate for personnel.	- Perhaps more guidance from leadership would have been helpful, but none of them had experienced a merger either.	- Recommended leaders be more transparent. - Recommended leaders gather input from employees at all levels. -Trusted new college president.	-Leadership should have visited other organizations recently merged to more effectively manage merger. -Too much pre-merger haggling at the leadership level left little time to plan merger.	-Leadership should have taken more time to consider merger details. -Visited with other merged institutions to learn what worked and what didn't.	-College leaders didn't have authority until merger was complete. Believes college leadership is strong, effective and have done an exceptional job. -Notes transparent leadership style. -Notes positive leader. -Community college president understands technical college philosophy.	-Lack of communication from leadership. -Transition still occurring. - Didn't feel there were avenues for her to get questions answered.	-No comments
Culture								
Curriculum as it relates to culture	-Curriculum is referred to as "stepping stones" students complete one class and then move to the next.	-Address changes in technical education curriculum to make it more in line with college/university course work -Enhance technical college syllabi to make them more rich	-Program enrollment as opposed to course enrollment as in community college -Teach in contact hour or credit hour	-Technical college faculty didn't know what syllabus was. -Funding of technical programs different than community college -Technical college faculty had difficulty grasping clock hour to credit hour conversion	-No comments	-Technical college model different than collegiate model. Discomfort on the part of technical college faculty as they move toward collegiate model -Meeting the requirements of HLC-NCA, regional accrediting body	-different admission tests for technical programs compare to general education courses -new student orientation required for community college students, technical college didn't have orientation	-No comments
Teacher credentials related to culture	-No comments	-The staff at the technical college only has a Bachelor's Degree, and we require our faculty here to have a Master's Degree	-No comments	-No comments	-You have to have a master's degree and 18 hours as community college faculty	-Technical college faculty did not have bachelor degrees	-Community college had very different faculty contracts.	-No comments

Participant	Amanda	Bradley	Fred	Georgia	Randy	Scott	Sonia	Zach
Process differences related to culture	-Technical college programs run similar to business, so different to community college.	-No comments	-Noted processes for everything were different. -Technical college there was less planning and more doing. -Paperwork and pre-approval now needed for tasks.	-Technical college had no rules, no budgets. -Paperwork needed for all processes. -Community college very structured	-Community college tends to make maintenance a priority and technical college attends to emergencies only.	-Technical college is departmentalized. -Technical college has defined rules, policies and procedures.	-Technical college had a different structure	-Technical college didn't have the luxury or technology of planning
Job overlap as related to culture	-Feel unable to cross certain job duty boundaries as result of merger. -Feel unable to ask questions of technical college staff	-No comments	-Community college didn't realize extend of job overlap. -Smaller technical college organization meant less people to do the work, all took on multiple roles. -Initially reported to multiple deans	-No comments	-No comments	-Technical college had fewer people to do the work which led to job overlap. -Some difficulty letting go of these old responsibilities even though grateful for community college. -Technical college less siloed than community college. -Taken year or more to determine who would do certain tasks.	-Initially lots of questions related to organizational structure.	-No comments
Identity related to culture	-Branding, college name is very important -Heard college name was changing soon -Question role in organization	-No comments	-No comments	-Question about what to call the technical college, vo-tech, technical center -Determining a name for new organization is important	-No comments	-No comments	-Question about what to call newly formed college. -Doesn't think this was initially considered. -Old nomenclature such as Vo-Tech started being used.	-System changes led to changes in the way people interface. -New knowledge was gained that didn't exist before.
Integration as it relates to culture	-No comment	-No comments	-Community college treated us very well.	-Would have liked formal introductions to technical college faculty and staff. -Still much division among technical college and community college faculty. -More should have been done to help integrate groups.	-Expressed wanting to make merger seamless.	-Second phase of merger coming to fruition. Beginning to "fit" into system.	-Speculated that technical college felt personnel felt "gobbled up" by community college -Have moved past "us and them" mentality -Recognize need to come together as group for all college events.	-Compared merger to marriage.
Communication Through Collaboration								
Communication of changes	-No communicatio	-Held departmental	-Felt it was important for	-Very few meetings to	- Frequent meetings to	-No comments	-Few avenues to get question	-Regular staff meetings

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Participant	Amanda	Bradley	Fred	Georgia	Randy	Scott	Sonia	Zach
	n at her level, all communicatio n at higher levels. Meeting with all team members to communicate job role changes. Changes not shared with individuals first.	and individual staff meetings. -Sometimes felt information not shared quickly enough.	him to share information and resulting changes from meetings.	discuss changes.	share information, calm nerves and anticipation. -Stressed personalized and correct information. -Sharing information early.		answered. -No meetings for non-faculty. -Normal communicatio n was an obstacle.	between technical college and community college employees -Give people opportunity to express needs.
Level of collaboration	- Opinions were not requested. -No opportunity to provide rationale for processes.	-Attempted to obtain buy-in from the start of the process.	- Everyone should have been involved and asked opinions in regard to changing processes	-No input on merger process	-Seemed to have high engagement with leadership. -Frequent meetings with all levels	-Expressed team view of process. -Focused on positive and end goal.	-Focus on process changes and getting staff to work together.	-A lot of "out of box" thinking. -Much collaboration with people on multiple levels of organization. -Staff feedback and guidance instrumental.
				Challenges Related to Mergers				
Problems of adjustment	-Feel inferior to community college personnel	-Learning new processes	-No comments	-Psychological challenges of coming into a new organization, learning the ropes.	-No comments	-Some faculty/staff left due to a merger. -Strained feelings.	-Figure out how processes work. -Learning information about the technical college programs.	-Some people resented change. Believes this is why some personnel left college.
Feelings related to merger	-There is still fear and uncertainty.	-Fear about how a faculty or staff members' job may change.	-Uncertainty about job security, benefits, salary.	-Concern about job security.	-Faculty/staff lives turned upside down. Due to nothing they had done.	-Faculty and staff had been doing the same job for years. -Believed the merger changes were not as fearful as the thought of the technical college closing.	-Concern about positions being eliminated. -Worries about the future.	-No comments
Stress related to mergers	-No comments	-Working longer hours without additional compensation. -No support services.	-No comments	-No comments	-Pressure to make merger successful in a short period of time. -Working longer hours without additional compensation.	-Was psychologicall y extremely stressful.	-No comments	-Increased work load without compensatio n. -Conflicting feedback.
Lack of state support for merger process	-Suggested a mediator with experience in mergers be used for merger process.	-No clear direction. -No experience with organizing a merger. -Clarity of outcome would have been helpful. -Moral support not the same as drawing up plans.	-Biggest obstacle was funding.	-No funding from state for merger process.	-Currently working on alignment with KBOR.	-No funding for post-secondary education unless you offer a degree.	-It was a mandate or an opportunity how you choose to look at it.	-No comments.
				Benefits Related to Mergers				
Personal Benefits of the	-No comments	-Learn about technical	-Better benefits with	-No comments	-No comments	-Less stress -Opportunity	-More personnel	- Opportunities

