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Postmodern story of meaning making in a residence life organization: a transformational change process

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UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

A POSTMODERN STORY OF MEANING MAKING IN A RESIDENCE LIFE
ORGANIZATION: A TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE PROCESS

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

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Current research on change and transformation in higher education frequently relies on models which “clean up” the messy process of creating change into easily consumed lists of strategies. However these reductive strategies may be incomplete and alternatives which provide a more complex picture of the process of change have been suggested. Additionally, while sensemaking has been identified as critical to transformation, little research exists on meaning making during change processes in higher education settings.

Using social constructivist epistemology and a postmodern theoretical framework, the purpose of this qualitative inquiry was to explore how individuals in a higher education organization make meaning of a process intended as transformational change. This 12 month case study of a complex residence life organization at a large research university included 45 individual and six group interviews, 340 hours of observation and document collection, and an extensive researcher reflexivity journal. The resulting postmodern portrait blurs the boundaries of academic writing, literature, and art. The account displays the intersections of roles, relationships and responsibilities across an organization during a change process, and explores how individual perceptions and relationships contribute to personal and collective meaning-making. Further, the methodological framework of

this study and the resulting “messy text” was designed to disrupt the metanarrative of the authoritative researcher voice and invite the reader into the analysis. While traditional research focuses on definitive findings, this inquiry contributes to the literature by raising questions and evoking reflection on the nature of creating transformational change in higher education. Additionally, the intent of this postmodern inquiry is to shift the paradigm of what it means to generate knowledge in the area of transformation in higher education from a focus on how practitioners create change to a focus on how practitioners *think about* creating change.

In keeping with the methodological intentions of this study, practitioners were invited to read and respond to the narrative. The need to think holistically and systemically, being other-focused, knowing personal and organizational stories, and the importance of pausing in practice to make individual and group meaning were identified as salient when considering implications of this inquiry around change.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

...elles ne vous questionnent jamais sur l'essentiel. Elles ne vous disent jamais:

“Quel est le son de sa voix? Quels sont les jeux qu'il préfère? Est-ce qu'il collectionne les papillons?” Elles vous demandent: “Quel âge a-t-il? Combien a-t-il de frères? Combien pèse-t-il? Combien gagne son père?” Alors seulement elles croient le connaître.

(de Saint Exupéry, 1943, Chapter 4)

“Si j'ordonnais,” disait-il couramment, “si j'ordonnais à un général de se changer en oiseau de mer, et si le général n'obéissait pas, ce ne serait pas la faute du général. Ce serait ma faute.”

(de Saint Exupéry, 1943, Chapter 10)

This dissertation is dedicated to Benita Graglia, my mother and my first teacher. She encouraged me to ask questions and to be curious enough to look for answers, tucked Willa Cather and Daphne du Maurier (and so many others) into my stack of books while waiting to check out at the library, turned off the television, and filled our home with all the things that made it easy to love learning. She taught me to think for myself and loved me enough to give me the space to do as I was taught.

I am grateful to the participants of this study, who shared their experiences and stories, and who allowed me to be in and a part of their space. I am especially indebted to Eva, Mac, and Lizbeth who engaged without reservation beyond the traditional bounds of data collection and to make meaning. I would also like to thank the many friends, family,

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CHAPTER I
INQUIRY ORIENTATION

Introduction

Change and emotion are inseparable. Each implicates the other. Both involve movement. Change is defined as “movement from one state to another,” while emotion comes from the Latin emovere, meaning “to arouse or stir up.” There is no human change without emotion and there is no emotion that does not embody a momentary or momentous process of change.

(Hargreaves, 2004, p. 287)

Higher education in the United States has come under particular scrutiny in a number of arenas, both internal and external (Green & Hayward, 1997). While many issues such as curricular change, the role of faculty, and the type and quality of services provided to students are recurring, the need for change has been exacerbated by financial crises, public scrutiny, and competition in a global marketplace (Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004a). Beyond structural or procedural adjustments, issues facing higher education today necessitate transformational change that examines core institutional values and beliefs, surfacing assumptions that restrict modern institutions' ability to be successful in a postmodern environment (Bergquist, 1993; Bloland, 1995, 2005; Dolence & Norris, 1995).

Higher education has looked to business models of change for direction, however, corporate sensibilities often fail to account for the complexity of academic environments

and stakeholders' competing priorities (Birnbaum, 2000). Successful transformation efforts in higher education are tied to an understanding of institutional contexts and cultures (Bergquist, 1993; Eckel, Hill, & Green, 1998) as well as an ability to reflect on and learn from the process as it is occurring (Eckel, Hill, Green, & Mallon, 1999b). Research specific to creating change in current academic contexts is crucial to the future of higher education.

This study, both topically and with regard to research design, sits at the crossroads of my interests, my history, and my beliefs about the world. My undergraduate degree is in Art and Communications, and it is through the lens of "artist" that I perceive and interact with the world. However, I have worked in student affairs for over a decade and have a master's degree with a focus not in administration, but in human development, specifically during the college years. Both art and development are about our ability to reach our potential through acts of creation and recreation.

I believe development is a transformational process, which occurs when our experiences cause us to reflect on who we are in relationship to the world, leading to different choices and different actions. It is not purely a cognitive endeavor, but also deeply emotive and often dependent on being in a community that is both supportive and challenging (Sanford, 1968). Thus, my own interest in transformational change is grounded not in organizations per se, but in people's ability to achieve their potential, both individually and when we come together in groups, large and small.

My career in housing has been about creating opportunities for change; in individuals, in residence halls, in departments, and across campuses. Some of it was transformational, because it was inclusive, was grounded in an examination of values,

and resulted in lasting change. Colleagues might point to ongoing programs we developed as evidence of that change. I believe the true confirmation of transformation is the shift in what we perceived as possible for ourselves, and the generative community that belief created.

While grounded in organizational literature, this inquiry was framed by a belief that the challenges facing higher education today are a call to realize our collective possibility. Change in higher education may be motivated by internal or external crises, however, it represents an opportunity to be in community with one another and connect to our deepest collective values. It is my belief that achieving this possibility is not based in a mechanistic understanding of the process, but in understanding how individuals make meaning of change, for themselves and in relationship to others.

Problem Statement and Rationale

Dwindling financial support, shifting student demographics, public demands, global social change, and the advancement of technology create compelling internal and external pressure for change in higher education (Eckel & Kezar, 2003b; Green & Hayward, 1997). While the need for change at transformational levels that addresses not only procedures but also individual values and institutional culture has been acknowledged, little research specific to higher education environments exists. Instead, most often attempts are made to apply models and research developed in corporate arenas, failing to account for the complexity of the academic system and unique leadership challenges in higher education institutions (Birnbaum, 2000).

Meaning making, whether defined as sensemaking (Weick, 1995), organizational learning (Senge, 1990), or transformational learning (Yorks & Marsick, 2000), has been

identified as critical in the change process in higher education (Eckel & Kezar, 2003b; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Kezar & Eckel, 2002b). However, there is a paucity of empirical research exploring individual and collective meaning making in transformational change processes. If higher education is to be responsive to crises both internal and external, the field must be able to use change as a deep and pervasive transformational tool. Critical to creating successful transformation is an empirically grounded understanding of meaning making within the process.

Purpose Statements and Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to explore how individuals in a higher education organization make meaning, both individually and in relationship to one another, of a process intended as transformational change. Transformational change in higher education was defined as deep and pervasive, intentional change that alters the culture of an organization by changing select, underlying assumptions, institutional behaviors, processes, and products (Eckel et al., 1998). Using a social constructionist epistemology and a postmodern theoretical framework, this inquiry resulted in a case study portrait of the “complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv). The research questions that guided this study were:

- Q1 What experiences do individuals in a higher education organization perceive as salient to their own meaning making in a transformational change process?
- Q2 How do individuals in a higher education organization perceive roles, relationships, and responsibilities in a transformational change process?
- Q3 How do individual perceptions and relationships in a higher education organization create collective/group meaning in a transformational change process?

Significance of the Study

This inquiry contributes to both the research and practice of creating change in higher education. Current research on change and transformation in higher education most frequently uses models that clean up the messy process of change into easily consumable strategies (Kezar, 2001). While valued by practitioners for their usability, strategies based on these models may be incomplete and multimodel approaches have been suggested as alternatives that can provide a more complex picture of the process of change (Birnbaum, 1991; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Morgan, 1997; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Additionally, while sensemaking has been identified as a critical component of transformational change (Kezar & Eckel, 2002a), little research exists on meaning making during change processes in academic settings. Research that has explored meaning making in a higher education environment most often has focused specifically on top management, rather than the organization as a whole (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994). The purpose of this inquiry was to explore individual and collective meaning making in a transformational change process using qualitative research design that created space for multimodel approaches and gave voice to organizational members beyond management.

Additionally, the epistemological and theoretical frameworks of this study were designed to create possibilities for representation that invite the reader into the analysis (L. Richardson, 2000; Stake & Kerr, 1995). While current researchers are focused on presenting definitive findings, this inquiry contributes to the literature by raising questions and evoking reflection (Stake & Kerr) on the nature of creating transformational change. In this way, the intent is to shift the paradigm of what it means to generate knowledge in

the arena of transformation in higher education from a focus on how practitioners create change to a focus on how practitioners *think about* creating change (Stake & Kerr).

Summary

The ability to create change in higher education is a crucial tool in responding to crises in areas such as financial support, technological growth, teaching and learning, curriculum, and changing student demographics. Beyond adjustments to procedures or structure, addressing these areas requires change initiatives deep and pervasive enough to be considered transformational, as they alter the culture and underlying assumptions of organizations (Kezar & Eckel, 2002a). Critical to the sustainability of transformational change is an understanding of meaning making within the process. The purpose of this study was to explore how individuals make meaning, both individually and in relationship to one another, of a process intended as transformational change.

The following chapter is a review of the discourse associated with creating change specifically within higher education. Literature addressing organizational culture, change models, resistance to change, the role of leadership, and learning in relationship to transformation will be addressed to provide support for the purpose of this inquiry.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE DISCOURSE

Organizational change has been a concept of continued interest for decades in higher education, whether usurping business models and applying them to the academic arena (Birnbaum, 2000; Rhoades, 2000; Sherr & Lozier, 1991) or focusing specific attention on the unique challenges of the post-secondary academic environment (Cameron & Tschirhart, 1992; Eckel & Kezar, 2003a; Kezar, 2001; Meyerson, 1998; Oblinger & Katz, 1999). Today, understanding the process of change is becoming increasingly vital as higher education has come under particular scrutiny in the United States, as well as internationally, regarding financial accountability and affordability, quality of and access to education, use of technology, proposed pedagogical shifts from teaching to learning, the role of faculty, competition in a global market, and meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse body of students and the society to which they belong (Bergquist, 1995; Eckel et al., 1998; Gehring, 1998; Green & Hayward, 1997; Kezar, 2001; Kezar & Eckel, 2002a, 2002b; Moore, 1998; Newman et al., 2004a; Rames, 2000; Tierney, 1988; Woodard, Love, & Komives, 2000). These issues span both international borders and institutional types, and reflect broader societal questions about the nature and purpose of knowledge and the role of higher education today (Bergquist; Green & Hayward).

In light of the complex and systemic nature of issues faced by higher education, the emerging paradigm for change is not that of a self-contained process, but of

organizations with the ability to continually recognize needs and change repeatedly (Bergquist, 1993; Eckel, et al., 1998). While early frameworks suggest change as an external force that must be managed (Steeple, 1990; Turk, 1989), current literature is moving toward a conceptualization of change as an intentional, self-initiated, transformational tool (Astin & Astin, 2000; Eckel et al.; Eckel & Kezar, 2003a; Safarik, 2003). Beyond changing structures and processes, “transformational change involves altering the underlying assumptions so that they are congruent with the desired changes” and requires “people to *think* differently as well as *act* differently” (Eckel et al., p. 4).

Given the range and depth of issues facing higher education, this review of the literature will explore the possibility of change as transformation in higher education, beginning with an overview of current and historical factors which frame the discourse. Discussion will then focus on the literature surrounding organizational culture, change models, resistance to change, the role of leadership, and learning in relation to transformation. A considerable amount of research exists around organizational change in general and, as a result, this review will be necessarily selective, focusing on literature that has been identified as particularly salient for higher education.

Change Issues in United States Higher Education: A Macro-Perspective

Historically, change in higher education in the United States has occurred around themes of “growth and accrual” (Kezar & Eckel, 2002b, p. 295) as the institutions established by Colonial America and modeled on the English colleges of the 16th and 17th Centuries (Thelin, 2003) evolved to meet the needs of an emerging and developing country. Knowledge of higher education’s colonial origins and the subsequent changes

that led to the modern university system provide a basis from which to distinguish traditional evolutionary conceptualizations of organizational change from emergent ideas.

*Higher Education's Origins and Purpose
in Colonial America*

Early institutions of higher education were founded by the church to serve the secular needs of the colonies by producing an educated elite capable of leadership in social and political arenas (Cremin, 1997; Thelin, 2003). White men from prominent families attended small colleges such as Harvard, established in 1636, to become “gentleman scholars” (Thelin, p. 7) primarily as clergy, but also as generally learned men groomed to be successful in a public arena. Degrees were a matter of prestige, however, not an economic necessity, as men could become successful surgeons, lawyers, or solicitors through a process of apprenticeship (Cremin).

Because these colonial institutions were residential and often in isolated locations far from family, faculty were responsible for students’ total intellectual and moral development (Thelin, 2003). Faculty were composed almost exclusively of tutors; young men who had recently received their baccalaureate degree and had not yet found a clerical appointment (Finkelstein, 1997). Tutors drilled students in the memorization of classical curriculum such as Greek, rhetoric, biblical studies, and arithmetic, (Cremin, 1997) but little specialization or expertise as instructors was required, as the belief was that “knowledge was a fixed body of truth to be acquired by rote through the discipline of the faculties” (Gruber, 1997, p. 203). Tutors also had custodial responsibilities for an entire cohort of students outside the classroom, sharing dining and living space and serving as disciplinarians (Gruber; Thelin). However, college teaching at this time was

viewed by most as a temporary situation, not a professional vocational choice, and the tenure of most tutors was three years or fewer (Finkelstein).

Following the nation's independence, many religious groups sought to have their own institutions for propagating their doctrines. Fledgling state governments granted charters to establish institutions of higher learning resulting in a "boom in college building" (Thelin, 2003, p. 8) in the early part of the 19th Century. However, a charter was merely permission to establish a college and brought minimal financial support from government (Thelin). As a result, colleges were highly dependent on private donors and paying students, and it was not uncommon for years to pass between the date the charter was granted and the actual opening of the institution for enrollment (Cremin, 1997).