Participant	Amanda	Bradley	Fred	Georgia	Randy	Scott	Sonia	Zach
mergers		education. How it differs from community college. -Services via technical college programs (oil change)	community college, sick leave, etc. -Take community college classes -Wellness program & gym -Brainstorm with more people			to use vacation and personal days after merger	resources- -Brainstorming with staff -Services via technical college programs (oil change, vehicle maintenance)	to prove oneself -Build relationships with others.
Student benefits of the mergers	-Opportunity for college experience (Sports, student housing)	-No comments	-Course enrollment as opposed to program enrollment. Students can come back and pick up a missed course.	- More choices for students	-More choices for students. -Seamless education for technical education students to earn an AAS.	-No comments	-Opportunity for college experience (Sports, student housing) -Student services for technical college students -More program options	- Technical college students have email addresses. -Library services
Benefits to the community	-No comments	-No comments	-Larger, remodeled technical college campus	-Was originally worried merger would not take place, community benefits because technical programs still exist -Providing more options to technical students.	-Outreach opportunity	-Technical programs were saved by merger, community benefits.	-No comments	-Merging college consolidates benefits for community
College benefits as a result of the merger	-Great from admission standpoint to promote services and programs.	-No comments	-Technical college program enrollment is higher	-Gained faculty person	-Gained great staff who are good to work with. -Opportunity to expand and grow technical programs -Auto Tech programs provide college vehicle maintenance.	- Technical college facilities have been upgraded with new windows and doors. -Enough personnel to complete the work	- Services via technical college programs (oil change, vehicle maintenance)	- Reports indicate the student satisfaction is increasing -Increased enrollment and retention -People resources

The integration of cases was completed by creating a list of all themes that reflect the stories of the entire participant group (Willig, 2001). Higher level emergent themes were cross-referenced to the transcripts to ensure the data captured the participants' common experience of the merger phenomenon. The master themes and their corresponding constituent themes were created to fully integrate the themes of each participant. This list includes the master themes, constituent themes, participants related to the themes, and the corresponding line/page numbers.

The written analysis of the results is structured around the master themes. Willig (2001) suggests participant quotations be used to "illustrate the ways in which themes are mobilized" (p. 60). Relationships of the themes were integrated into the written analysis and related to existing literature in the field of college mergers.

Findings

I have organized the findings into five major sections based upon the emergent master themes. First, findings related to the master theme of *leadership* are listed. This section includes information about how the mid-level administrators view the high-level administrators and the importance of leadership during the college merger as well as the individual leadership characteristics they described for themselves. Second, I describe the master theme *culture* and discuss how the cluster themes of curriculum, teacher credentials, process differences, job overlap, identity and integration play into the cultures of the institutions. Third, I discuss the master theme of *communication and collaboration*. This section describes how mid-level administrators recognize communication and collaboration associated with the merger process. Fourth, the master theme merger *challenges* are highlighted. This section includes information related to

problems of adjustment, feelings during the merger, stress and the lack of state support.

Fifth, I describe the master theme merger *benefits*. This section examines merger

benefits which include personal, student community and college benefits. In the

following sections I note the speaker of an interview excerpt, as is usual in interpretive

phenomenology findings. Pseudonyms have been assigned to conceal the identities of

the mid-level administrators. At certain times only general references to the speaker are

used when specific identifiable text could create conflict for the mid-level administrator.

Leadership

High-level administrator leadership. Participants recognized that upper level

leadership was critical in the success of their merger. In general, participants who had a

positive outlook on the merger also had a positive opinion of leadership in their

organization. Fred positively commented on his community college president the "First

time I ever met him, and he told me, you know, he spoke the truth." Because he trusted

the president he shared this positive outlook with his employees and as a result, "I believe

the teachers here trusted me. And I trusted them that they were telling me the truth…"

Scott showed deep appreciation and admiration for his community college president, the

president's staff, and the board of trustees. He believed that if it had not been for the

president's leadership, the technical school would not be in existence today.

Alternately, Amanda shared that weak leadership may have caused most of their

merger problems. She claimed that the president at her institution did not address

concerns up front, which led to problems and communication issues. In addition,

Amanda felt that pre-planning along with a merger timeline would have helped make the

merger go more smoothly. Sonia believed that high-level administrators should have

provided an avenue for asking questions and communicating information. Both Sonia and Amanda indicated that post-merger transitions are taking place at their colleges, but that some of these transition issues should have been addressed sooner rather than later. Fred believed that high-level administrators should have engaged all levels of employees requesting for input regarding the merger. Even though Fred thought the merger went well, he felt including everyone would have minimized some of the problems that resulted later.

Three of the eight participants mentioned that high-level administrators should have sought out information regarding mergers. Of merging Randy said, "I think that's the only thing, none of us knew how to merge." Georgia thinks that the high-level administrators should have visited other colleges that had recently merged to find out what worked and what didn't. As far as she knows this type of information gathering never took place. Regarding the merger, Georgia indicated the,

> Boards had haggled over it for a year or two and then once they finally decided
> and then we had to be ready by fall and so you know there wasn't a lot of time to
> do a lot of meetings and sit down and explain things.

Not having enough time to do research prior to the merger was mentioned by several participants. Scott said, "We basically had about 6 weeks to make everything happen. And uh, it was interesting. But, we got it done. And that was the important thing and the school was still functioning."

Individual leadership characteristics. The mid-level administrators interviewed for this study seemed to have a wide range of leadership styles. Several of the mid-level managers shared they tried to be transparent, to lead by example, instill trust with

employees and help manage employee expectations. Scott stressed being a team player

by taking on roles that he didn't necessarily enjoy. Randy's goal was to help staff

understand new roles and responsibilities.   Amanda and Sonia started the merger as

participatory leaders who encouraged their staff; however, throughout the merger process

became frustrated and then found it difficult to provide leadership to their staff due to a

lack of information. Amanda indicated that when her staff asked questions about an

issue, she got to the point of "shrugging her shoulders" and responding with no answer at

all.

Bradley felt that he worked to create buy-in from employees. He kept focused on

that fact that everybody wanted the merger to happen. His goal was to encourage staff

and keep everyone moving forward, pulling together. Unlike some of the other

participants' experiences, Bradley, rather than rushing right in and saying, "This is how

it's going to go… this is what you will be doing now, as opposed to what you used to be

doing," used more thought, more time, more energy, and more patience.

Culture

Most participants discussed the differences between the technical college and

community college. It was interesting that only one participant, Zach, related the

differences of the entities to culture, "And along this time that they have been working

here, they have developed organizational culture, they have had their way of doing

things." According to Fralicx and Bolster (1997) culture is defined as the way people

work in organizations. Zach recognized that it would be a challenge to integrate the

culture and identity of each institution into the new organization.

Participants acknowledged the merger of the entities was a challenge due to the immense differences.   Amanda, coming from the technical college side, explained, "I'm not sure it's a perfect fit and I don't think that everyone fully understands that it is not a perfect fit…from the technical side to the community college standard side." Scott, another technical college participant, addressed the discomfort of this change as well,

> You know while the tech school model and the collegiate model are, are different, consequently there is, uh, a little bit of discomfort as we evolve towards…changing the model so that we have a good working model of our programs and classes and everything.

He went on to say that some technical college employees may be uncomfortable with the community college requirements but that these requirements are necessary for existence. The requirements for existence, as he calls them, are hinged upon regional accreditation with the Higher Learning Commission- North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (HLC/NCA).   As an advocate of regional accreditation he provides rationale for making changes and improvements, "So it's not that the college is evaluating the instructor, but the college is being evaluated itself. And they have to meet certain standards. So that's very important."

Curriculum as it relates to culture. Regardless of coming from the technical college side or community college side, curriculum was a common theme. According to Bradley, bringing the curriculum into alignment was a focus on

> What kinds of changes might need to be made as we're moving from a, a technical orientation totally to something now connected with a college or university. What's that program going to look like now? Also, will the program

continue to exist?

Amanda saw the technical college curriculum as stepping stones, starting with the foundation and moving on to more advanced skills. She explained that in a technical curriculum,

> You take a class and you move on to the next one. And it's not like going in and taking, you know, four or five classes in a week and just having your different times set up for those. It is a stepping stone. Uh, building a house, you start with the foundation and move up, you don't start with framing in the middle.

Participants with the community college background were more focused on curriculum by course and credit hour as opposed to program or skill focused.

Community college and technical college staff also realized that a key to curriculum was vague or in some cases didn't even exist. This key was the course syllabi. Bradley, participant from the community college said,

> The syllabi used there, were not as rich as the syllabi we used here. In our syllabi here, we've gone to being very specific about learning outcomes for courses and competencies for courses um, and fairly standardized approaches, to the process.

Fred concurred that technical college faculty didn't have syllabi,

> And they didn't know what a syllabus was. They were so locked into that high school deal. And I kept, I kept saying, 'they've gone to college…I mean most of them have gone to college, surely they know what a syllabus is.' But they couldn't see that.

The expectation was that technical college faculty would create course syllabi one way or another.

Teacher credentials as related to culture. One of the reasons why faculty at the technical college didn't know what a syllabus was may have been directly related to the faculty credentials.   Faculty at the community college are required to have a master's degree along with 18 credit hours in the field being taught in order to teach. Technical college faculty in contrast may or may not have a college degree. Randy, at the community college explained it in this way,

> We'd never had faculty who had those kind of credentials. I mean the fact that they have a faculty member that can teach you cosmetology; she just may be a great cosmetologist. Well you can't be a great English person and teach at the community college. You have to have a master's degree and 18 hours even to be looked at.

The fact that the community college required faculty to have a master's "Creates its own set of challenges," said Randy.

The challenges related to technical college teacher credentials centers around the teacher's educational background and skill level within the discipline. For example, an auto collision teacher may have 15 years of experience within auto body refinishing and repair, but no bachelor degree. In addition, the salary scale for technical faculty is quite different from a salary scale for a community college faculty.

Process differences related to culture. It was clear from the onset of the mergers that the processes at each institution were different. Zach, a participant from the community college, said, "We were used to doing things certain ways; the 'technical school' used to do it in a certain way and certainly those two ways are not identical." Fred, on the technical college side, shared, "Everything we did over here is totally

opposite of what they did over there. I mean enrollment. We used to enroll monthly.

They do it by courses. We just do it by programs. They get paid by the credit hour. We

were getting paid by the clock hour." At the technical college changes to the curriculum

or courses didn't impact course schedules because they taught skills by program, not

individual courses within programs. Fred went on to say,

> You know you'd enroll here in a program and that's all you did. And now it's
>
> classes. Before they couldn't do that. If you missed it, you missed it unless the
>
> teacher was willing to take you back at that time and go through because it was a
>
> wheel.
>
> Technical colleges, it seemed, had less structure, more of a free flowing way of

getting things done. Scott, a technical college employee, explained the difference in this

way, "The college has a bigger organization and has more clear cut defined rules and they

have policies and procedures. And we didn't have the luxury of that." Most community

college participants seemed to understand this difference and made an effort to help

technical college employees navigate the more bureaucratic model. Georgia said,

> We are very structured. And they had not had any structure so at first that was a
>
> little bit of a change for them, a big challenge for them, I think from their point of
>
> view. But, I think they've got it down now and…There's just so many times you
>
> get your hand rapped and you pretty well learn the process. And so, there again
>
> they weren't used to doing that. They didn't know.

Technical college employees came from an organization where the rules and budget was

lax, whereas, the community college setting is described by Georgia jokingly as, "We

have to send paperwork in for every time we go to the bathroom, I mean you know."

Job overlap as related to culture. Perhaps one of the reasons for the lack of structure and more relaxed business practices at the technical college was because the staff "wore so many hats". A common theme that emerged throughout the interviews was that the technical college staff experienced job overlap due to understaffing and lack of funding. Scott, a technical college employee, explained, "We were running short of funds and there was three people, three positions that were eliminated…where we were there was a few of us and we had a wide, wide range of duties." Scott told me that after the merger on July 1st,

> I got ready to go through the school and start locking doors and everything, and
> our director of maintenance man, he smiled at me and said 'we have people to do
> that'. I said 'well let me go lock this up'. He said 'we have people to do that, you
> don't have to do everything'.

The reason he explained for the overlap was simple according to Scott,

> We kind of had responsibilities but it was…it was something that we…those lines
> could be blurred real fast because if something needed to be done, it didn't make
> any difference whose job it was, it had to be done and we had to keep the school
> operating.

Their philosophy was making the college work and making it work well. "That's part of the tech school evolving just simply because we operated for so long on a bare bones budget with a skeletal staffing".

Fred said, "You know some of the stuff, I don't think the community college really realized what all we did and how much we did until we got into it and we're still in the process of figuring stuff out." Fred went on to say that the community college had the

opportunity to be able to focus on one area, but he wanted me to know that he didn't feel overworked. He said, "I mean it's not that it was overworked or anything like that. It's just we're smaller scale to main campus and I understand why they have one thing to focus on because it's way bigger than what we were here."

Amanda, a technical college employee, didn't perceive this difference in a positive light as Fred did. She noted,

> I think they just felt like maybe we overlapped in too many different areas. So, if this was financial and this was student services and this was academics. They didn't want one person to overlap into several different areas. Although they all kind of fit where we had them, they didn't like the overlap to be underneath that several different people.

She believed these issues cause negative impact on the students. The thought that she cannot help the student by providing information, which now falls outside her approved job function, frustrates her. She was once able to help the students with their questions, but now encourages students to track down answers and to continue calling other departments for help.