Small sectarian colleges with liberal arts curriculum built around the classics remained the educational norm until the middle of the 19th Century (Thelin, 2003). Although notable exceptions existed, such as Oberlin College, which was established in 1833 and admitted "all comers regardless of race or sex" (Church & Sedlak, 1997, p. 131), the vast majority of institutions were focused on educating an elite white, male, privileged class. As a result, most of the more than 240 colleges established in the early 1800s struggled economically as they frequently lacked both sufficient funding, as well as adequate numbers of qualified students (Cremin, 1997; Thelin).

*Revolution Through Evolution: Toward
the Modern University*

As the United States evolved, so did higher education, seeking to meet the changing needs of a developing nation. While an all-encompassing history of higher education in the United States is beyond the scope of this literature review,

understanding significant events in its maturation to modern incarnations serves two purposes. First, it illustrates recurring issues of change in higher education. Second, and equally important, it provides insight into the culture and complexity of the modern university, factors that distinguish the study of change in higher education from other disciplines (Birnbaum, 2000; Eckel et al., 1998; Green & Hayward, 1997; Sanaghan & Napier, 2000; Swenk, 1999).

Growth of the Public System

The Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890 established land-grant institutions by offering states and territories 30,000-90,000 acres of land from the sale of which to raise capital for new and existing schools (Gruber, 1997; Johnson, 1997). The result, though far from immediate, was to establish a system of state-based institutions focused on providing practical education to the masses (Johnson).

Today, public universities that began as land-grant institutions exist in every state, comprising a “national system, derived from national policy” (Johnson, 1997, p. 222). Additionally, eight of the 10 largest undergraduate universities are land-grant institutions and public higher education as a whole serves the majority of students enrolled today (Johnson). Beyond the construction of colleges and universities, the Morrill Acts established federal support for higher education (Williams, 1997). This support set the foundation for a system of education intrinsically tied to the political process and established government as a major player in the success and direction of post-secondary education (Williams).

Access to Public Education

Debate over who should attend higher education has been present since women began to seek access in the mid-19th Century (Church & Sedlak, 1997) resulting in the founding of new women's colleges from 1860 to 1930 (Thelin, 2003). Additionally, the Second Morrill Act of 1890 extended land-grant legislation to the Southern states and made provisions for the support of "separate but equal" education for blacks in the post-Civil War era (Johnson, 1997). In fact, well into the 20th Century, the United States depended on small colleges "dedicated to serving a special constituency, whether defined by race, ethnicity, gender, or religious affiliation" to diversify access to higher education (Thelin, p. 13), with little regard towards discrepancies in funding and governmental support these institutions received in comparison to larger, public institutions (Newman et al., 2004a).

Legislation such as the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the creation of Pell Grants and the Title IX Education Amendment both in 1972, and the 1990 Vocational Rehabilitation Act opened the doors of mass public education to underrepresented groups (Thelin, 2003). However, diversification efforts often rested on physical and monetary access, with little attention to patterns of discrimination students experienced once admitted, as assimilation into the existing institution was an implicit expectation (Newman et al., 2004a; Thelin).

Current issues of access deal with financial affordability, selection processes, quality, student retention and degree attainment, and the support offered to students operating in a system that evolved from cultural values that failed to take their needs into consideration (Bergquist, 1995; Green & Hayward, 1997; Hurtado, 2003; Newman et al., 2004a). Beyond allocating funding for services, support for students and their needs

involves taking a critical look at the programs and curriculum offered in the 21st Century (Bergquist; Newman et al.).

Curricular Change

Increased urbanization, industrialization, and westward expansion following the Civil War created a national need for scientific and technical knowledge in the second half of the 19th Century (Gruber, 1997). The Morrill Acts and the Hatch Act of 1887 attempted to meet these needs and influence curricular change by encouraging the shift away from the classics toward a scientific, agricultural, and industrial core (Johnson, 1997) thought to be better suited to and more practical for mass education of a growing democratic nation.

Additionally, the focus of curriculum was also influenced by emerging national secularism, to which both Darwinism and German ideas about higher education contributed (Caple, 1998; Gruber, 1997). Between 1820 and 1920 almost nine thousand students went to Germany for advanced degrees not yet available in the United States, and returned to become leaders in education with modern ideas about scholarship and the purpose of post-secondary education (Johnson, 1997). German influences included the importance of knowledge being both grounded in and expanded through research based on scientific principles, the idea that a university was a community which valued intellectual freedom, and a “conviction that knowledge has a social function” and a “responsibility to the public welfare” (Gruber, p. 206).

These factors contributed to a dramatic shift away from liberal arts education toward a curriculum focused on vocational choice and the development of an elaborate system of elective education (Caple, 1998; Gruber, 1997). While liberal arts colleges

continued to exist, the major paradigm for social mobility and national prosperity made a college education an important component of individual economic success (Gruber; Newman et al., 2004a). Today, higher education's link to economic and social development, for individuals as well as nations, is no less prevalent in light of globalization, technology, and competition in an international marketplace (Green & Hayward, 1997; Newman et al.). These factors expand issues of curricular change to encompass broader questions of what purpose higher education serves, or should serve, in society today (Green & Hayward). With competing priorities between faculty's academic freedom and the public's call for accountability squarely in the foreground, debate focuses not only on what change, if any, should occur, but also on who is entitled to make those decisions (Lazerson, 1997).

University Structure and the Role of Faculty

Knowledge grounded in science resulted in faculty specialization, leading to both the development of colleges within the university around specific domains, as well as a major change in faculty roles revolving around a core value of academic freedom (Gruber, 1997). Scholarship was now a profession requiring an advanced degree and commitment not only to the propagation of knowledge, but to research and service as well, where faculty loyalty was focused more on discipline than institution (Caple, 1998).

Administrative positions emerged to handle responsibilities once met by faculty, resulting in the bureaucratization of the university in the late 1800s, both in terms of governance and function (Gruber, 1997). With the growing complexity of institutions, the role of president, once occupied by a "first among equals" who shared teaching responsibilities and daily contact with faculty, was now that of a manager charged with

the smooth operation of an elaborate organization (Caple, 1998). Responsibilities outside of the classroom, such as registration, housing, discipline, and oversight of co-curricular activities now fell to the fledgling field of student affairs (Caple), dividing the academic profession “into two vocations—administration and teaching—with clearly demarcated spheres of influence” (Gruber, p. 212). While faculty still maintained academic freedom in the classroom, policy decisions affecting the direction and future of institutions fell into administrative and governance arenas, dividing not only the academic profession but the structure of modern institutions as well (Gruber).

The Role of Student Affairs and Services Provided to Students

The appointment of personnel delegated to specifically handle student concerns and problems occurred in conjunction with shifts in the roles of both faculty and presidents, as well as increases in coeducational enrollment (Boyer, 1990). Harvard appointed the first college dean in higher education, Ephraim Gurney, in 1870 to relieve the president of student conduct responsibilities (Stewart, 1985). The development of the field of student affairs, however, did not fully coalesce as a profession until the 1900s (Nuss, 2003). First called student personnel, the profession has at its center a “consistent and persistent emphasis on and commitment to the development of the whole person” (Nuss, p. 65.) while supporting the academic mission of the institution.

Within the field of student affairs a primary functional area which is intrinsic to student experiences at residential colleges is student housing (Schuh, 2004). Blimling (1993) refers to housing as the “core of any established student affairs organization” (p. 1) because more than any other program or department, life in the residence halls has the most potential to influence on students’ growth and development outside the classroom.

Early colleges in the United States were modeled after English residential colleges where faculty and the young men they instructed lived in close proximity (Schuh, 2004). However, the spartan, barrack-like dormitories provided for colonial students were viewed as places to “eat and sleep” (Schuh, p. 269) and conditions failed to create the close-knit faculty-student relationships on which the scholarly lives of their English counterparts were built (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976).

Three factors contributed to the growth of student housing in the late 19th Century. The University of Chicago was founded with housing for students as a central part of campus life by first president, William Rainey Harper (Brubacher and Rudy, 1958). As the institution became known for its academic excellence, its residential framework became a model for other institutions (Brubacher & Rudy). Second, the construction of private colleges for women and coeducational opportunities at existing institutions refocused attention on the need to provide adequate and safe housing for students (Schuh, 2004). Finally, student housing became more popular and convenient as campus life outside the classroom developed with activities such as Greek societies, college athletics, debating clubs, and student publications (Brubacher & Rudy).

Student housing experienced many ups and downs in its transition to current models, mitigated by national circumstances such as the Great Depression of the 1930s (Frederiksen, 1993), the post World War II boom of the GI Bill (Schuh, 2004), student activism of the 1960s (Schuh), and the economic poor conditions of the 1970s (Fenske, 1980). The 1990s brought challenges still present today as students began to see themselves as consumers, expecting increased services and amenities such as meal plan

options, cable television in their rooms, access to technology, and a precarious balance between personal freedoms and assurances of safety and security (Schuh).

Mueller (1961) suggests three objectives for student housing: (a) providing for the physical needs of students in terms of convenience and proximity to classes, (b) promoting learning that happens in the classroom, and (c) supporting students' personal development. As a result, organizational culture within the area of student housing may often be bifurcated between administrative and developmental interpretive frameworks, where the professionals with the former framework value administrative and facilities related responsibilities, and those with the latter framework value the developmental and programmatic areas of their jobs (Love, 1995). Similarly, housing departments report to either student services or auxiliary services divisions within the university, or a combination of both, based on institutional philosophy (Sandeem, 2001; Stoner, 1992).

Studies have shown residence hall living has a noteworthy positive impact on the persistence and academic success of students (Schuh, 2004). Housing, however, will continue to deal with new and recurring issues with regard the type of services provided to students and the manner in which those services are delivered. Issues include facilities renovation, community development and student conduct needs, technology and academic support, professional preparation and staffing patterns (Schuh), and how interpretive frameworks influence departmental action and outcomes (Love, 1995). Beyond services, particularly salient matters for both housing as well as the broader field of student affairs include working towards social justice, fully claiming and integrating an educator role in student learning, and professionalism within the field (MacKinnon, Broido, & Wilson, 2004).

A Modern University in a Postmodern World?

Today, higher education in the United States is under national scrutiny over issues that challenge core institutional values with deep historical roots (Bergquist, 1993; Newman et al., 2004a). The 1990s marked the transition from an industrial age to a knowledge-based or information age, where the rate of knowledge generation is rapidly increasing and the life cycle of information will continually shrink (Bergquist 1993, 1998; Bloland 1995, 2005; Dolence & Norris, 1995; Hirschhorn, 1997). This has deep implications for complex, monolithic institutions built in response to the needs of an industrial or modern society, as they are challenged to respond to recurring historical issues of higher education in new and ongoing ways (Dolence & Norris; Duke, 2002).

Critiques over cost, financial cutbacks at state and federal levels, and public cries for wide-scale reform question modern institutional assumptions about the role of higher education in society, as well as the relationship of research, prestige, size, mission, leadership, and unrestrained growth to institutional success (Bergquist, 1998; Boehner & McKeon, 2003; Newman, Couturier, & Scurry, 2004b; Potter, 2003; Schmidt, 2004). Scholars suggest this crisis illustrates a system of higher education so immersed in its modernist values that it fails to recognize and be responsive to the fragmentation and complexity of postmodern societal needs at all levels of the institution, creating not just a philosophical debate but a mandate for change (Bergquist, 1993, 1995, 1998; Bloland, 1995, 2005; Slaughter, 2001; Tierney, 2001). Although leaders have perceived a change in the environment of higher education, most have failed to “grasp the profound significance of the Information Age” (Dolence & Norris, 1995, p. 22) and its impact on society (Allen & Cherrey, 2000). As a result, most change initiatives are focused on

responding primarily to dwindling resources and public support in strained financial times (Dolence & Norris), rather than surfacing underlying assumptions that may no longer be useful. Ultimately, however, the success of pervasive change initiatives at institutions across the nation are predicated on the degree to which these initiatives reflect an understanding of complex issues of change in general, and address higher education's unique environment specifically (Birnbaum, 2000; Eckel et al., 1998; Green & Hayward, 1997; Kezar & Eckel, 2002a; Meyerson, 1998; Newman et al., 2004a; Winston, 1998).

Organizational Change and Transformation in Higher Education

While higher education is being called on to be intentional and “responsive to an ever-changing environment” (Kezar, 2001, p. iii), a review of the literature on change reveals a paucity of empirical studies focused specifically on higher education. Much of the existing literature tends to be anecdotal in nature (Eckel & Kezar, 2003a), with university leadership sharing stories and advice about the content or factors involved in change, but not the process necessary to bring about change (see Farmer, 1990; Gumport, 2000; Martin, Manning, & Ramaley, 2001; Ramaley, 1996; Sanaghan & Napier, 2000; Van Loon, 2001; Wright, 2001).

Similarly, historical analyses of change in higher education, such as the one that begins this chapter, by their nature tend to review and record change from the perspective of “what” happened rather than the intricacies of “how” it happened. While both conceptual literature and history can provide insight into trends and recurring issues, today's multitude of competing issues and rapid rate of change (Green & Hayward,

1997) warrant a broader understanding of the theories and models that can help higher education professionals make meaning of organizational change.

Theories and Models of Organizational Change

Models of change are numerous and diverse, and come from various arenas of science and social science (Kezar, 2001). They can “reveal why change occurs (the driving forces of change); how change will occur (the stages, scale, timing, and process characteristics); and what will occur (the content of change, outcomes, and ways to measure it” (p. 25). Implicit in each model are epistemological assumptions and, as a result, the perspective used to make meaning of and initiate change reflects individual and collective ideas about human beings and the nature of reality (Kezar).

Building on the work of Van de Ven and Poole (1995), Kezar (2001) conducted an extensive literature review of change models and posits a typology of six organizational change models: (a) evolutionary, (b) teleological, (c) life cycle, (d) dialectical, (e) social cognition, and (f) cultural. Teleological and evolutionary models have been identified by practitioners as most usable, due to their more linear approach, however, all six models illuminate valuable aspects of the change process (Kezar). Although some models have not been applied directly to higher education settings, all provide insight into different conceptualizations of change in an academic arena.

Evolutionary models (also known as environmental models) stem originally out of biological frameworks that view change as an external force to be managed through incremental adaptation in response to the environment (Morgan, 1997). The history of higher education presented at the beginning of this chapter reflects an evolutionary perspective on change as a slow process, “dependent on circumstances, situational

variables, and the environment faced by each organization” (Kezar, 2001, p. 28). From the perspective of evolutionary models, change cannot be planned because it is an external force which instead must be “managed” (Kezar). Although managers can be proactive in some cases, the emphasis is on an environment that demands a responsive organization to change in order to insure survival (Kezar).