Identity related to culture. It was clear throughout the course of my interviews that a few of the mid-level administrators were having difficulty with the organization's new identity. Georgia, a community college employee, said,

> And then another thing we had a big deal about was what to call them…tech school, vo-tech…they are part of us and so it's real important to figure out how to make them feel included in that. And however, we all still refer to it as tech school. Coming up with a name to name us all, that's difficult.

Sonia, community college employee, explained what she thought the technical college employees may have been thinking, "I mean I can't imagine from their point of view…they're going okay now we're going to be gobbled up by this community college." In most cases, the employees of technical colleges and community colleges had worked together in some fashion prior to the merger. Sonia commented, "We had been working with them so long but really not together, I mean we had really worked together but hadn't, we weren't of the same entity." She said, "It was never a competitive thing like 'us and them'. But we would refer…I think people would refer to the staff at the technical center or the staff at the vocational school." According to Sonia, old connotations for the technical school emerged; people began referring to the technical school as the "Vo-Tech."

Integration as it relates to culture. As discussed previously in the literature review, it takes years for employees to feel part of the new merged identity (Applebaum, 2000). One concern mentioned by several participants was helping the employees feel integrated. Randy said, "The merger caused concern for the people who were being transferred over. And how we could make that as seamless as it was going to be, as painless as it was going to be." Sonja indicated it was a concern, but didn't take it upon herself to help employees feel integrated,

> I didn't have to, but I'm sure levels above me looking at: okay how do we
> incorporate all of these people and make it a smooth transition where no one feels
> threatened, where no one um you know feels like their position isn't going to be
> there, or they're going to be downsized or outsized or whatever you want to call
> it.

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She went on to say, "They've tried to make in-roads to make things work better. I'm not

sure that our, you know even when we have activities for faculty in-service and stuff, the

two faculties separate."

Georgia had taken it upon herself to help employees feel part of the newly merged

institution. She said, "I've been in meetings with them and I've tried to get to know

them. We have a once a month staff meetings and so we're all in a big room together so I

just make sure that they feel that they're treated okay." In her opinion though, leadership

should have taken a more proactive role in introducing the employees. She felt because

its human nature to stay with what's familiar, they should have been "forced" to get to

know individuals from the technical school. Instead she said, "We still go to faculty

meetings and they sit there and we sit here."

Communication through Collaboration

The literature points to communication as the key to successful integration of the

merging cultures (Balmer & Dinnie, 1999; DeVoge & Sprier, 1999). The participants I

spoke to stressed more than merely communication, they wanted to be part of the merger

process. Involvement or collaboration in the merger process was a theme that was

articulated by each of the participants. Several of the participants believed that more

should have been done to gain understanding of the employee's rationale for processes.

In addition, by having a collaborative dialog there is an opportunity for mutual respect

and learning.

Communication of changes. Once decisions are made, communicating these

decisions is of utmost importance. Randy and Bradley both stressed the importance of

regular meetings with leadership and other staff. Meetings were held to calm the nerves

of those directly impacted by the merger. Randy said, "Personalized and correct information to people who are being impacted is the most important factor." This direct and open communication helps to reduce the likelihood of the rumor mill. The regular meetings allowed staff an avenue to voice concerns and to ask questions. Bell (1988) suggest that communication should be shared using a variety of vehicles including memos, newsletters, and press releases. Bell also notes, "The idea is not to let the cat out of the bag, but to include more people in the bag" (p.32).

Other participants were not fortunate enough to have an avenue to address concerns and questions. Of those responsible for the merger, Sonia even said, "No one really inquired about whether there were any questions." When her staff asked questions of her she didn't have answers or an avenue to pose the questions to leadership. Sonia indicated that regular meetings of non- faculty deans and directors had ceased during the merger and were still not occurring. Instead of rocking the boat she and her staff worked as they always had and made changes if they were directed to do so. Sonia shared that finding answers to questions or learning about changes happened by chance. Amanda was completely frustrated by the lack of communication between the community college and technical college, lamenting, "If the communication would have been better, right now we wouldn't feel like we've been doing everything wrong." Two years into the merger she says "In terms of us getting answers, it's just very hard. It's very, very hard. And so it's a matter of figuring out who can get that answer …up at the main campus."

Level of collaboration. Ainspan and Dell (2000) recommend that organizations use informal networks using influential peers. Several participants indicated that everyone at the institution should have been involved with the merger planning meetings.

This would have allowed for input, an opportunity to ask for advice and to learn reasons why things were done the way they were. Amanda said, "I think the worst part was they didn't ask our opinion. You know, um, we're, we're living it and they didn't ask our opinion." Georgia said of the process, "As far as anybody meeting with us and them saying okay this is how we're going to go about this merger, no we didn't have any input."

In most cases, the colleges knew for a year or more that the merger was coming allowing time for employee collaboration. Participants said that preplanning with other departments would have helped ease tension. Amanda, a technical college employee, said in the beginning she and her staff were hopeful about meeting with the different community college departments to develop a plan of action. The hope was that this plan of action would have been organized to include a timeline along with deadlines for action items. Instead, she shared the merger wasn't organized or collaborative. Georgia felt that the college leaders should have asked for help from other merged colleges. Perhaps, administration did this preparatory work, but if they did she wasn't aware of it. Georgia went on to say,

> Going and visiting with some other deans and finding out what some other
> mergers have done, because my gosh they've done it all over across the state and
> finding out about the funding formula all ahead of time, and then sitting down
> with all of us and saying 'okay this is how it's going to be done. And this is
> how…you know this is what we need to do.' The boards had haggled over it for a
> year or two and then once they finally decided and then we had to ready by fall
> and so you know there wasn't a lot of time to do a lot of meetings and sit down

and explain things, it was just we're going to do it. This is happening.

Randy said more time may have helped, but then it wouldn't have been as critical and explained, "Because you always got 'oh hell it ain't gonna happen until tomorrow anyway. I got another month.'".

Challenges Related to Mergers

In addition to communication and collaboration, participants mentioned numerous challenges throughout the merger. Zach thoughtfully noted about his merger experience, "The challenges come from the differences between the two cultures." Culture is just one piece of the puzzle. Employees impacted by the merger told me about the following challenges they experienced: problems with adjustment to the merger, anxiety, fear and uncertainty of changes; stress related to the merger; and lack of state level support for the merger.

Problems of adjustment. Community college employees mentioned that it was probably more difficult for the technical college employees to merge because it was the technical college processes that changed. Some employees who are not open to change eventually realized that they would not be able to experience new opportunities. Scott said of people unwilling to change, "People that are not getting opportunities is because they fight every change. You can't fight it…its part of life. You have to embrace it and go forward." According to Zach and Scott some employees struggling with the changes resulting from the merger decided to resign from the college. It was noted that those who chose to leave the college felt resentment.

Feelings related to changes. Due to the multitude of the changes involved with the mergers, employees experienced many feelings such as anxiety and fear related to the uncertainty of the situation. Fred said of the uncertainty:

> There was a lot of uncertainty from everybody because people didn't know if they were going to keep their jobs. You know they were told they were and then they thought they were going to get their benefits, didn't know if they were going to get their benefits and then you know paper work was always flying around and nothing was in stone.

Most employees from the technical college were guaranteed their job for two years. But even with this information known, staff walked on egg shells wondering if they would be let go after the two years was up. Geber (1987) indicates that worry results in an immediate drop in productivity after a merger because employees feel insecure and are often too distracted to do their jobs. Fred said,

> But you don't know all the rules, the laws and stuff. And I guess as long as you knew you were doing your job, they probably wouldn't get rid of you, so. And I know that that's the way everybody was around here.

Sonia said that she and her staff had worries about the future. They were busy and even though they had a lot of work to keep their minds occupied from time to time they became "unnerved." She indicated that she had moments when she thought, "Oh my God, what's going to happen?"

There was the fear of change as well. Employees had been doing their jobs the same way for years, why should they have to change now? Scott said of employees struggling with change:

They were afraid of the changes that were going to happen. But what they didn't

seem to grasp is that the changes that were going to happen were not near as

severe as what was going to happen if the merger didn't go through because the

school would've closed. I firmly believe that.

Randy felt concern for employees' fear because the merger created major change in their

lives through no fault of their own.

Stress related to mergers. Stress was the result of immense pressure for a

successful merger. Most participants indicated an increased level of stress due to

additional job duties resulting from the merger. Randy said, "There was a lot of pressure

on all of us…to make it work and to make the impact as small as possible." He said that

for a significant amount of time it felt as if he was working two jobs, instead of one.

There was no compensation for taking on this extra load either, Bradley noted, "They're

wanting you to do another job and nobody's said anything about, uh, um, additional

money or Zoloft or anything like that."

Lack of state support for merger process. Throughout my interviews with

participants the merger was referred to as a mandate by the Kansas Board of Regents

(KBOR). In reality, the technical colleges/schools did have a choice whether to merge

with a community college, remain as a school under the local school board or become an

independent entity. The participants expressed a lack of support or, what perceived to be

a lack of support from, the state level. Bradley said of the KBOR,

We're trying to meet their expectations on the one hand, and they had no idea

what the hell they were doing. Then you're trying to meet the internal

expectations and, um, as an administration, I don't think we've ever engaged in

any kind of merger that I'm aware of.

The lack of support seemed to be directly related to funding. Georgia put it this way,

"The biggest obstacle probably was the funding and the state said you are going to merge,

but how you're going to pay for it is up to you. Most participants felt that merging

institutions would have been a better opportunity if there was KBOR support in the form

of funding and assistance in the merger process.

Benefits related to Mergers

It seemed more difficult for participants to zero in on the benefits resulting from

the merger. When asked about the benefits or rewards of the merger participants often

paused, repeated the question and then finally provided an answer. It was as if until I

asked the question, benefits of the merger had not been considered. Ultimately the

themes about merger benefit focused on personal benefits, benefits for the students, the

community, and the newly merged institution.

Personal benefits of the mergers. Personal benefits community college

employees noted often surrounded the new resources the technical college faculty and

students were able to provide. For instance, Bradley remarked, "Thursday I'm going to

have my oil changed." Sonja said, "Staff members, they can take their vehicles there if

they have mechanical problems or they have painting needs because they are always

looking for projects." Technical college employees indicated a benefit was being able to

take community college classes, and improved human resource benefits such as use of the

wellness center, and more sick leave. Human capital was another personal benefit.

Participants like being able to have more people to brainstorm with and the opportunity to

build relationships while working toward a common goal. Zach added the merger has "Given the opportunity for people to prove to themselves what they are capable of doing" and "has provided an opportunity for those individuals that doubted their capabilities and for the institution to really know who is an achiever and who is not."   Most participants would have appreciated monetary rewards for taking on additional responsibilities, but realized money was not provided or made available to support the merger process.

Student benefits of the mergers. All participants agreed the students benefited the most from the merger. Sonja even said, "The opportunities for students is excellent" and Zach, "bottom line it is good for our students". The technical college students, that is, have more services available such as the library, online library databases, student housing, athletics, and even retention services like new student orientation. Most technical college students did not have access to these services until the merger.

In addition to services, technical college students have the opportunity for a seamless transition to general education courses to obtain a degree. Randy put it this way:

> From the educator point of view, I think that our ability to uh provide
>
> undergraduate education to their students at that location, if they decide to take it,
>
> has been a great opportunity for the college and the students that are there. If a
>
> student takes an auto body technology or auto collision or something like that
>
> wants to take Comp 101 and really get college credits and learn how to write
>
> better; or he want to take Business 100 and learn a little bit about business and
>
> stuff, that opportunity is there. And it's really seamless and it's really uh easy for

them to do. And I think that's been an opportunity for us to serve the students in

a better way.

With the changes in curriculum, from program based, to course based, the students could take one course at a time. If a student missed a course he or she could come back, take the one course and complete the requirements for the program. The program curriculum initially in place at the technical colleges didn't allow for this flexibility.

Benefits to the community. Being able to reach out to the community was a benefit that most participants acknowledged. Scott, a technical college participant expressed in the community benefit in this way, "The community college here recognized that the technical education is important and important for the community and really stepped up to help make that, or keep it…a reality." Georgia worried that the colleges may not merge because of back and forth discussions with each institution's board. Her fear was that the merger might not happen and as a result be a loss to the community. Ultimately, merging colleges has allowed the consolidation of courses, programs and services instead of having, "two separate silos".

College benefits as a result of the merger. Benefits for the newly merged college were also mentioned. One benefit for the college was gaining enrollment, adding courses, students, and additional course offerings ultimately leads to increased enrollment. Fred, a technical college mid-level administrator, speaking of the community college commented, "I think they, you know, got a good deal because now they got our enrollment and you know 24 more programs." With the gain of programs, there was also a gain of valuable faculty and staff. Community college participants also mentioned the maintenance benefits to the newly merged institution. For example, students in the auto

service technology programs change the oil and perform regular maintenance services to college vehicles. Students in auto collision courses perform body repair work by knocking out dents and dings in college vehicles. Of course, the college pays for parts, but because the teachers incorporate the repairs into the course curriculum, the college doesn't have to pay for labor on the repairs. One participant said the college's auto program students repaired a badly damaged car that was ultimately used as a marketing tool,

> A couple of other opportunities for us as a school. One was there's an auto tech program there. And apparently their paint system is like state of the art. It's like the newest way to paint…paint vehicles. And those kids were able to reconstruct some very badly damaged vehicles and one was like a Mustang. It was very nice. And the other was an FJ Cruiser. Both of them were redone and were in competition for the state in the state auto shows or whatever. And these kids were, you know did so well. And for obvious reasons, it was…what the FJ Cruiser was that gold, that yellowish-gold, which is one of our colors, so they made it a parade vehicle for us.