Teleological models include strategic planning, adaptive learning, and organizational development approaches to change, where institutional leaders see the need for change and produce intentional, rational, linear processes to achieve it (Kezar, 2001). Assumptions of this model are that organizations are both purposeful and adaptive, and that changes occur because individuals perceive a necessity (Kezar). Compared to evolutionary models that emphasize a response to external demands, teleological models place the onus of change on internal factors such as organizational features or decision-making (Kezar). The leader is central to teleological models as a change agent who engineers the construction of goals, strategies, plans, assessment, and rewards (Brill & Worth, 1997). Total Quality Management, is an example of a teleological change model which originated in the corporate area and later was applied unsuccessfully in higher education settings (Birnbaum, 2000; Kezar).

Life cycle models are similar to evolutionary models (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995), however, they are more focused on human development and “systematic individual change” (Kezar, 2001, p. 36) as organizations are born, grow, mature, and decline. These models grew out of child development studies and frame change as a series of progressive and rational stages (Kezar; Miller & Friesen, 1980). Change does not happen because of a perceived necessity, but because it is inevitable (Miller & Friesen, Morgan,

1997). Training and development are stressed, as life cycle models emphasize the role of people, beyond those in leadership positions, as critical to success in the change process (Kezar). Schein's (1992) conceptualization of organizational culture, (discussed later in this chapter) as having youth, midlife, and mature stages that influence change and other initiatives reflects aspects of a life cycle model.

Dialectic models focus on polar opposite, and often political, forces present in all organizations that interact to create change (Kezar, 2001; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). While the previous three models emphasize change as rational and progressive, dialectic models create space for regressive and irrational aspects of change, as well as periods of inactivity (Kezar). Conflict is seen as inherent in human interaction (Morgan, 1997) and dialectic models often focus on Marxist theories, emphasizing the role of power in creating or restraining change (Kezar). Labor movements, unionization, Civil Rights activism, and critical-cultural examinations of gender and race issues in the workplace are all based in dialectic change models (Kezar).

Social cognition models emphasize sensemaking and come from social-constructivist views of organizations, where change is a response to the cognitive dissonance individuals experience when confronted with conflicting information (Argyris, 1977). Social cognition models align change with learning, and examine how individuals build on past knowledge to make meaning of what happens in their organization (Kezar, 2001). In contrast to earlier models, change is not a clean, linear or stage-based process but instead "is a multifaceted, interconnected, overlapping series of processes, obstacles, and individuals" (Kezar, p. 45). Argyris' (1977) model of single and double loop learning (discussed later in this chapter) is a social cognition model of change.

Finally, *cultural models* combine the sensibilities of social-cognition and dialectical models, emphasizing “irrationality...the spirit or unconscious, and the fluidity or complexity of organizations” (Kezar, 2001, p. 50). Rather than the human, structural, or cognitive foci of earlier theories, symbolic aspects of organizations are stressed and change is recognized as a slow process where collective action is critical (Kezar). Change from a cultural model perspective occurs at deep levels in the organization, addressing values, assumptions, beliefs, and rituals (Schein, 1992). Schein’s cultural change theory, is perhaps the most well-known cultural model in the literature. Civil Rights activism and the current immigration debate in the United States are meaningful examples of cultural models of change in action.

Most literature in the area of change focuses on teleological (planned change) and evolutionary (adaptive change) models and tends to be preferred by both researchers and practitioners as they seek to understand change (Kezar, 2001). However, one cannot help but wonder if these models, which simplify and “clean up” a complex process, actually represent organizational change in useful ways or merely reflect a Western epistemological predilection for a positivist framework. It has been suggested that researching change using multiple models in combination can provide the most insight into the intricacies of organizational change (Birnbaum, 1991; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Morgan, 1997; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). This strategy seems particularly salient when considering the cultural complexity of higher education institutions today (Bergquist, 1993; Swenk, 1999; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003) and the depth of change needed to be considered transformational.

Defining Transformational Change in Higher Education

Although some literature uses “transformation” indiscriminately as a synonym for “change” the American Council on Education’s (ACE) Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation (Eckel et al., 1998) makes specific distinctions, assuming that the process requires more than structural or procedural changes. Transformational change, therefore, requires attention to factors that influence organizational culture at deep levels. In this context, transformation insists that faculty and administrators alike “alter the way in which they think about and perform their basic functions” (Eckel et al., p. 3).

As a part of the ACE longitudinal study of 26 higher education institutions attempting significant change initiatives, researchers identified four factors that define transformational change. Transformation “(a) alters the culture of the institution by changing select, underlying assumptions and institutional behaviors, processes, and products; (b) is deep and pervasive, affecting the whole institution; (c) is intentional; and, (d) occurs over time” (Eckel et al., 1998, p. 3). The fact that transformational change is both deep and pervasive distinguishes it from other forms of change such as adjustment, isolated change, and far-reaching change (Eckel et al.; Eckel & Kezar, 2003a).

Adjustments have low depth and low pervasiveness, constituting modifications to existing practice with limited effect on the institution as a whole (Eckel et al., 1998; Eckel & Kezar, 2003a). Examples include new advising practices in residence halls or textbook changes in the classroom. Isolated change is “deep, but limited to one unit or program or to a particular area” (Eckel & Kezar, p. 32) and is not pervasive. It profoundly affects how people think and feel, but the change is limited to within the unit.

Far-reaching change is pervasive, but not deep and, while it may impact most units on campus, has little effect on the practices, values and beliefs (Eckel & Kezar).

Transformation relies both on internal and external sources of change (Burnes, 1996), coupling outside pressure with internal desires (Eckel & Kezar, 2003a) to create sustainable transformation. Transformation in higher education results in intentional, continuous change that is “more responsive to the needs of higher education’s many stakeholders and its external environment” (Eckel et al., 1998, p. 1). At the same time, transformational change efforts are still true to the purposes and values of the institution (Eckel et al.)

| | | Depth | |
|---------------|------|---------------------|-------------------------|
| | | Low | High |
| Pervasiveness | Low | Adjustment | Isolated Change |
| | High | Far-Reaching Change | Transformational Change |

Table 1. Types of Organizational Change, (Eckel et al., 1998)

Alternative perspectives reject the notion of institutional level commitment as the only route to transformation (Astin & Astin, 2000; Safarik, 2003). Transformation is viewed as a values-based leadership process that can be practiced by faculty, students, staff, or administrators to create change in a broader social context (Astin & Astin). This idea is reinforced by concepts surrounding organic change in networked organizations, where change can be initiated from anywhere, new ways of relating and influencing are valued, and there is a belief that relational thinking and collective intelligence will lead to new, innovative ways of influencing the system (Allen & Cherrey, 2000).

Organic change recognizes that there is no distinct beginning, middle and end to an ongoing process where “one change triggers another, often in unexpected places, and through which an interrelationship of the component parts leads to an unending cycle of reassessment and renewal” (Eckel, Hill, Green, & Mallon, 1999a, p. 1). While other models of transformation emphasize procuring financial resources, Astin and Astin believe “the resources that are most vital for transformative change are readily available both within and all around us” (p. 88) and include autonomy, critical thinking, and a willingness to challenge.

Both conceptualizations of transformation are characterized by second-order, rather than first-order, change (Boyce, 2003; Kezar, 2001). First-order change is “instrumental, incremental, developmental, evolutionary, programmable, and linear” (Boyce, p. 126) and tends to be structural and procedural. Examples of first order change in higher education include revising courses and adding or eliminating departments or services (Kezar). These types of changes affect procedures or practices, but do not directly address values or beliefs.

Second-order change constitutes “deep” change, as it surfaces and alters underlying assumptions and is irreversible (Bergquist, 1993; Boyce, 2003; Kezar, 2001). It involves double-loop learning (Argyris 1977) which focuses on not only what is happening but asks significant, values-based questions as to why it is happening and what meaning can be made as a result. In higher education, second-order change and double-loop learning result in “changes to mission, vision, culture, structures, processes, performance, and behavior” (Boyce, p. 127).

Intrinsically bound to successful transformation efforts is an understanding of environment and institutional contexts (Bergquist, 1993; Eckel et al., 1998). Attention to organizational culture has been identified as critical in the transformation process in university settings (Eckel & Kezar, 2003a). Such attention begins with an understanding of models and theories of organizational culture that attempt to make meaning of a change in the complex higher education environment.

Organizational Culture and Change in Higher Education

According to Tierney (1988), “an organization’s culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it. It concerns decisions, actions, and communication both on an instrumental and a symbolic level” (p. 3). In other words, culture is understood by looking not only at the structure and rules of an organization, but also by observing how the participants in that organization interpret the structure and rules. Tierney uses case studies and application of anthropological models to provide a framework to understand organizational culture in higher education. This framework includes six essential concepts or “cultural terms” through which higher education organizations can be assessed and evaluated: environment, mission, socialization, information, strategy, and leadership. Each of these cultural terms exist in all organizations in varying degrees, though the attention they receive may differ considerably, resulting in varying levels of overall effectiveness (Tierney).

Offering additional insight and also drawing on anthropological models, Schein (1992) defines culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid” (p. 12). Once conceived as valid, this culture is taught to

new members in both overt and covert ways. Culture is perpetuated and becomes “the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, p. 12).

In organizations, three levels of culture can be analyzed to provide an overall understanding (Schein, 1992). The surface level of culture is that of *artifacts*. Artifacts in higher education organizations comprise the visible structures and processes of organizations such as architecture, language, myths and stories told about the institution, policies, rituals, and ceremonies. The level of artifacts is easily observed in organizations, but often difficult to decipher in terms of meaning (Schein).

The second level of culture that provides insight into organizations is the level of *espoused values* (Schein, 1992). This is a conscious level of organizational strategies, goals, and philosophies that are shared and put forward to the larger community through artifacts such as vision and mission statements. Espoused values, however, are not always enacted values, as they may often violate basic underlying assumptions (Schein).

The level of *basic assumptions* encompasses “unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, perceptions, thoughts and feelings” (Schein, 1992, p. 17) and is the ultimate source of values and actions. These shared basic assumptions within an organization serve as cognitive defense mechanisms for individuals and groups seeking stability and meaning. In order to truly understand an organization’s culture, it is important to move beyond artifacts and try to understand both the basic assumptions underlying actions as well as the group learning that occurred within the organization that brought those assumptions into being. Organizational change at its core involves changing these basic assumptions within the culture, which can “distort new data by denial, projection,

rationalization, or various other defense mechanisms” (Schein, p. 27) in attempts to maintain stability.

While Tierney (1988) and Schein (1992) conceptualize ways to interpret organizational culture in general, Bergquist (1992) focuses specifically on the academic environment and proposes four distinct cultures that exist simultaneously within higher education. The *collegial culture* represents faculty disciplines and values research, scholarship, and shared governance. The *managerial culture* is goal oriented and finds meaning in the organization and in the ability of the organization to define and measure its goals. The *developmental culture* relies on programs and activities that enrich the collegiate community. It values service and curricular planning. The final culture, *negotiating*, is grounded in the establishment of equitable policies and procedures that insure fairness and operates in an arena based in power. These four cultures exist to varying degrees on campuses, and, like the evaluative cultural terms in Tierney’s model, have an impact on institutional effectiveness (Bergquist).

Based on a review of related literature, Frost and Gillespie (1998) view theories and models of organizational culture as evaluative tools in that “organizational change and the way it comes about, (or whether it occurs at all) are linked to culture through organizational beliefs about change” (p. 8). They posit that successful organizational change from a cultural perspective is predicated on three factors. First, the change must be communicated as and perceived as congruent and important to the vision and mission of the organization. Second, the change must be a critical determinant in the organization’s future success. Finally, the organizational culture regarding change should “support altering long-held processes in favor of furthering organizational goals” (Frost &

Gillespie, p. 9). Based on a review of discourse related to characteristics of organizations, culture, and teams, studying organizational culture after the implementation of change is suggested as useful in determining the success of the initiative. Frost and Gillespie conclude that long-term, lasting change cannot occur outside the context of culture. In order for change to be considered truly successful, new practices and thought patterns must be integrated into the culture so that they become routine and a part of daily practice. This seems to reinforce the characteristics of transformation as defined by Eckel et al. (1998).

However, both the review above, as well as the preceding models of culture, are focused primarily on assessment of effectiveness and efficiency through understanding one's organizational culture, rather than providing strategies for changing organizational culture. Kezar and Eckel (2002a) use both Tierney's (1988) framework of institutional culture, and Bergquist's (1992) model of cultural archetypes (collegial, managerial, developmental, and negotiating) to provide a framework for studying organizational culture change.

Using the data set from the ACE study on transformation, six of the 26 higher education institutions engaged in deep and pervasive change efforts were studied through the lenses of both frameworks (Kezar & Eckel, 2002a). Using a teleological change model, five core change strategies were developed, providing insight into strategies for transformation of organizational culture:

1. *Senior administrative support*, refers to individuals in positional leadership providing support in terms of value statements, resources, or new administrative structures.

2. *Collaborative leadership*, defined as a process where the positional and non-positional individuals throughout campus are involved in the change initiative from conception to implementation.
3. *Robust design*, a more complex and less well known term than vision... Leaders develop a desirable and flexible picture of the future that is clear and understandable and includes set goals and objectives related to the implementation of that picture. The picture of the future and the means to get there are flexible and do not foreclose possible opportunities.
4. *Staff development*, a set of programmatic efforts to offer opportunities for individuals to learn certain skills or knowledge related to issues associated with the change effort.
5. *Visible actions*, refers to advances in the change process that are noticeable. Activities must be visible and promoted so that individuals can see that the change is still important and continuing. This is an important strategy for building momentum within the institution. (p. 439-440)

The campus culture, context, and institutional type determined which of the five core strategies were most important for individual institutions, but all were present in the six participating colleges and universities (Kezar & Eckel, 2002a). Additional findings of the study indicated that there were several identifiable relationships between organizational culture and deep change; most notably strategies that violate cultural norms will not produce results (Kezar & Eckel). Also, results cautioned against “presenting change strategies as universal principles” (p. 446), noting that a relationship existed between the cultural archetypes (Bergquist, 1992) and the specific way the change

was enacted in each of the six case study institutions. Similarly, Schein (1992) also notes that changes initiated in mature organizations specifically, as most institutions of higher education are, will not be understood or fully enacted if they do not fit cultural norms.

Bolman and Deal (2003) offer an additional way of interpreting organizational culture in terms of four frames; structural, human resource, political, and symbolic, which may provide further insight into organizational change in higher education. Specific organizational concepts are central to each frame. The structural frame is focused on rules, roles, goals, policies, technology, and environment. The human resource frame is concerned with needs, skills, and relationships. The political frame relies on power, conflict, competition, and organizational politics. Finally, the symbolic frame looks at culture, meaning, metaphor, ritual, ceremony, stories, and heroes in organizations.