Zach summed up the benefits by saying that in the long run,

> We are better off and the rewards vary. It depends on how you really look at it. I think its people. You could have the best technical systems out there and you could have a multi-million dollar budget, but if you do not have the right people you're not going to get anywhere. I think its people.

Summary

This chapter illuminated common themes that impact the experiences of mid-level administrators involved in a college merger. The analysis of the data entailed rich information and stories about the experiences of the participants. Frequently, excerpts from the interview transcripts were provided to support the analysis of each theme. Interpretive phenomenological approaches often reveal the power of the individual stories and the findings that originate from this rich information.

The data analysis yielded several common themes among mid-level administrators experiencing a college merger. These themes included leadership, culture, communication and collaboration, merger challenges, and benefits. The findings of this study demonstrated that the merger process is more than blending together two organizations, there are factors that impact the motivation, morale and dedication of mid-level administrators within merging organizations.

Finally, the data showed that the relationship between leadership, communication and culture are strongly integrated.   While the stories came from across the state within three different college mergers, the substance and meaning behind them were comparable. Many of these mid-level administrators described similar experiences and offered insight into the importance of the human factor throughout the merger process.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This study of mid-level administrators who experienced a college merger was based on an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA). Finding meaning and insight as a result of the mid-level administrators' stories was the purpose of this study. The primary goal was to extract themes, patterns, and concepts from the mid-level administrators' narratives. Accessing multiple mid-level administrators from each college merger uncovered a conceptual understanding surrounding the themes of leadership, culture, communication and collaboration, merger challenges, and benefits. The participant responses reinforce literature that indicates mergers should be focused on people.

An unexpected outcome of this study was the lack of participant responses surrounding personal and psychological experiences of the merger. Instead of cultivating responses related to personal and psychological experiences, organizational and sociological aspects of the participants' merger experiences were revealed. It is unknown why the participant responses did not share more personal and psychological experiences especially when open-ended questions specifically addressed this topic. It is possible that fear and anxiety related to the merger were still very fresh on the minds of these participants and therefore they were not willing to disclose information to an unknown researcher. Another possibility is that the participants who agreed to participate in the study did not have strong personal or psychological experiences related to the merger. As with all qualitative studies it is important to let the participant experiences guide the

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results.

Findings Related to the Literature

The eight mid-level administrators interviewed for this phenomenological study reaffirm literature which stresses the importance of the well-being of employees experiencing a merger. The findings from this research confirm that merger literature stressing the importance of leadership, communication, culture, collaboration and integration impact the mid-level administrators' experiences throughout the merger. As evidenced by the participant responses in this study, the relationship between leadership, communication, and culture appear to be strongly integrated. In relation to the overarching research question, "What are the lived experiences of mid-level administrators at community colleges/technical colleges as they engaged in a merger?" a majority of the mid-level administrators I interviewed expressed positive views of the college merger and merger process. In addition, mid-level administrators seemed to be aware of the benefits of the merger to students and ultimately, the community.

The criticality of leadership is evident throughout the merger process. Mid-level administrators stressed strong leadership as a necessity to the merger to empower employees and to create a sense of community. Several participants expressed deep respect and appreciation for the college presidents sharing that without the leadership of these individuals the technical colleges may not be in existence today. As echoed in the research (Curri, 2002; Eastman & Lang, 2001; Harman, 2002; Prichard & Williamson, 2008) this study recognizes that strong leadership to guide the human element throughout the merger process is important. While an organization may not be able to control all the variables impacting the employees, is it apparent from the participants in this study that

leaders have a strong influence over the well-being of the faculty and staff they serve.

As evidenced by the study participants' experiences, the impact of a merger on the organizational culture is vast. Only one of the participants in the study seemed to recognize that culture differences had such an impact on the merged colleges. Based upon this study of technical college and community college mergers, care should be taken in assuming that two academic organizations have similar cultures. Culture differences related to processes, job overlap, identity and integration were identified in this study. It was evident throughout the course of my interviews that community college mid-level administrators seemed to find fault or look down upon the technical college culture. The technical colleges' mid-level administrators were often forced to make changes to their curriculum, processes, job role, and identity upon merging with the community colleges. Each mid-level administrator will have a difference of opinion about whether changes may or may not have been justified or explained. Because culture is comprised of a set of assumptions that a group has created, developed or discovered to adapt and integrate into their situation (Shein, 1985; Hatch, 1993), community college leadership should be mindful to not discount the technical college culture. Research suggests (Buono & Bowditch, 1989) that culture change should be explained and justified to employees. In addition, leaders should consistently communicate the beliefs and values of the new organization to encourage employees to adopt them (Buono & Bowditch, 1989).

An issue that impacts adopting a new culture is "in-group" and "out-group" perspective. Social identity theorists maintain that beliefs, behaviors and perceptions of merging groups tend to manifest in inter-organizational competition that could undermine the merger (Hogg & Terry, 2000). Due to in-group bias, individuals tend to identify

more strongly with members of their own group that with individuals outside their group. It is likely that participants originally affiliated with the technical college and those originally affiliated with the community college experienced in-group bias toward the organizational change. Essentially, most participants felt a strong connection to their organization and that "buying in" to the new organization and new culture was somewhat difficult.

Overall, community college participants seemed to accept the changes resulting from the merger more readily than their technical college counterparts. The reason for this difference is likely connected to the technical college being viewed as the "out-group" or the organization being "absorbed" by the community college. Technical college participants were required to change their organizational culture and to adopt the organizational culture of the community college. Mergers require individuals to shift their self-concept to maintain align their identity to the changing organization. Individuals must make this shift in organizational identification for merger success (Dutton et al., 1994). The more closely the participant identifies with the organization, the more likely the participant is to adopt the culture of the organization. (Van Kippenberg, et. al., 2002).

There seemed to be distinct differences in how male and female participants responded in this study. Male participants focused more on the positive outcomes of the merger while female participants mentioned more negative experiences. Female participants seemed to experience more difficulty with communication and collaboration and express more fear and uncertainty than their male counterparts. Both male and female participants recognized benefits of the merger.

Communication and collaboration appear to be directly related to one another. They also seem to be key factors in how the mid-level administrator reacts to the merger. Study participants who experienced high levels of communication also experienced high levels of collaboration. A few of the participants seemed significantly disengaged due to the lack of regular meetings and avenues to voice their questions or concerns.