Bolman and Deal (2003) illustrate how a multiframe, or multiple model (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995), approach addresses the four categories of issues generally associated with an organization undergoing major change. Change affects an individual's ability to feel effective and valued, disrupts existing roles and relationships which can produce confusion and uncertainty, creates conflicts and requires arenas for the renegotiating of issues, and creates loss of meaning for those receiving rather than initiating the process (Bolman & Deal; Eckel et al., 1999b). Each frame provides particular insight into the organizational change process in terms of strategies that address these issues. The human resource frame focuses on skills and the need for training in the change process. A structural frame brings alignment and role clarity to the foreground. The political frame is focused on conflict and creates arenas in which it can be negotiated, and finally, the symbolic frame creates transition rituals, new symbols, and meaning. According to the

authors, a multiframe approach allows for the most intentional and successful approach when leading change.

As noted earlier, in the context of higher education, this multiple model approach to understanding organizations in order to implement change may be particularly relevant in light of distinctly different academic and administrative subcultures (Eckel et al, 1999b; Frost & Gillespie, 1998; Klein & Dunlap 1994; Swenk, 1999; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). Initiatives that violate cultural norms will not succeed (Bolman & Deal, 2003; Eckel et al., 1999a, 1999b; Frost & Gillespie, 1998; Schein, 1992) and, as a result, must take into consideration academic values and respect institutional history and culture to keep key stakeholders from feeling marginalized in the process (Eckel et al., 1999b). In higher education organizations, change strategies that are based on inaccurate assessments of subcultures or that neglect particular frames are most likely to meet resistance.

Resistance to Change

Resistance to change in the context of transformation provides additional insight into the culture of organizations. Is resistance a natural, human reaction, or the result of leadership choosing a change strategy incompatible with its organizational culture? Planned change within organizations “cannot be understood without considering culture as a primary source of resistance to change” (Schein, 1992, p. xiv). However, resistance is an often-overlooked component of cultural change (Keup, Walker, Astin, & Lindholm, 2001). It is an inevitable, though not necessarily negative, part of transformation despite its traditional connotation and may actually be an indicator that change efforts have reached below the surface to affect the culture (Keup et al.). In fact, Sanaghan and Napier (2000) view resistance as positive, calling it a resource and rich source of information

that can strengthen a change process, provided that resistance is embraced rather than shut down by leadership.

In contrast, research indicates that resistance may also be an indicator of a lack of understanding of organizational culture and sub-cultures. In a case study involving strategic planning at a large, western university, Swenk (1999) identifies resistance to change as a failure to recognize cultural differences between “the dual institutional hierarchy” (p. 7) of faculty and administration and how decisions are made respectively. Additionally, perceptions that change efforts were initiated externally, without the input of those most affected also exacerbated resistance (Swenk).

Similarly, in a study of educators’ emotional responses to both internally and externally motivated change efforts, Hargreaves (2004) found that externally motivated change met with resistance. However, more critical to predicting the success of efforts than the location of their impetus, was the degree to which the efforts were inclusive rather than exclusive of teachers’ values and sense of purpose. Regardless of being internally or externally imposed, initiatives that addressed how participants made meaning of themselves and their work met with the least resistance (Hargreaves).

In relationship to change and resistance, Dent and Goldberg (1999) review the evolution of the term “resistance to change” and suggest the phrase itself invokes a mental model that results in unproductive organizational behavior. They assert it is not change that is resisted, per se, but any other number of factors, such as the unknown, the loss of comfort or pay or status, or lack of opportunity for input. While many may argue semantics, failure to recognize this mental model suggests increased possibility for

inaccurate assessment of an organization's culture and could reduce the effectiveness of transformation strategies (Dent & Goldberg).

Additionally, higher education institutions are social organizations and tend to be averse to change, as efforts can call into question deeply held personal beliefs as well as traditional, cultural, and structural assumptions with broad historic rationale (Eckel et al., 1999b). The complexities of higher education institutions raise two specific struggles with regard to change and resistance, the first being where, or with whom, the change originated and the second being who is involved and how (Eckel et al.). Change initiatives viewed in light of these issues and coupled with seemingly competing priorities based on constituencies can be threatening, often interpreted as blame or implicit value statements about competence and performance of stakeholders with deep personal commitments or political investments in an institution (Eckel et al., 1999a; Newman et al., 2004a).

Significant issues with regard to organizational change and resistance in higher education are based in philosophical differences among stakeholder groups (Eckel et al. 1999a, 1999b; Green & Hayward 1997; Winston, 1998). Debate arises over these varying viewpoints around recurring historic issues such as purpose, curriculum, access, services and programs, administrator and faculty roles, and governance; all made critical by the dual priorities of meeting the changing needs of society while doing so in an era of diminishing funding and financial crisis (Green, 1997). The structure, culture, and history of higher education are such that multiple, competing ideologies and priorities exist simultaneously within the institution, and among key stakeholders as well (Bergquist,

1995; Eckel & Kezar, 2003a; Green & Hayward, 1997; Gruber, 1997; Newman et al., 2004a, 2004b).

Students, faculty, staff, governing boards, administration, elected officials, and the general public are all stakeholders who have competing viewpoints which can generate resistance to change. For instance, change initiated by administration frequently challenges deeply held, historical beliefs faculty hold regarding academic freedom and tenure, as well as the overall autonomy of the profession (Eckel et al., 1999b; Lazerson 1997). Additionally, prestige for faculty is attained in individual endeavor through publication in a specific domain, which often makes critical change skills such as defining and working towards common goals difficult for faculty (Lazerson), behavior that can be interpreted as resistance to those outside the culture. Similarly, increasingly partisan governing boards often perceive administration as resistant. Trustees from the corporate sector may view change through a business lens and try to impose corporate “solutions” on institutions, cutting budgets without a clear understanding of the complex organizational realities with which administrators deal (Lazerson; Newman et al., 2004a).

Regardless of ideologies, change, while often exciting or well intentioned, may induce fear and anxiety as human beings respond to new situations (Eckel et al., 1999b; Eckel & Kezar, 2001). Stakeholders may fear ambiguity or an unclear future, alterations to their personal or professional lives, being viewed as incompetent, or that “their skills and knowledge will not be valued in the changed organization” (Eckel et al., p. 5). Fear is also magnified when change is conducted in a climate of mistrust, where leadership assumes a benefit of doubt not afforded then by the internal or external stakeholders (Eckel et al.; Yankelovich & Furth, 2005). While colleges and universities are generally

seen as trustworthy, general growing skepticism toward privileged, intellectual institutions, and specific association with corporations and government that are targets of mistrust (Yankelovich & Furth) complicate issues of creating and sustaining change.

Additionally, as noted, the structure of higher education, where units and departments often operate independently and autonomously from one another, is often a barrier to pervasive change (Eckel et al., 1999b). Called “loosely coupled” (Weick, 1991), change strategies in organizations of this type must vary significantly from more tightly coupled or hierarchical organizations to be successful (Eckel et al.). However, the majority of empirical change research focuses on tightly coupled business systems (Kezar, 2001) and little is known about success strategies for loosely coupled organizations. As a result, what appears to be “simple” change for government officials or trustees with a corporate framework is met with significant resistance from the academic community, exacerbating “us versus them” mentalities.

Other barriers to change related to the structure of higher education institutions also exist. First, due to the loosely coupled structure, decision-making is diffused, with some decisions occurring centrally with the administration and others on the periphery with academic and student affairs departments (Kezar, 2001). As a result, “departments may not rely on each other or the administration for direction or support” (Eckel et al., 1999b, p. 4) and the collaboration needed for change is impeded. Second, the “messiness” of loosely coupled systems makes it difficult to attribute effects to causes without significant lapses of time. This “delayed and confounded feedback” (p. 4) system has three implications for change leaders: (a) leadership may not know where or what to change because outcomes may be unclear; (b) because outcomes may be the result

of numerous interrelated causes, leaders may be hesitant to change anything for fear that they are changing a component that has a positive impact on different, unconnected outcomes; (c) and finally, action may be taken in one area, only to have an unintentional, detrimental influence somewhere else (Eckel et al.).

Finally, resistance to change may be grounded in the fact that a focus on the future is difficult, because the larger picture behind initiatives may not be fully understood (Eckel et al., 1999b). Sustained change means refocusing the energy and attention of over-extended faculty, staff, administrators, and students away from their daily work (Eckel et al.). In order to see the larger picture, stakeholders must “move beyond the perspective of their individual endeavors” (p. 5) into a space that may be uncomfortable and unexplored. Additionally, a focus on the larger future of the institution as a whole is often limited by staff and faculty specialization, which frames the unit or the domain as the dominant force in their work, where members can feel connected and have influence (Birnbaum, 1991). For this reason, many stakeholders within institutions are “not accustomed to being institutional citizens—aware of the larger picture and, consequently, responsible for decisions that impact the institution as a whole” (Eckel et al., p. 6).

It should be noted that resistance to change is frequently framed as a leader-follower issue, however resistance also occurs within and between stakeholder groups, as the “have-mores” (O’Toole, 1995) struggle to main the status quo in which they benefit (Eckel et al., 1999b). These “have-mores” may be faculty or administrators in formal or informal leadership roles, or “individuals whose comfort and prestige are supported by the current system” (Eckel et al., p. 5). This is especially important to note with regard to

initiatives that call into question issues of social justice and equity in higher education, where changes constitute acknowledging privilege and redistributing resources.

While the meaning inherent in resistance to change differs according to researchers, what is apparent is that resistance plays a significant role in transformation efforts. Resistance provides important feedback regarding depth and pervasiveness of efforts, as well as insight into cultural norms. Successful change initiatives may well be dependent on leadership's ability to correctly interpret the subtext of resistance as a sensemaking process within the cultural frame or frames, and adapt transformation efforts accordingly.

Leadership and Change

Bensimon, Neumann, and Birnbaum (1989) offer a review of leadership theory applied to higher education. They group theory by four major categories: trait theories (in which leaders are associated with specific qualities), power and influence theories (in which leaders exert power or practice influence), behavioral theories (which focus on the task or people orientation of a leader), and cognitive theories (which relate to the perceptions of leader effectiveness). All four categories reflect premodern and modern perspectives of leaders as either endowed with greatness or as hierarchical managers of organizations (Bergquist, 1993, 1995).

Transformational leadership theory (Bass, 1985; Burns, 1978), specifically, has been heralded as purposeful for transformational change in a postmodern organizational era (Prewitt, 2004). Transformational leadership “occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns, p. 20). Such leadership theoretically engages followers' higher needs, moving them beyond self-interest and allowing them to perform

beyond expectations (Bass). However, theories of transformational leadership have been criticized for their almost exclusive focus on leadership in the United States, as well as their failure to be inclusive of under-represented populations (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005). In light of these considerations, transformational leadership in its traditional incarnation is considered modernistic, as it focuses on devotion to a charismatic, trait-oriented, “heroic” leader as the center of a change process (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe). A gender and ethnically inclusive study of middle to top managers in the United Kingdom (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe) found factors such as a genuine concern for others’ well-being and development, connectedness and inclusiveness, and creating shared meaning of the purpose and the process of work-role activities were more important to transformational leadership than individual charisma.

Emergent theories of leadership move away from a hierarchical or positional perspective toward viewing leadership as a collective, collaborative process, where change is a central tenet (Allen & Cherrey, 2000; Astin & Astin, 2000; Faris & Outcalt, 2001; Komives, Lucas, & McMahon, 1998; Rost, 1991; Safarik, 2003). In their book, *Exploring Leadership*, Komives et al. advocate a relational definition of leadership as a process of change undertaken by a group of individuals in relationship with each other. This reciprocal model frames leadership and change as inclusive, empowering, purposeful, and values-oriented (Astin & Astin; Komives et al., Rost). From this collaborative perspective, a leader can be anyone “regardless of formal position – who serves as an effective social change agent” (Astin & Astin, p. 2). Collaborative, team leadership reflecting emergent models has been explored in higher education, garnering criticism when it has been adapted as a usurped business model and praise when it

is reflective of larger cultural considerations (Allen & Cherrey, 2000; Bensimon & Neumann, 1993; Frost & Gillespie, 1998; Kezar, 1998). Stakeholders must be invited to become part of a collaborative leadership team and participate in both developing and implementing the change agenda (Allen & Cherrey; Eckel et al., 1999b; Frost & Gillespie). Although sometimes criticized for slow decision-making, collaborative teams can create a constituency from which to build a critical mass of campus supporters for change (Eckel et al.). Collaborative, open leadership builds trust by making processes transparent and motives clear (Yankelovich & Furth, 2005). Additionally, collaborative teams tend to lead through persuasion rather than coercion, further building trust and a committed, invested coalition for change (Allen & Cherrey; Astin & Astin; Eckel et al.; Faris & Outcalt).

Kotter (1995) provides additional support for a relational, reciprocal, and networked conceptualization of leadership when identifying eight steps common in successful change initiatives: (a) establishing a sense of urgency, (b) forming a powerful guiding coalition, (c) creating a vision, (d) communicating the vision, (e) empowering others to act on the vision, (f) planning for and creating short-term wins, (g) consolidating improvements and producing still more change, and (h) institutionalizing new approaches. The change concepts of visioning, empowering others, and forming a coalition reinforce the purposeful, empowering, and inclusive aspects of emergent leadership models.

With regard to leading change specifically within higher education, Ramaley (2000) advocates a model of the leader as a “learner among learners, willing to embrace the novel and unexpected and able to be an agent for change” (p. 76). Based on

Ramaley's experience as a university president, "learning is a means for institutional leadership to create a meaningful context for transformational change" (p. 77). Although anecdotal, this perspective provides insight into the role of learning in an organizational change process.

While Ramaley (2000) focuses primarily on scholarly learning and research in a theory-to-practice approach in leading change, Eckel et al. (1999a) identify the ability of leadership to learn from and adapt accordingly during the change process as critical to success. In the second paper resulting from the ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation, Eckel et al. use the 26 case study institutions to identify actions that institutional leaders can take in bringing about successful organizational change. Leaders do the following:

1. Make a clear and compelling case to key stakeholders about why things must be done differently.
2. Craft an agenda that both makes sense and focuses on improvement without assigning blame.
3. Develop connections among different initiatives and individuals across campus that create synergy and provide momentum for the initiative.
4. Support and are involved in institutional efforts.
5. Identify and empower talent across campus and at a variety of levels.
6. Develop supporting structures, create incentives, and provide resources for change efforts.
7. Focus campus attention on the change issue.

8. Work within a culture while challenging its comfort zone to change the culture.

9. Plan for change over the long term.

Singularly, none of the three categorical leadership theories reviewed by Bensimon et al. (1989) seems to account for a leadership approach broad enough to enact all nine strategies for successful change. Implicit in these strategies is the need to move beyond individual leadership style alone as a key determinant of success in implementing change, recognizing that modern perceptions of the “great leader” can frame collective leadership, a critical component of change initiatives, as threatening (Bergquist, 1995; Green & Hayward, 1997). Instead, leaders must recognize that success is equally contingent on knowledge and assessment of organizational culture and the ability to “fit” leadership style appropriately to culture, whether leadership is defined from an individual perspective or as a group process. These findings seem iterative of the importance of sensemaking and organizational learning in the change process (Boyce, 2003; Duke, 2002; Kezar & Eckel, 2002b; Senge, 1990; Woodard et al., 2000; Vaill, 1996).

However, many leaders, both individuals and teams, fail in initiating change because they traditionally are focused almost exclusively on a structural frame and do not address issues raised within the human resource, political, and symbolic frames (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Additionally, leaders miss opportunities for creative approaches to change because they cannot “reframe” the process through these other perspectives (Bolman & Deal). By applying Kotter’s (1995) eight steps of transformation to their four-frame model, Bolman and Deal illustrate how leadership’s ability to reframe a situation and consider multiple change strategies at each of the eight steps contributes to success:

Consider, for example, Kotter's first stage, developing a sense of urgency.

Strategies for the human resource, political and symbolic strategies all contribute.

Symbolically, leaders can construct a persuasive story by painting a picture of the current challenge or crisis and why failure to act would be catastrophic. Human resource techniques of participation and open meetings would help to get the story out and gauge audience reaction. Behind the scenes, leaders could meet with key players, assess their interests, and negotiate or use power as necessary to get people on board. (p. 384)

Every frame is not essential to each stage but all contribute critical information and strategy toward the overall success of the eight-stage process (Bolman & Deal).

Beyond frames, leadership's ability to create change may also vary as the organization ages from its founding and early growth, to midlife, to maturity and decline (Schein, 1992). At each stage, different mechanisms of change initiation become appropriate based on the developmental role that culture plays within that stage (Schein). In an organization's youth, for instance, culture is a central element in the establishment of a group identity and a leader or founding member is a key player in building and integrating cultural norms that define the organization. As an organization evolves into midlife and norms become more embedded in routines, subcultures emerge which diffuse the culture. At this stage, leadership may choose to initiate change by promoting elements of a subculture into the total culture. In mature organizations, shared assumptions are strong and, as long as external environments remain stable, are a source of organizational success. If change is required, due to flux in the external environment, organizations are

often reluctant and leadership may choose to bring outside agents in to initiate the desired results (Schein).

Finally, chaotic times and extensive shared problems require leadership in higher education to “work spiritually smarter” (Woodard et al., 2000, p. 86). Change leaders will not only be called on to have new knowledge or skills, but also, equally, to have high levels of emotional and spiritual maturity to cope creatively and effectively with the complexity of today’s world (Astin & Astin, 2000). According to Vaill (1996), “In most serious uses of the word spirit, we are reaching for a word that captures our intuitive feeling of something that pervades, energizes, weaves through, infuses, saturates some person or action or thing or concept in our experience” (p. 215). Working spiritually smarter, in this context, encourages individuals and organizations to explore their inner landscapes to discover the “values, social consciousness, authenticity, beliefs, and faith” (Woodard et al., p. 86) that make communities meaningful. Working spiritually smarter, with regard to transformation efforts in higher education means that change will occur not “merely as an aggregation of ‘conditions’ – global economic trends, markets, and politics” (W. C. Richardson, 2000, p. vi), but will instead represent an expression of our highest collective values.

To accurately interpret, assess, communicate, and implement change, leadership “must have the ability to perceive and evaluate elements of their own culture and to change those elements in the service of organizational survival and effectiveness” (Schein, 1992, p. 296). With regard to transformational change, all leadership theories have their specific application as inhibitors or facilitators, however, when coupled with Kezar and Eckel’s (2002a) conceptual strategies for organizational transformation

(senior administrator support, collaborative leadership, robust design, staff development, and visible actions), the success of change efforts may not be dependent on a specific leadership style, but on the flexibility of the organization to learn continuously during the process. These strategies were critical because they help individuals in the organization “to conceptualize a new identity, to feel worthwhile about their efforts, and to be brought along with the institutional agenda” (Kezar & Eckel, p. 303) and contributed to campus-wide learning and sensemaking.

Sensemaking and Learning in a Change Process

Sensemaking

Sensemaking is, quite literally, exactly what it says: the making of sense (Weick, 1995). Grounded in communications theory and research, sensemaking has been applied to organizations to explain ongoing development in terms of both interpretation *and* action (Gioia, et al., 1994; Weick). Communication is critical in the sensemaking process, where organizations evolve when sense is made of the environment in individual and collective ways (Weick). Sensemaking recognizes organizations as social systems and is “about such things as placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding, and patterning” (Weick, p. 6). Sensemaking is set apart from other processes such by seven distinct properties (Weick):

1. *Grounded in identity construction.* Sense is made through the process of asking “what implications do these events have for who I will be?” (p. 23-24). This process of identity construction in relationship to the organization happens both individually and collectively.

2. *Retrospective*. Sense is made based on experiences and events that have already happened. The idea of “meaningful *lived* experience” attests to the fact that we can only know what we are doing *after* we have done it. Meaning is constructed when we reflect on what we have done.
3. *Enactive of sensible external environments*. People make sense of the organizational environment through active processes of noticing and bracketing. Bracketing is selecting what to focus on in an uncertain environment, and allows sense to be made from a number of possibilities.
4. *Social*. Sensemaking is a social activity involving communication, idea-sharing, and gleaning new information from others. It is influenced by organizational culture, where “human thinking and social functioning are essential aspects of one another” (p. 38) and collective sensemaking is bound by the rules, symbols, and language of the institution.
5. *Ongoing*. Sensemaking is always happening. However, “shocks” can disrupt the regular flow of sensemaking, triggering a more emotion-charged process.
6. *Focused on and by extracted cues*. “Extracted cues are simple, familiar structures that are seeds from which people develop a larger sense of what may be occurring” (p. 50). People pull cues selectively and contextually from the regular course of activities, build upon them, and create reference points on which to make sense of events.
7. *Driven by plausibility rather than accuracy*. Sensemaking does not necessarily mean being “right.” Sense is dependent on the degree to which it seems reasonable and plausible to those involved. Plausibility is a feeling that

something “fits” with what you know already, and, as a result “the sensible need not be sensible” (p. 55).

Based in these properties, from an organization perspective, sensemaking explores how something becomes an event for organizational members (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005). Members make sense of incoming information and, in an effort to make the world more orderly, relay the sense they make back into the world through their actions:

Sensemaking is about the question: “what does an event mean?” in the context of everyday life, when people confront something unintelligible and ask “what’s the story here?” their question has the force of bringing an event into existence. When people then ask “now what should I do?” this added question has the force of bringing meaning into existence, meaning they hope is stable enough for them to act into the future, continue to act, and to have the sense that they remain in touch with the continuing flow of experience. (Weick et al., p. 410)

Although Weick (1995) applies sensemaking to explain the ongoing development of organizations, sensemaking has been linked to the process of strategic change specifically in higher education through several studies. A case study of a comprehensive public research university linked sensemaking and influence as key dynamics in a strategic change process (Gioia et al., 1994). The study focused on top management and how symbolism and metaphors were used to reveal or conceal aspects of the change process in order to reduce resistance. In a similar mixed-methods study, Gioia and Thomas (1996) researched how identity, image, and issue interpretation influenced sensemaking by top management at 372 U.S. colleges and universities engaged in strategic planning. Findings indicated that both the strategy (in this case, the strategic

planning model) and information processing structures (committees, task forces, informal meeting, etc.) created a sensemaking context for top management to make meaning of identity and image throughout the change process.

Using data from six of the 26 institutions that were a part of the ACE Project on Leadership and Institutional Transformation, Kezar and Eckel (2002a, 2002b) discovered five core transformation strategies common across all six institutions (senior administrator support, collaborative leadership, robust design, staff development, and visible actions). As a secondary theme, sensemaking emerged as an important sub-strategy in four of the five core strategies. Thus, the way the strategies were enacted helped members to make new meaning of their roles, skills and philosophies. Central to transformation efforts was the opportunity for people to engage in activities that would “alter their mental models, leading to a different set of meanings and activities consistent with the new realities of the changing institution” (Kezar & Eckel, 2002b, p. 303).

The same data was used for secondary document analysis to explore campus-wide strategies institutional leadership can use to create new mental models in the process of transformational change (Eckel & Kezar, 2003b). Change strategies were identified as sensemaking opportunities if they had a majority of Weick’s (1995) seven sensemaking properties. Findings indicated six change strategies that provided sensemaking opportunities across all six institutions participating in the study: widespread conversation, cross-departmental academic teams, staff training, outsiders and their ideas, concrete ideas and guiding documents, and public presentations (Eckel & Kezar). Weick’s strategies of identity construction, plausibility, social aspects, and extracted cues were most prevalent. Congruent with findings generated from the larger ACE study

of which this subset of data is a part, implications seemed to indicate that in addition to action, transformation is also about adopting new cognitive processes and mental modes, i.e., acting *and* thinking differently (Eckel et al., 1998). Implications also indicated that transformation in higher education requires more collective, collaborative leadership rather than traditional modern models of the independent, heroic leader (Eckel & Kezar).

Several areas of sensemaking in organizations remain relatively unexplored from empirical perspectives (Weick et al., 2005). Of specific interest with regard to change processes in higher education are issues of distribution of sensemaking, power, and emotions (Weick et al.). Distribution of sensemaking explores whether shared beliefs are a necessary condition for organization action, and how wide-spread those beliefs need to be. Current research on sensemaking has also left the impact of power unscrutinized, including how it is expressed, how it increases or decreases, and how it influences others. Finally, while hinted at in his 1995 book, *Sensemaking in Organizations*, Weick leaves the area of emotionality in sensemaking unexplored, especially how positive and negative expectations play into emotional responses and action (Weick et al.).

Organizational Learning

Similar to sensemaking, organizational learning has been identified as critical to creating sustained change (Boyce, 2003). The concept gained popularity in connection with management fads of the 1990s such as Total Quality Management (TQM) and strategic planning (Senge, 1990). Schools of thought in organizational learning are varied and include systems thinking (Senge) and double-loop learning (Argyris, 1977). All involve challenging mental models which may be inhibiting group learning. A mental model, or cognitive frame, shapes perceptions through “deeply ingrained assumptions,

generalizations, or even pictures or images that influence how we understand the worlds and we take action” (Senge, p. 8). Organizational learning is the process of detecting and correcting errors in mental models that impede learning (Argyris) and in most models, dialogue and reflection play an important role in creating a shift of mind.

One barrier to organizational learning in higher education specifically is that often highly educated professionals see learning, a critical component of sustainable transformation, strictly as straightforward problem solving, requiring little reflection (Martin et al., 2001). Instead of reflecting on and learning from a change process, institutional leadership may focus on correcting errors in external environments rather than within their own work (Argyris, 1991). Then, when administrative action fails, as structurally focused initiatives often do, leaders are likely to blame others or external circumstances (Martin et al.).

Transformational Learning

Transformative learning is a relatively new area of interest and research in adult education, and has specific application with regard to teaching and pedagogy (Cranton, 1994). Additionally, transformative learning can enrich the dialogue around social justice, organizational and individual change, activism, and ethical development (Inglis, 1997; Kovan & Dirks, 2003; McDonald, 1999). Most studies are focused on individual transformation, however, more recently transformational learning in groups and organizations, which may address issues of emotions and power in ways sensemaking and traditional organizational learning models do not, has been explored (Kasl & Elias, 2000; Yorks & Marsick, 2000).

Mezirow (2000) defines transformative learning as “learning that transforms problematic frames of reference—sets of fixed assumptions and expectations (habits of mind, meaning perspectives, mindsets)—to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, reflective, and emotionally able to change” (p. 58). His study of women returning to college outlines a ten-phase process of transformation which begins with a disorienting dilemma, followed by steps which create, evaluate and test a new perspective, and ends in “a reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 169). Transformative learning is the process by which perspectives are transformed. Critical to perspective transformation are opportunities for both discourse and self-reflection in a process of communicative learning (Mezirow, 1991). Perspective transformation is “the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive, understand, and feel about our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive, discriminating, and integrative perspective; and finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167).

Although Mezirow (1991, 2000) defines his cognitive-rational theory as “a work in progress” and has recently acknowledged the role emotions play in the process, the seminal theory has been criticized for being overly linear and rational, and failing to account for the personal and sociocultural contexts that influence transformative learning (Taylor, 1997). More recent studies connect transformation with emancipation, development, and spirituality, emphasizing a circular or spiral process that includes other ways of knowing such as intuition, story-telling, emotionality, and empathy (Baumgartner, 2001; Clark, 1997; Palmer, 2000; Scott, 1997; Taylor, 2001).

Because organizational transformation requires substantial change in past organizational patterns and functions, as well as entirely new behavior on the part of members, it has been linked recently with transformational learning (Yorks & Marsick, 2000). Two group learning strategies, action learning and collaborative inquiry, have been suggested as valuable in producing transformative learning in organizational settings (Yorks & Marsick). Both strategies evolved out of action research and use cycles of action and reflection to improve practice and generate new knowledge (Yorks & Marsick).

Action learning involves working in small teams to create action on specific and meaningful organizational problems (Yorks & Marsick, 2000). Through the use of dialogue and critical reflection, the team both works toward a solution and learns to learn together. A longitudinal qualitative study found the use of action learning teams in a multinational food company produced sustained change (Yorks, 1998). Top management met in teams four times in a six-month period for six days at a time in different company locations, working on project initiatives in the six week intervals between meetings. Findings indicated transformative behavior in individuals and the group as a whole that influenced the overall operation of the company (Yorks & Marsick).

Collaborative inquiry is similar to action learning but is based on voluntary participation and focused on answering a question of interest framed by the group rather than an outside source (Yorks & Marsick, 2000). In the process, “each person is a coinquirer—shaping the question, designing the inquiry process, participating in the experience, making and communicating meaning” (Yorks & Marsick, p. 266). Collaborative inquiry used in an organizational change process was studied in a university setting (Yorks & Marsick). Faculty and staff members asked the question,

“How can we help students take more responsibility for their learning in a way which makes the university more of a learning organization?” (p. 267). The process created a group exploration of student culture, campus values, curriculum structure, and classroom methods and resulted in a transformation of teaching practices (Yorks & Marsick).

While transformational learning has not been studied extensively with regard to organizational transformation, both action learning and collaborative inquiry seem to have potential as tools in the process. According to the ACE study on transformation in higher education (Eckel et al., 1999b) successful change should begin with questions, rather than answers, with the intent of surfacing assumptions, exploring why a particular change is required, and creating shared solutions. Strategic plans created by top management and unveiled to the masses do little to encourage participation, group meaning making, or transformational learning (Eckel & Kezar, 2003b).