Participants noted the importance of communication throughout the merger process and described situations where communication either strengthened or weakened the merger process. More than saying communication was important, the mid-level administrators identified examples of positive communication associated with the merger by sharing information to encourage "buy-in" and by holding regular meetings to eliminate the "rumor mill." Negative experiences of communication were shared, noting a lack of "a plan of action" and lack of "timelines with deadlines for action." This finding aligns with previous research (Applebaum, et al., 2000) that communication is the most important factor throughout the merger process. Beyond the connection with previous research, this study offers a unique contribution because it suggests that communication is related to collaboration. Participants in this study stressed that in addition to having communication, they wanted to be included in the process. The level of communication and the level of collaboration appear to be key factors in how the mid-level administrator responded to the merger. The first communication about the merger tends to set the tone for the entire merger. In the colleges where it was evident the merger was inevitable and a constant, consistent message was not shared, mid-level administrators felt anxiety and tension. On the other hand, participants who indicated the communication was straightforward and transparent seemed to express more positive

views of the merger even if the messages did not always contain the information employees wanted to hear. Thus, this study reinforces research that communication should be timely (Balmer & Dinnie, 1999; Buono & Bowditch, 1989; Burke, 1987; Daniel, 1999; Lloyd, 2009), honest (Bell, 1988) and should address and resolve uncertainty (Applebaum, et al., 2000).

The study also supports other research that suggests that a merger has an immense impact on the lives of employees. Organizations should expect some decline in employee morale and productivity, but care should be taken to minimize these negative effects. Research suggests that staff development using support groups and project work (Locke, 2007) as well as tools to help employees deal with constant change. Additionally, in order to develop new relationships and gain support of new managers (Sherer, 1994) should be made available to employees to help them cope with the merger. Official support mechanisms to help mid-level administrators through the merger were not apparent. It was not apparent that the mid-level administrators would have sought out and used these support mechanisms if they were available.

The study participants also shared benefits resulting from the merger, a topic not generally discussed in merger research. Benefits related to the college mergers were numerous although somewhat difficult for participants to name initially. Ultimately the merger benefit themes that emerged were: personal benefits; college benefits; student benefits, and community benefits. While most participants would have appreciated monetary benefits to offset the increased workload due to the merger, monetary benefits were not a reality. Most personal benefits mentioned centered on the opportunity for personal development either by taking classes or using the wellness center. Participants

didn't always articulate that they appreciated the opportunity to work with new employees from the merged institution; however, it was evident in the other experiences mentioned during the study. Community college mid-level administrators shared the benefit of being able to utilize the technical college automotive program as a resource for taking their cars for routine maintenance. Likewise, community college mid-level administrators indicated that the college also benefited from the use of technical college program equipment for maintenance and repairs on the college campus. College benefits also included growing the college by adding new programs, faculty, staff and students. All participants agreed that students as well as the community as a whole benefited from the technical college/community college mergers. Technical college students now have access to services and courses not previously available to them. Due to the fear of the technical colleges closing, because of the merger, participants recognized that the technical education programs would still be available in the community.

Limitations

As with all research, there were some limiting factors to this research study. First, there were not as many participants as I had hoped. From the prospective participant pool, few of these individuals agreed or even responded when I requested their participation in my study. It appears as though some prospective participants selected not to participate in the study for personal reasons, emotional reasons, or for study related reasons such as being unsure of what the research would involve, fear of being identified by colleagues, or fear in sharing experiences with an unknown researcher. Two of the three college presidents encouraged mid-level managers to participate in this study. Understandably, college presidents who encouraged mid-level managers to participate

did generate more participants than the one who did not encourage participation. Perhaps the mid-level administrators from the college where participation was not encouraged felt fear or uneasiness about participating in the study even though I was able to provide the president's letter providing permission for conducting research.

Surprisingly, snowball sampling was very minimal. Only one of the participants suggested by another participant agreed to take part in the study. Even though the study was completely anonymous, I expected that participants recommended by another fellow colleague would be more likely to materialize because the participant personally knew the individual they were recommending to me. The ineffectiveness of snowball sampling might be due to concerns about the possibility of the participant's interview being shared with the person who recommended participation in the study.

These limitations did not seem to reduce the quality of the data. Instead, it limited the quantity of the potential participants. It is possible that the time of year impacted the participant pool as well. Participants were contacted over the summer and summer is often a time when families take vacations. One participant contacted me agreeing to participate, but indicated that she would not be able to do so until she returned from vacation two weeks later. Fortunately, each college yielded at least two participants for this study, one college yielded four participants.

The final limitation deals with the extent to which the participants were open about their merger experiences. At times I wondered if the participants were holding back or sugar coating their experiences. Due to the nature of the topic it seems likely that the participants, even knowing their responses were anonymous, may not be entirely honest about their experience with an unknown researcher. Still, the stories and

examples shared, show themes related to the participants' merger experiences.

Recommendations for Further Research

Results from this research provide suggestions for future research. Findings of this study show the importance of gaining multiple perspectives. Because the research only targeted two to four mid-level administrators within a college, additional research should include a wider participant base. Utilizing high-level administrators, mid-level administrators, faculty, and other staff will help draw upon experiences across the institution and therefore, paint a broad story of the merger experiences.

A more balanced participant pool could result in different outcomes. Considering the unequal distribution of participants' institution of origin, 3 from the technical college and 5 from the community college, it would be interesting to see if the study results would vary if there was a balanced participant pool. Community college participants seemed to have a stronger voice due to the higher number of participants from the community college. Also related to the unbalanced participant pool, was gender of the participants. There were 3 female participants and 5 male participants. Because female participants shared more experiences related to anxiety and fear, it is possible that a sample with more females would have generated more data related to personal and psychological experiences.

Another area to consider for further research is the possible link between gender and the mid-level administrators' merger experience. It seemed as though the male participants were more matter of fact regarding their merger experience. They tended to accept the changes resulting from the merger with less personal stress than the female participants I interviewed. The female participants noted more anxiety, more fear, and

tended to take the merger experience more personally than the men. It may be that men utilize different coping mechanisms in times of high stress such as a merger. It would be interesting to learn more about these differences in order to help leadership approach the merger process in a way that relieves anxiety and fear for both men and women.

Another area needing additional clarity is whether the technical college mid-level administrators and community college mid-level administrators have similar perceptions of the merger. Throughout my interviews it was interesting to hear about the differences in process, ultimately differences in culture, from the different groups. While this was not the goal of this study it would be insightful to learn more about how the merged groups' experiences differ from those belonging to the original institution. Based upon my interviews with mid-level administrators from both groups, it is expected that their perceptions and experiences vary much more than I could see from the surface.

I was surprised by the participants' lack of responses about how the merger impacted them personally. I expected to hear more about the impacts of the merger on their personal lives outside of the college. Besides increased work load and stress, I expected to hear more about not being able to spend as much time with their families or their family members not understanding the magnitude of the merger. Perhaps I didn't hear as much about personal challenges due to the deep sense of organizational commitment, a commonality, expressed by the mid-level administrators. This commitment to the organization was evident by the mid-level administrators' dedication to the employees, faculty and students they serve. Repeatedly, participants' expressed a sense of self-satisfaction knowing they are helping students meet their educational and career goals.