Sensemaking, organizational learning, and transformational learning all have application to transformation efforts in higher education. Learning – whether sensemaking, organizational, or transformation – has been linked to successful and sustained change (Boyce, 2003; Duke, 2002; Kezar & Eckel, 2002b, 2003a; Senge, 1990). However, literature and empirical inquiry in these areas is highly focused on institutional leadership and top management and much could be gained by exploring how learning occurs in broader contexts across loosely coupled organizations. Subsequent research into individual and collective meaning making during the change process, beyond anecdotal accounts, would contribute significantly to the literature on transformational change in higher education.

Conclusion

Higher education is in crisis in a diverse number of arenas and in terms of overall function and accountability. However, there is little agreement over the meaning or importance of change in these areas (Eckel, et al., 1999b; Swenk, 1999; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003), only that it is inevitable:

Environmental demands have shifted from asking the university to do what it does for less money to asking the university to change what it does. The contemporary question is not whether higher education can continue business-as-usual given increased environmental turmoil; rather the question is what sort of universities will emerge from adaptation to the inexorable demands (Gumport & Prusser, 1997, p. 455).

There is a paucity of empirical research surrounding transformational change and organizational culture in higher education in the United States. European and Australian literature may have application and contribute to the dialogue in the U.S., however Kezar and Eckel (2002) suggest that research at a micro level runs the risk of “becoming too specific and idiosyncratic to be of much help to others” (p. 435), particularly practitioners. Instead, they advocate for understanding organizational culture and its relationship to successful change from a macro perspective with broad applicability. Implications of their research, as well as the work of other authors, point to the need for institutional leadership to recognize and work within cultures to create change (Bergquist, 1992; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Schein, 1992).

While a multiframe approach to change in higher education is suggested as particularly helpful (Birnbaum, 1991; Bolman & Deal, 2003; Van de Ven & Poole,

1995), Eckel, et al., (1999b) note that no specific combination of strategies insures success. Rather, successful transformation initiatives within the ACE study were linked to three habits of mind in the leadership; they were intentional in their actions, they were reflective on the process of change, and they learned from their experience as they went and adjusted their plans (Eckel et al.). With this in mind, more than ever, the effective higher education professional must be a “doer” and a “thinker,” and must be able to do both simultaneously if much-needed transformation is to be successful.

However, while many institutions may be engaged in self-examination and change, few will be transformed (Eckel, et al., 1998). The institutions in the ACE study recognized the need for change, however, differences existed in the capacity and desire to engage in transformation. Many administrators and faculty were uncomfortable with the definition and scope of transformation and instead sought less pervasive change or developed a different vocabulary for the process, instead seeking to modify or experiment with what they were currently doing. The case study experience led the researchers to believe that currently “on most campuses both leaders and constituents do not now see the need for deep or pervasive change” (p. 6). While they identified issues in which transformation might occur in the arena of higher education, broad transformational change was seen as unreasonable in institutional culture so firmly rooted in tradition and custom (Eckel, et al.).

Understanding transformational change in higher education is an area replete with possibilities for empirical research. Little research exists and, additionally, much of the existing literature is based on one data set, through the lens of a teleological change model (Eckel et al., 1998; Eckel, et al., 1999a, 1999b; Eckel & Kezar, 2003a,

2003b; Kezar & Eckel, 2002a, 2002b). While internal and external constituents are calling on institutions to change in both deep and pervasive ways, the absence of understanding specific to higher education leaves a gap that is filled insufficiently, and often detrimentally, by corporate models that fail to honor the complexity and culture of the institutions they attempt to change.

The need for change affects every aspect of higher education including structure, access, curriculum, the role of faculty and administration, and the quality of services and programs (Bergquist, 1995; Dolence & Norris, 1995; Eckel et al., 1998; Green & Hayward, 1997; Gumport, 2000; Woodard et al., 2000). The ability of professors and administrators alike, as leaders within higher education (Astin & Astin, 2000; Faris & Outcalt, 2001), to understand, implement, and embrace transformational change grounded in an empirical understanding of organizational culture and change strategies specific to higher education is critical in the difference between institutions surviving or thriving in a fast-paced, knowledge-based, postmodern era (Allen & Cherrey, 2000; Bergquist, 1995; Bloland, 1995, 2005; Tierney, 2001).

This study was an exploration of how individual and group meaning making occurs in a higher education organization that is engaged in process intended as transformational change. While teleological and evolutionary models of change are most frequently used in research (Kezar, 2001) all six typologies offer specific insight into the process. For the purposes of this study, no one model was the focus of inquiry. A detailed discussion of the research design in which this study was grounded is presented in the following chapter, including the epistemological and theoretical frameworks. The chapter concludes with an outline of specific methodology and methods.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The Researcher as Artist: Self and Stance

in a Qualitative Paradigm

Artistic practice is a distinctive activity of research and representation.

(Jongeward, 1997, p. 1)

Art has run like a golden thread throughout the fabric of my life.

(Hall, 1993, p. 59)

“What is this?” Mr. Sachse leans over my shoulder to survey my gesso and paint-covered canvas. The wet smell of winter and the french fries in his paper Burger King bag fill the space between us as he unwraps his scarf and discards his grey wool coat on the stool next to mine. Although he has just entered the room, his affect implies that he is continuing a conversation we had started earlier, a conversation I apparently do not remember. It is a well-known fact that he is random, but it still disconcerting when it happens in your vicinity. I look at him, and then behind me at the empty high school art room to make sure he is talking to me. Is he kidding? This is the painting I have been wrestling with every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday in his freshman art class for the last two weeks. He has seen me regularly during lunch periods just like this one for those same two weeks. My struggle to recreate on my own canvas the still life display of heart-shaped chocolate boxes and flowers arranged on the blue-draped table at the front of the

room has been evident. I have painted and repainted every corner of the piece, dissatisfied with the colors and lines and shadows. I am not a stranger to paint, having grown up in a house filled with art supplies, an aunt who taught art, and ample encouragement to perfect technique, but I cannot represent the still life accurately. The hues are always wrong or my perspective is off.

“It’s my painting.” I say, unable to hide the incredulity in my voice.

Mr. Sachse makes a noise that sounds like “Hrumpf” and leaves my side to rummage through the piles around his desk. He returns to the tall, black art table with an oversized book and moves my paints out of the way. I read “The Works of René Magritte” embossed in the linen cover just before he flops it open and rifles through the pages.

“What is this?” he asks, pointing to a specific lithograph and shoving the book squarely in front of me.

I look at the painting of a pipe floating in the air with a single line in French written in a cursive hand below it. “It’s a pipe.”



Figure 1. *La trahison des images* (*The betrayal of images*),

René Magritte (1929)

“Try again. What does it say?”

“It’s in French.”

“So?”

“I’m taking Spanish.”

“How wonderful! Both are romance languages. Now work it out.”

“I don’t speak French!” I push the book in his direction. Mr. Sachse pushes the book back and glares until I relent. I stare at the sentence, *Ceci n’est pas une pipe*. “Okay. Um, something about a pipe?”

“Excellent! What about it?”

“Um... ‘Look at my pipe.’”

“You’re guessing.”

“I *don’t* speak French! All I *can* do is guess!”

“Try again.”

“Look at *the* pipe.”

“This is...,” he prompts me, translating the first part of the sentence.

“...not helpful. I came in to work on my painting. I only have this period. Hey, is your lunch getting cold?” I ask, hoping for a subject change.

He ignores the question. “This is...” he repeats more insistently.

“This is...a pipe.’ See, Magritte thinks it’s a pipe too!”

“*Ceci n’est pas une pipe*,” he says with a perfect accent. There was a rumor going around school that he had lived a bohemian life in Europe before taking the teaching position in the art department and that was why he was so eccentric. He was graying at the temples, and could be considered grandfatherly – if your grandfather was the sort who was given to diatribes on the nature of creativity and building random artwork in public

school hallways – but had an ageless quality that made him hard to place. “This *is not* a pipe. *N’est pas*,” he adds for emphasis.

I point to myself with both index fingers just to be clear. “*N’est pas*,” I say, emulating his inflection, “a French student.” Mr. Sachse throws his head back and laughs, breaking the spell of his intensity. I think the conversation is over, but he continues asking questions through the lunch hour, through the semester, throughout my high school career, and while ushering me into my college experience.

By the end of that lunch period, when my 15-year-old mind finally grasped why Magritte’s pipe truly was not a pipe and what that realization meant, my life changed. The pipe was merely the representation of a pipe, recognizable only because of the implicit construction of shared meaning between artist and audience. More than that, by titling the piece “The Betrayal of Images” and including the line of script Magritte was inviting me into a dialogue about my assumptions of reality and the purpose of art. He was not telling me what a pipe was, but was creating space and context for me to question my assumptions about what it was. In his own inimitable way, Mr. Sachse was doing the same thing; creating space and context for me to ask questions. Is art merely representation? Where was I in the still life I was attempting to paint? What does my work say about me? What does art say about the world? How does my art show me who I am? When I look at something, why do I see what I see and not other things? Why is it that I can look at the same painting or read the same poem on different days and find new meaning in them? Why do some pieces move me when others do not? What is art? Where is art? Who gets to decide?

Mr. Sachse shared books and dialogue with me and we moved from Surrealists like Magritte, to the avant-garde, to Dadaists, to Postmodernists, to pop artists, and super-realists. We covered paintings and sculptures, absurdist plays and poetry, performance pieces, assemblies, installations, and happenings, and I had the opportunity in the course of my high school career to try my hand at creating most of them. Mr. Sachse showed me that art encompasses more than the visual and is critical, exploratory, and raises questions. Art is social commentary, contextualized and layered, created when the artist, the piece, and the audience converge and make multiple meanings of a single experience and it necessitates the presence and positioning of “self” (or multiple selves). Mr. Sachse taught me how to “see” art, both for myself and in the historical context in which it was created. He taught me how to hear the story in art, and how that story was intrinsically tied to my own. I learned to ask questions about what the artist is trying to say and what meaning I make of it. I learned the rules of art, why they are the rules, and, more importantly, why knowing them gave me the power to break them. In teaching me to see art, Mr. Sachse also taught me how I see and interact with the world.

Art is how I know the world, both by creating it and in finding it not only in galleries and museums, but all around us. Art is not only the product, but the process of creation, wherever it might exist. It is often the only socially acceptable way to say what is socially unacceptable, drawing attention to margins and unheard voices. It involves multiple ways of knowing and of communicating that knowing, and often relies on deconstructing what we think we know and reconstructing it in ways that allow us to ask ourselves questions and discover new meanings. I am confronted with such questions in works like the “truisms” of conceptual artist Jenny Holzer and the postmodern

architecture of Frank Gehry, in plays like John Guare's *Six Degrees of Separation* or Jane Wagner's *Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*, in the angry spoken word of poet Maggie Estep, and in the irony of *Sweet Honey in the Rock* harmonizing over discordant social issues. Each also tells me something about the world and my relationship to it.

As a researcher who defines herself as "artist", learning about qualitative inquiry in my doctoral coursework was liberating. My master's thesis, where a quantitative paradigm was the only option, was a painful experience that involved forcing myself to construct knowledge in a way that was at odds with how I make meaning of the world. Because of this incongruence, the process was "false" and subjugating; in many ways merely a rigid exercise rather than an educational experience. Comparatively, qualitative research resonates deeply with my worldview, both in terms of the methods it uses and the knowledge it creates.

In qualitative research as in art, researchers "study subject matter and reveal meanings through analogies, interpretations, and descriptions that capture its essence" (Watrin, 1999, p. 93). Eisner (1991) argues that the work of artists, which falls within the realm of human inquiry, is highly qualitative in nature and thus studying the artistic process can provide insight into qualitative research. Further, Denzin and Lincoln (2005) characterize the qualitative researcher as a *bricoleur* or Jack-of-all-trades. The artist can also be considered a bricoleur who "relies on allegories, metaphors, and narrative elements to create art" (Watrin, p. 93). Finally, like Magritte's pipe the words, figures, and images research produces are not the experiences they represent (Stake & Kerr, 1995). As with art, qualitative representation no matter how rich and descriptive is not

solely the purview of the researcher. Influenced by the researcher, representation is also the creation of the reader who brings her own meaning to the piece. In this way, both qualitative researcher and artist are provocateurs of understanding whose efforts to represent “reality” are simultaneously incomplete as well as full of possibility, as readers bring their own experience to the text (Stake & Kerr).

My interest in and approach to the study of transformational change in higher education is deeply contextualized by my own life-experiences and worldview around art. Additionally, my career in higher education has been characterized by positions in which I was asked to participate in deep cultural change within a single residence hall, across a department, or in conjunction with campus-wide efforts. The meaning I made, individually and as a part of a collective group, influenced the role I played in the process. My experiences and the meaning I made through reflection also influenced this inquiry. While I have chosen student affairs as a career path, I define myself as “artist” in terms of how I interact with and make meaning of the world through creative expressions of self and experience. Change, art, and qualitative research are all acts of creation which involve alternative modes of meaning making. Through this study I explored transformational change through an epistemological and theoretical framework outside the dominant research paradigm, giving voice to multiple perspectives and creating space for accessible representations that reflect the complexity of organizations and transformational change.

Research Methodology

There has been a growing realization in recent years among researchers of something that artists have long known in their bones; namely, that form matters, that content

and form cannot be separated, that how one says something is part and parcel of what is said...the form of representation one uses has something to do with the form of understanding one secures. Once this idea penetrated the research community, the form used to inquire and express what one had learned was no minor consideration. This idea, the idea that different forms could convey different meanings, that form and content cannot be separated, has led to the exploration of new modes of research.

(Eisner, 2001, p. 138-139)

Social research methodologies, and the resulting methods, must be informed by a larger theoretical perspective within the overarching epistemological worldview of the researcher in order to produce congruent data (Crotty, 1998). These four elements (epistemology, theoretical perspective, methodology, and methods) inform one another as in Figure 1 and were used as a design framework for this study. The theoretical and methodological decisions I made for this study reflect who I am as a researcher and frame how the story of this inquiry was told and will be retold (Jones, 2002). Additionally, this framework also illuminates my ethic in conducting this work and my social responsibility in co-creating and representing the lived experience of the participants (Lincoln, 1997).



Figure 2. Four Elements of Research Design (Crotty, 1998)

Epistemology: Social Constructionism

This study was informed by the overarching epistemology of social constructionism. According to Crotty (1998) constructionism is the “view that all

knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). Further, social constructionism bridges the gap between objectivism and subjectivism, as it is predicated on the idea that human beings are engaged in a constant dialectic cycle where objective reality is created socially and then internalized subjectively as individuals (Berger & Luckmann, 1966). Through this cycle we inherit a social system of symbols that constitute our cultural lenses or discourses (Berger & Luckmann; Foucault, 1974). The discourse(s) to which we belong determine what we consider meaningful, as well as what we choose to ignore as irrelevant (Crotty; Foucault).

The meaning participants made of attempts to create transformational change in their organization was socially constructed and influenced by their identity, position, and life experiences. Additional influences on their meaning making included the social constructs of organizational structure and culture, campus climate, resources, supervision, region of the country, and relationships to one another. Positioning this study in a social constructionism epistemology acknowledged both individuals and their relationship to a larger social community in the creation of meaning and was congruent with the purpose of this inquiry.

Theoretical Perspective: Postmodernism

While social constructionism speaks to how meaning is created, postmodernism acknowledges we cannot know truth absolutely. Postmodern theory stems from the rejection of modernity’s elevation of reason and objectivity as tenets of Enlightenment and emerges from divergent thinking in multiple disciplines (Denzin, 1997; Stronach

& MacLure, 1997). The postmodern response to modernism most often involves incredulity toward metanarratives (Lyotard, 1984). Metanarratives are narratives with a legitimizing function; metanarratives are true because they say they are true (Rolfe, 2001). For example, science is a metanarrative grounded in assumptions about the world, how it works, and how we come to know how it works that are beyond proof (Rolfe). Embedded within the metanarrative is justification both of the world and of science itself. Modernism gives authority to certain metanarratives over others in attempts to make coherent meaning of the world, however postmodernism involves a “rejection of overarching propositions, an acceptance of pluralism and fragmentation, an emphasis on difference and heterogeneity, and an ironic admission of the ephemerality of things” (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997, p. 456). From a postmodern framework, this inquiry into individual and group meaning making in a change process intended as transformational opened space for voices and viewpoints previously silenced or ignored as “untrue” because they contradicted modernist metanarratives (Kilduff & Mehra). Through a process of deconstructing hidden meanings and contradictions, the power that allows those *in* authority to define who is *an* authority is exposed (Rolfe).

While the deconstruction associated with postmodern theory has cultural implications that can be interpreted as nihilistic, for the purposes of this research, deconstruction was defined as an opening of space (Derrida, 1974; Stronach & MacLure, 1997) in which multiple meanings can exist. This opening occurs within and alongside the discourses protected and revered by disciplinary institutions such as higher education and their metanarratives, presenting multiple perspectives without advancing a particular discourse as “true” (Rolfe, 2001). However, postmodernism does not necessitate

a staunch stance in epistemological relativism. Though we cannot claim to know everything, we still can know “something” (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Framed by a social constructionist epistemology, postmodernism does not deny an objective reality exists. Instead, it points out how the discourses in which we operate shape our efforts to discern and understand that reality (Rolfe). A realm of absolute truth may indeed exist, however, we have no objective way of determining if we have gained access to it (Rorty, 1989). In the absence of singular truth, uncertainty emerges:

The core of postmodernism is the doubt that any method or theory, discourse or genre, tradition or novelty, has a universal and general claim as the “right” or the privileged form of authoritative knowledge. Postmodernism suspects all truth claims of masking and serving particular interests in local, cultural, and political struggles. But it does not automatically reject conventional methods of knowing and telling as false or archaic. (L. Richardson, 2000, p. 928)

With regards to research, postmodern doubt does not dismiss traditional ways of knowing, but opens space to question traditional inquiry and representation methods as well as create new ones (Denzin, 1997; L. Richardson, 2000). As American philosopher Richard Rorty (1989) notes, “to say that we should drop the idea of truth as out there waiting to be discovered is not to say that we have discovered that out there, there is no truth” (p. 8). The disruption and disorganization of postmodernism does not elevate itself above modernity, but actually “stands both outside and deeply within its logics, trying to force a space for new questions about identity, humanity, and agency” (Stronach & MacLure, 1997, p, 5). A departure from the traditional paradigm makes it possible to question the assumptions held by fields and disciplines as self-evident (Stronach

& MacLure) and not only influenced the research methods of this study but also necessitated questioning collective and individual assumptions (including my own) about organizations, higher education, student affairs, housing and residence life, and change.

A postmodern perspective did not permit me, as researcher, to position myself as objective knower within the inquiry, as I am a “product of the social context and processes being studied” (Nilges, 2001, p. 234). This theoretical framework allowed me to recognize my limitations as a researcher and released me from the traditional paradigm of omniscient researcher (Herndl, 1991) because postmodernism acknowledges my situational limitations as a knower (L. Richardson, 2000). The story this study tells is not *the* story of change, but *a* story of change, contextualized not only by the experiences of participants and myself in co-creation, but also by the chosen methods of representation (Denzin, 1997; Nilges). The goal of this inquiry was not to provide answers or solutions but, like the artist Magritte, to raise questions and provoke poetic reflection on the nature of creating transformational change (Stake & Kerr, 1995). By creating space to question what we think we know, this study shifted the paradigm of what it means to generate knowledge from a focus on discovering “what is” to raising questions about “*what is worth pondering*” (Stake & Kerr, p. 61).

It would be a mistake to conclude this section as if postmodernism was easily defined and the “opening” this inquiry sought to create is tidy and contained like a window or a door in a paradigmatic house. Postmodernism emphasizes movement rather than position, and, as a result, defies the acts of creating boundaries and bringing closure to understanding necessary for something to be satisfactorily “defined” (Stronach & MacLure, 1997). If postmodern openings are desirable in terms of the space they

create, they are equally dangerous with regard to the fearful critiques they evoke and the temptation for the postmodernist herself to abandon the uncertainty critical to the perspective in defense of the theory (Rolfe, 2001; Stronach & MacLure). Risk also exists of undermining one's own theoretical position by presenting the "reading of any issue as a 'better' one...than whatever interpretation we have placed on the 'other' side of the argument" (Stronach & MacLure, p. 9). Reflexivity, so important to qualitative research, becomes critical in a postmodern framework; an issue I address in greater depth later in this chapter.

As a novice researcher engaged in the culminating activity of doctoral study intended to evidence what you "know", choosing a theoretical framework which is attentive to what you *do not know* presents a possible additional danger. The postmodern opening I sought in my research problematized the learning I engaged in, as it also created space for challenge, criticism, and rejection of any aspect of methodology presented here. Choosing a theoretical framework that elongated and complicated an already stressful dissertation experience may be counterintuitive to the United States post-secondary and graduate educational paradigm that seems to emphasize finishing over learning. However, to not choose postmodernism as a framework would have moved this inquiry from educational experience to rigid exercise, a procedure I did not care to repeat. More important in my doctoral education than the *product* of the dissertation was the *process* of the dissertation and how it continued, reflexively and in community with my committee, the dialogue begun in a high school art room 25 years ago.

Methodology: Case Study and Portraiture

Methodology describes the theory and design in which the inquiry is positioned and provides a connection between specific methods and the desired outcomes of the study (Crotty, 1998; Jones, 2002). To that end, this postmodern study of meaning making in a transformational change process advocated an eclectic methodological approach which sought “to include and use techniques, insights, methods, and approaches from a variety of traditions, reaching backwards, forwards, and sideways with little regard for academic boundaries or the myth of progress” that condemns some truths while exalting others (Kilduff & Mehra, 1997, p. 457). This positioning was congruent both with the idea of a methodological *bricoleur* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005) who attempts to be proficient at an array of tasks “ranging from interviewing to intensive self-reflection and introspection” (p. 6) and the goal of this inquiry to challenge dominant models as well as produce alternate forms of knowledge regarding transformational change. Choosing case study and portraiture provided methodological rationale for methods (Crotty) of both collecting and representing data.

Case study as a methodology is focused on understanding a process within a system bounded by time and place, and consisting of a program, event, activity or individuals (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). It involves rigorous data collection over a period of time and relies on multiple information sources and collection methods (Creswell). Data collection was driven by a need for the product of this inquiry to be a descriptive case which provides rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under study (Merriam; Stake, 1995) Specific methods are discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Interest in this inquiry was in “process rather than outcomes, in context rather than a specific variable, in discovery rather than confirmation” (Merriam, p. 19). Further, case study methodology was congruent with the overall design of this study. The research questions regarding meaning making in a transformational change process were driven by the complexity and particularity of the organization of interest, the interaction of its members, and the desire to understand its activity within the context of important circumstances (Stake, 1995).

While case study provided a framework for delineating the phenomenon and events of interest in this inquiry, portraiture was used to blend the aesthetic and empirical in order to “see clearly the art in the development of science and the science in the making of art” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 3). Portraiture was developed by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot as a method of inquiry in educational research. She offers the following description:

Portraiture is a method of qualitative research that blurs the boundaries of aesthetics and empiricism in an effort to capture the complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of the human experience and organizational life. Portraitists seek to record and interpret the perspectives and experience of the people they are studying, documenting their voices and their visions—their authority, knowledge, and wisdom. The drawing of the portrait is placed in a social and cultural context and shaped through dialogue between the portraitist and the subject, each one negotiating the discourse and shaping the evolving image. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv)

In portraiture, the researcher's voice is woven purposefully into the representation to enhance understanding of the research participant and create accessible findings (Hackmann, 2002). Created as a result of researcher's interactions within the research setting, this methodology permits a specific situation or event to be understood and "known" in multiple ways (Marble, 1997). Room for competing truths exists, and in this way portraiture was highly congruent both with a postmodern theoretical framework and with the realities of a complex higher education culture, where events had different meanings for different stakeholders. As a result, "these varying perceptions can be fashioned onto the canvas of the institution's portrait, in essence becoming a composite representation of various individuals' beliefs regarding their organization" (Hackmann, p. 57).

Portraiture represents the viewpoints of organizational insiders and gives voice to divergent perspectives in ways that more traditional methodology does not (Hackmann, 2002). In this way, portraiture allowed for the exploration of collaborative theories about values-based transformation and transformational leadership, where the focus was on possibility rather than blame (Astin & Astin, 2000) and group process rather than specific individual leadership characteristics (Alimo-Metcalfe & Alban-Metcalfe, 2005; Komives et al., 1998).

Methods

Setting

The setting for this inquiry was the bounded case (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998) of a division of housing and residence life engaged in a process of organizational change intended to be transformational. Congruent with inquiry into meaning making as framed by the literature, case study design was "employed to gain an in-depth

understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved” (Merriam, p. 19). Case study is concerned with process and discovery rather than outcomes and confirmation and can lead to insights that directly influence practice (Merriam). Setting the case intentionally within a housing division, specifically at a research extensive university, enriched the inquiry in two potentially positive ways. First, it allowed me, as a researcher with a professional background in housing, to gain entry and access through insider status created through shared experience, vocabulary, and understanding. My status created context, critical in portraiture methodology, from which to interpret or “decode an action, a gesture, a conversation or an exclamation” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Additionally, housing divisions at large institutions frequently are themselves loosely coupled systems (Weick, 1991) where smaller units or sensemaking frameworks (Love, 1995) within operate independently of one another and mirror the larger university culture the literature identifies as troublesome when applying business models of change.

Participants

According to Merriam (1998), “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). Ongoing theoretical sampling (Merriam) was used, where an initial sample was chosen based on specific criteria. Initially proximity to the change process occurring at the time of data collection was suggested as criteria. However, in the field the limitations of that criteria became immediately apparent, as it reflected a latent presupposition towards teleological change efforts and failed to account for other less visible possibilities. Initial sampling instead occurred based on how I could gain access to groups and individuals, based either on

my own relationships or introductions from others. Two staff members, the Director of Residence Life and a Hall Director, whom I knew from other contexts, acted as gatekeepers during the first few weeks of my study and provided access to meetings and colleagues. Supported by ongoing and continuous analysis during data collection in co-creation with each participant, additional participants were identified in an emergent process which followed lines of meaning making and relationship within the organization. Consistent with portraiture within a postmodern framework, this sampling procedure also allowed me, as the researcher, to seek out variants or exceptions as the research evolved (Merriam) and interact with participants at every level of the organization. This level of engagement was sufficient to reach a point of saturation near the conclusion of the study, where continued data collection did not result in additional information (Creswell, 1998) about the organization or individuals' meaning making.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred in three primary ways over the course of twelve months: observation, individual and group interviews, and document collection (Merriam 1998; Stake, 1995). Decisions about specifically what to observe, who to interview, and what documents to collect were made in an emergent process determined in co-creation with my participants based on what was interpreted in ongoing analysis as meaningful for them. Additionally because both case study and portraiture are intimate and relational methodologies, dependent on the transparent positioning of the researcher during data collection and analysis (Janesick, 1999; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997; Merriam; Stake), I kept an extensive research journal in which I explored and reflected on my role as researcher within the inquiry process (Janesick), examining the multiple selves I

brought to the study and how they influenced the manner in which I told the participants' story (Lincoln, 1997).

Participant observation. Observation in research provides opportunity to gather data that can provide context for the overall study including the setting, participants, activities and interactions, conversation, subtle factors, and my own behavior as the researcher (Merriam, 1998). It is how the portraitist begins her fieldwork, "listening and observing, being open and receptive to all stimuli, acclimating herself to the environment, documenting her initial movements and first impressions, and noting what is familiar and what is surprising" Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 187). Observation can also provide insight into specific behaviors or incidents to be explored further during interviews (Creswell, 1998; Merriam). Portraiture necessitates the researcher operate as a participant observer, moving "from a minimalist stance of restraint and witness to a place of explicit, audible participation" (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p.105). Immersion in the research setting makes it possible to move beyond biases and surface observations to a deeper understanding of the organization (Marble, 1997; Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis).

I spent 12 months and approximately 340 hours at the site. At the beginning and end of the study I went to the site two to three days per week, spending no less than four hours during a single visit. Near the middle of the study I went to the site less frequently during the week but stayed for longer periods of time, shadowing participants or observing settings. To document my time with the department, a fieldwork journal, including both descriptive and reflexive notes (Creswell, 1998), was kept for this inquiry. Entry to the department was gained through the Director of Residence Life, who gave me open access to meetings, gatherings, and central office space. During my time with the

department I observed the daily operation of the central office and area or hall offices, weekly Supervisory meetings and Management meetings, bimonthly Leadership Team meetings, Hall Director meetings, monthly all-staff meetings, work group and committee meetings, educational programming, inservice and professional development sessions, retreats, birthday and other celebrations, and hall staff meetings.

Interviews. Merriam (1998) calls the most common form of interviewing a “person to person encounter in which one person elicits information from another” (p. 71). Described as a conversation with a purpose, interviews range from highly structured, to semi-structured, to unstructured or informal (Merriam). For the purposes of this study interactive interviewing (Ellis & Berger, 2003) was used in both individual and group settings.