Summary

This phenomenological study reinforces literature that indicates mergers should be focused on people. More importantly, this study illuminated the experiences of eight mid-level administrators committed to the mission of colleges in which they serve. They provide a sense of hope for other individuals who may experience the phenomena of a merger.

Merger literature often provides negative examples of the merger experience. This study recognized that mergers are difficult for individuals who experience them, while at the same time, reinforces positive aspects resulting from mergers. These positive aspects include: personal benefits; college benefits; student benefits; and community benefits.

This study found that the mid-level administrators were highly committed to making their institutional merger a success. Achieving success with others also engaged in the process was the fuel that kept the mid-level administrators pressing forward. Even in the face of adversity, the mid-level administrators were focused on providing a wider range of educational programs and enhanced student services. Ultimately, mid-level administrators expressed dedication to their employees, faculty, students and the community in which they serve.

APPENDIX A: LETTER OF INTENT

Letter requesting approval from the college president to interview mid-level

administrators.

Dear,

I am currently a Colorado State University doctoral student seeking my PhD in Community College Leadership. In addition to being a doctoral student, I am an employee at Wichita Area Technical College (WATC). It is my desire to conduct a qualitative research study regarding the personal and psychological experiences of mid-level administrators within a merger of a Kansas community college and technical college/school. This topic is of interest to me because WATC recently became an independent college in 2006 as a result of KS Senate Bill 7, the same legislation leading to your college merger.

With your permission, I would like to do the following:

1. Interview your college mid-level administrators to learn about their personal experiences with the recent merger.

I am enclosing a copy of my dissertation proposal for your review. Thank you in advance for considering my request to conduct research on your institution and your employees. You may contact me at 316.250.0417 with specific questions or to informally approve my request to conduct research. A formal letter from you, providing permission to conduct research, will need to be on file prior to starting my research. A template of the letter is attached for your use.

Dr. Sharon Anderson is my dissertation committee chair. Other members of my committee include: Dr. Jim Banning, Dr. Bruce Hall, and Dr. Linda Kuk.

Sincerely,

Jessica E (Ross) Ohman
Doctoral Student
Colorado State University

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEWEE CONFIRMATION LETTER

Name
Address

Dear _____,

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my research study on the Personal and Psychological Experiences of a Merger: The Perspective of Mid-level Administrators in Merged Kansas Community and Technical Colleges. I am conducting this research as part of my doctoral research at Colorado State University, Fort Collins, Colorado.

Your personal experience with the recent merger will be an asset to the nature of my study. I deeply appreciate your assistance in agreeing to be interviewed. Your involvement will take place of the course of one personal interview lasting approximately 1.5 hours each. A follow-up interview may be requested to clarify or expand upon questions from the initial interview.

The purpose of this study is to examine the personal and psychological experiences of mid-level administrators who participated in a merger of a Kansas community college and technical college/school. I will interview 8-10 college mid-level administrators who experienced the recent college merger. Your responses will be confidential and I will maintain your anonymity in this study.

Dr. Sharon Anderson is my dissertation committee chair. Other members of my committee include: Dr. Jim Banning, Dr. Bruce Hall, and Dr. Linda Kuk.

I can be reached at 316.250.0417 if you have any questions. Thank you in advance for your time and contributions to my research. If for some reason you are unable to participate in this study please contact me at your earliest convenience. Your response is needed by _____.

Sincerely,

Jessica E (Ross) Ohman
Doctoral Student
Colorado State University

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPANT QUESTIONS

The following are the interview questions I will ask each participant. The order of the questions may vary dependent upon participant responses. Additional questions may evolve depending upon the participants' responses.

     a. How were you impacted personally and psychologically by the college merger process?

     b. What are the challenges and obstacles or rewards you have experienced as a result of the merger at your community college/technical college?

     c. How were you impacted personally and psychologically by the college merger?

     d. How could your institution have helped you with the merger experience?

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT CONSENT

Participant Consent

Consent to Participate in a Research Study
Colorado State University

TITLE OF STUDY: Personal and Psychological Experiences of a Merger: The Perspective of Mid-level Administrators in Merged Kansas Community and Technical Colleges

Principal Investigator: Sharon Anderson, 970-491-6861
Co-Principal Investigator: Jessica (Ross) Ohman, 316-250-0417

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? You have been invited to take part in this study because you are a leader within an higher education organization which has recently merged.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY? To gain insight regarding the personal and psychological experiences of the participant involved in a higher education merger for the investigator's dissertation research.

WHERE IS THE STUDY GOING TO TAKE PLACE AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST? The study will take place over the course of two interview sessions lasting approximately 1-1.5 hours each.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? You will be asked questions about your experience and feelings resulting from the recent higher education merger. You will also be asked to review and approve the interview transcript for accuracy.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS?

➤ *Sharing personal and confidential information with the researcher, and possibly the researcher's graduate instructor, committee, and classmates, though your identity will not be revealed.*
➤ *It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher(s) have taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any known and potential, but unknown, risks.*

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? *There are no direct benefits to the participant. It is expected the researcher will be able to gain experience with interviewing participants prior to beginning the formal dissertation research. It is hoped the final dissertation study will benefit society as a whole by providing insight into the personal and psychological experiences within a higher education merger.*

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THE STUDY? *Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in the study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.*

WHAT WILL IT COST ME TO PARTICIPATE? *There is no cost for participation*

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION THAT I GIVE?

I will keep private all research records that identify you, to the extent allowed by law.

You will not be identified in these written materials. I may publish the results of this study; however, we will keep your name and other identifying information private.

This study is anonymous. That means that no one, not even members of the research team, will know that the information you give comes from you.

CAN MY TAKING PART IN THE STUDY END EARLY? *You may be removed from the study if you so choose.*

WILL I RECEIVE ANY COMPENSATION FOR TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? *No, you will not receive compensation for taking part in this study.*

WHAT HAPPENS IF I AM INJURED BECAUSE OF THE RESEARCH? *The Colorado Governmental Immunity Act determines and may limit Colorado State University's legal responsibility if an injury happens because of this study. Claims against the University must be filed within 180 days of the injury.*

WHAT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

Before you decide whether to accept this invitation to take part in the study, please ask any questions that might come to mind now. Later, if you have questions about the study, you can contact the co-investigator, Jessica (Ross) Ohman at 316-250-0417. If you have any questions about your rights as a volunteer in this research, contact Janell Barker, Human Research Administrator at 970-491-1655. We will give you a copy of this consent form to take with you.

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW?

The college president has provided permission for me to conduct the research study.

Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document containing 2 pages.

_____   _____
Signature of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date

_____   _____
Printed name of person agreeing to take part in the study   Date

_____   _____
Name of person providing information to participant   Date

_____
Signature of Research Staff

APPENDIX E: DESCRIPTION OF STUDY

Description of Study

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of mid-level administrators within a merger of a Kansas community college and technical college/school. Interviews will last approximately 1-1.5 hours and will be digitally recorded. You will have an opportunity to review the written transcription of the interview

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