Interactive interviewing, specifically reflexive dyadic interviewing, deconstructs notions of the researcher as passive recipient of the participant’s “truth,” rejecting the strict separation of the researcher from the participant and acknowledging the latter as an active player both in the interview and in the representation (Ellis & Berger, 2003). From a constructionist postmodern framework, interviews in this study on meaning making were a social action resulting in the co-construction of meaning between the participant and myself as we negotiated the relationship in a collaborative process (Holstein & Gubrium, 1995). Reflexive dyadic interviewing necessitated deconstructing issues of power and an empathic responsibility for emotions during the interview, as well as when seeking to represent the story of the research:

The interviewers might reflect deeply on the personal experience that brought them to the topic, what they learned about and from themselves and their emotional responses in the course of the interview, and/or how they used

knowledge of the self or the topic at hand to understand what the interviewee was saying. Thus the final product includes the cognitive and emotional reflections of the researcher, which add context and layers to the story being told about the participants. (Ellis & Berger, p. 162)

Framing interviews in this highly reflexive and relational manner created an approach to this inquiry with space for multiple perspectives. It required me to engage in a constant process of questioning what I thought I knew about the participant, the field, and how change happens. Additionally, reflexive dyadic interviews were congruent with portraiture methodology where making explicit my personal context as the researcher contributed to a deeper understanding of and empathy for the participant and the topic of transformational change (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Interactive individual or group interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. An introductory interview initiated participation in the study, and additional follow up interviews, either in small groups or individually, were conducted unless time or schedules did not permit. Additional interviews were scheduled with participants as needed, as the nature of the study unfolded with regard to meaning making. Unstructured, informal interviewing took place throughout the inquiry and was recorded digitally when possible or noted in my researcher journal immediately following the interaction. In total, 45 individual and six group interviews were conducted and transcribed.

Document collection. The term “document” refers to a wide array of visual, written, and physical materials already present in the research setting and relevant to a particular study (Merriam, 1998). Documents include public records, personal documents, and physical materials or artifacts (Creswell, 1998; Merriam; Stake, 1995).

Additionally, documents may include materials generated by the researcher specifically for the inquiry (Merriam).

In seeking to understand how meaning was made around a change process, public documents such as mission and vision statements, job descriptions, forms, memos, meeting agendas and minutes, reports, budgets, internal newsletters, and newspaper articles, as well as electronic and online publications offered insight into the organization and its programs (Merriam, 1998). Such documents viewed collectively illuminate espoused and enacted values and can provide information about organizational culture and how individuals operate within it (Schein, 1992). For instance, values named in a mission statement, such as multicultural initiatives or staff development, may or may not be supported by allocations in a formal budget. Public documents can also help to create context for the change initiative being attempted and can stimulate direction for later observation and interviews (Merriam; Patton 1990). For this reason, collection and analysis of such documents began prior to interaction with the individuals or observation of the setting and continued over the course of the 12 month study.

Personal documents include emails, diaries or journals, photos, and calendars, and provide a subjective yet “reliable source of data concerning a person’s attitudes, beliefs, and view of the world” (Merriam, 1998, p. 116). Documents of this nature speak to inner experience and can provide insight in this inquiry regarding individual meaning making. Personal documents were requested when referenced by the participant in an interview or observation setting and the relationship between the participant and myself was such that it does not seem intrusive. For example, when a participant mentioned spoke often

about how full her weekly schedule was with meetings and commitments, I requested and received a print out of her electronic calendar.

Finally, researcher-generated documents are created by the researcher or by participants for the researcher as a part of the inquiry process (Merriam, 1998). For the purposes of this study, participants were invited to be a part of an interactive journal (Janesick, 1999) exchanged over email, social networking sites, and instant messaging which provided an additional opportunity and forum to co-create meaning. Much of this exchange took place during the writing and analysis stage, as participants provided member checking and shared meaning they made regarding findings. As researcher, I also took digital photographs, both for the purpose of documenting the setting and for use as photo elicitation. Photo elicitation is a technique in which the researcher uses photos to facilitate open-ended interviewing (Collier, 1997; Creswell, 1998; Warren & Karner, 2004). Objects may appear mundane or uninteresting as a photo however the meanings that participants attached to them are discussed as a way to “yield something that was already in the experience of the [participants], things about which they might not have spoken beforehand, or could not easily speak about in an interview” (Radley & Taylor, 2003. p. 90). One participant who was interested also took photos of images that represented what change meant to her for the purpose of elicitation and insight into her meaning making processes. As an example, with this participant’s permission, I took her photos of conference rooms and building construction to other participants to see what meaning they made of these images in relationship to change.

Researcher journal and reflexivity. Janesick (1999) advocates the use of a journal as a powerful qualitative research tool for numerous reasons including: (a) to

reflect on and gain greater understanding of the role of the researcher, (b) to refine the understanding of participant responses in the inquiry, (c) as a tool of communication between researcher and participant, and (d) as a method for researchers to become “connoisseurs of their own thinking and reflection patterns” (p. 506). An artistic endeavor, journal writing is a way of getting in touch with one’s intuitive self in a way that enriches the research process (Janesick; Watrin 1999). For this study in particular, the researcher journal was a critical tool for reflexivity in a number of arenas.

Journaling as a researcher made it possible for me to explore and surface the assumptions and discourse-based biases I have regarding the topic and the setting. As someone who has come from a career in student affairs, specifically housing and residence life, I am in many ways a product of the discourses of the professional field. Positioning this inquiry in a postmodern framework necessitated that I deconstruct those discourses, especially espoused “truths” of the field and how they may influence my ability to create space for multiple perspectives. This journaling begins prior to entering the research site and creates an “anticipatory template” as a starting place for portraitist, “identifying the intellectual, ideological, and autobiographical themes that will shape her view” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 186). In making this voice explicit and identifying the lenses through which I see the world, I was more able to be open to what I encountered in course of fieldwork. Excerpts from this journal are integrated into chapters four and five.

Additionally, in choosing portraiture as a methodology, my story and voice become part of the text (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). I am also a person writing from a particular position at a specific time (L. Richardson, 2000). Journaling

was an opportunity to explore this voice and position, including how they converge or diverge with participant voices and position. By keeping daily “impressionistic records” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis) of site visits, journaling allowed for ongoing reflection that “identifies emerging hypotheses, suggests interpretations, describes shifts in perspective, points to puzzles and dilemmas (methodological, conceptual, ethical) that need attention, and develops a plan of action for the next visit” (p. 188). In this way, data analysis and methodological decision-making became ongoing, flexible processes, responsive to both participants and the setting.

I have kept journals chronicling my daily activity since grade school, when I received a blue Holly Hobby diary with gilded pages and a tiny golden lock for my tenth birthday. In high school, Mr. Sachse introduced me to the idea of an art journal as a way to both plan for and reflect on whatever creative processes I was engaged in at the time. Besides the traditional use of written words to explain or record, “text” in the art journal consists of visual and metaphorical representation as well, such as sketches, collages, poetry, word games, and collected images or articles used to explore and deconstruct problems in a piece, approach, or medium. Similarly, Janesick (1998) advocates various exercises, including metaphor and collage, to improve qualitative inquiry and writing. It is from both these perspectives that I created a researcher journal, recording observations and significance as I sought to record not only activity but also the multiple meanings I made of the experience. In this manner, writing itself became a method of data collection, allowing me to explore what I think I know and position myself more transparently during the analysis and representation processes of this inquiry (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005).

Data Analysis

Analysis of data congruent with a portraiture framework is a process where the researcher “gathers, organizes, and scrutinizes the data, searching for convergent threads, illuminating metaphors, and overarching symbols, and often constructing coherence out of themes that actors might experience as unrelated or incoherent” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). It involved both empirical interpretation and aesthetic narrative development and was highly attentive to voice, framed by the intellectual, ideological, and autobiographical themes I established through my journaling. In this way, journaling allowed me to make my lens “more lucid, less encumbered by the shadow of bias” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 186). Connections were then traced between this “anticipatory template” and emergent themes within the data in order to construct the final portrait in a process of ongoing, holistic coding that was both iterative and generative, and conducted in concert with participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis). Five methods of analysis involving synthesis, convergence, and contrast are associated with portraiture: listening for repetitive refrains, listening for resonant metaphors, listening for themes expressed through cultural and institutional rituals, use of triangulation to weave together threads of data, and, finally, revealing patterns (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis).

Repetitive refrains, both audible and visible, proclaim “This is who we are. This is what we believe. This is how we see ourselves” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 193). Repetitive refrains are heard from a variety of participants in the inquiry over and over again, in language, actions, and gestures. Refrains can also be seen in signs and symbols in the setting. They may be easily identifiable, or require that the portraiture

may need to listen carefully to recognize irony or innuendo. However, once recognized by the researcher, refrains are shared with and confirmed by the participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis).

In analyzing the data, the portraitist also is attentive to resonant metaphors, which may occur infrequently, but express and illustrate large ideas within human experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). They are present in the words, phrases, and symbols used by the actors and may give key insight into the core of organizational culture or a life story because they both “embody values and perspectives and they give them shape and meaning” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 198). The portraitist must listen carefully for metaphors, always seeking to uncover their meaning and context, and discovering their origins in dialogue the participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis).

Rituals, both institutional and cultural, are aesthetic displays of the organization’s purpose and values (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). They are functions of community life that the portraitist can both participate in and observe, and the data collected can be an aesthetic expression that gives insight and context to emergent themes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis). Within rituals “we see values revealed, priorities named, and stories told that symbolize the institution’s culture” while also providing “opportunities for building community, for celebrating roots and traditions, and for underscoring continuity and coherence” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 201).

Triangulation is a method by which the researcher uses multiple tools and strategies for data collection to find points of convergence within the data (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). It is characterized by the layering of data and involves using different lenses to frame similar findings (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis). However, while

helpful as a tool for analyzing data within portraiture methodology, triangulation in this postmodern exploration of meaning making around transformational change will not be used as a measure of “truth” in the findings of this inquiry.

Finally, patterns are revealed by the portraitist in both convergent and divergent processes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Voices of participants, symbols, observation, and documents may converge in a “harmony” of clear patterns and themes which can be illustrated in the final portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis). However, triangulation may not be present in the data and the portraitist must attend to the seeming lack of coherence and consensus, reflecting on her on experience and searching for patterns not immediately recognizable to or articulated by the participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis).

Representation

Conducting research within the theoretical framework of postmodernism is an invitation to critique and re-evaluate the “notions of self, society, community, reason, values, and history that dominate modernity” (Hollinger, 1994, p. 170). From this perspective representation can never be fully understood or completely objective (Denzin 1997; Nilges, 2001; L. Richardson, 2000). Knowledge produced in this inquiry is not only bound by history and context, but also constructed through my own reflexivity as researcher and the manner in which data was collected, analyzed, and represented in co-creation with participants (Denzin, 1997; Kilduff & Mehra, 1997). Therefore, representation also became a method of inquiry and analysis, as I discovered in the process of writing about the topic new aspects of myself as researcher and of the topic itself (L. Richardson, 2000).

As illustrated in Table 3.1, representational, or rhetorical, strategies from a postmodern perspective differ significantly from traditional paradigms (Nilges, 2001). My intent with this representation is to invite readers into participants' stories of transformational change and create space in which we can begin to think about social concepts regarding change in ways which currently elude us (L. Richardson, 2000). Additionally, in this space meaning can be mobilized rather than fixed (Stronach & MacLure, 1997), better representing the dynamic process of change itself and creating space for new voices and new questions.

| Rhetorical strategy | Conventional text | Postmodern text |
|----------------------------|--|---|
| 1. Role of the author | Omniscient and detached Third person point of view | Active First person point of view |
| 2. Role of the reader | Objective chronology creates passive role for the reader | Reader and author move through text together |
| 3. Voice | Monologue dominates Author's voice controls text | Polyphonic Multiple voices heard |
| 4. Temporal sequencing | Absent due to triangulation | Scenes unfold over time |
| 5. Conclusion | Interpretive omnipotence | Reflexive |

Table 2. Rhetorical Strategies in Conventional and Postmodern Texts (Nilges, 2001)

As a postmodern text, portraiture results in representation that seeks to “blend artistic expression with scientific rigor to form an aesthetic whole” (Hackmann, 2002, p. 51). The purpose of this inquiry was not to “prove” something about meaning making in a process of change intended as transformational, but to *vivify* it, turning representation “into a display and interaction among perspectives and presenting material rich enough to bear re-analysis in different ways” (Lather, 1991, p. 91) so that it interrupts the

authoritative voice of the researcher and, like the evocative work of the artist Magritte, brings the reader into the analysis (L. Richardson, 2000; Stake & Kerr, 1995).

The choices I made with regard to representation and findings in chapters four and five reflect an attempt to follow the advice of Woolgar (1989), who, when considering a postmodern paradigm, proposed juxtaposing “textual elements such that no single (comfortable) interpretation is readily available” (p. 85). By presenting elements that may be self-referring or even contradictory (Woolgar) the idea of the author’s voice as omniscient, all-knowing authority is challenged, creating space for multiple voices to be heard (Finlay, 2003; Palmer, 1993). Additionally, interrupting traditional narrative formats with alternative textual forms is more than a structural device to present different voices on a single page. It is a visual reminder the narrative shared here is not *the* truth but *a* truth, and I am the architect of how this truth is told. Like building blocks stacked together on the page, this portrait is constructed by me as the researcher in an act of power; fitted together through the choices and omissions I have made in attempting to represent a year of data collection in what is, by comparison, a few short pages.

Within the space of the page, the formatting is also a way to insist the reader engage in ways that bring her into the analysis. The forced choice of selecting a path through the narrative is an attempt to recognize and remind the reader knowledge as well as knower are subjective (Palmer, 1993). Choosing when to engage, disengage, and re-engage with some parts of the story in order to read other parts—decisions that will vary reader to reader and reading to reading—creates space for alternate interpretations and new meaning based on how content is presented and (re)presented to the reader.

Sparkes (1995) suggests creative texts can also blur boundaries between researcher and researched. I would like to advance this idea and consider how artful texts such as the one presented here may also blur the boundaries between researcher, researched, *and* reader by asking those who engage to think *about* and *with* the data (Coffey, 1999), much as viewing a painting by Magritte is a conversation between patron, piece, and artist that uncovers hidden assumptions. Of equal importance to how space *on* the page conveys the relationship between participants and me, is how the reader fills the creative space *between* the page and her own experience, in relationship to the co-created text and with regard for the rich contexts of her own story.

Finally, postmodern textual forms should “recreate lived experience and evoke emotional responses” (L. Richardson, 2000, p. 931). As a young professional I had the opportunity to visit the United State Holocaust Memorial Museum shortly after it opened in Washington DC and be a part of a tour that highlighted the design of the museum as much as its content. More so than other collections installed in monolithic buildings around the Mall, the Holocaust Museum is conceptual, meaning artifacts do not stand alone but instead serve to support the primary narrative of refuting revisionism (Ochsner, 1995). The story of the Holocaust is told with the intent to elicit emotion, through traditional means such as overwhelming evidence or personal identification, but also through the manipulation of the physical space of the museum itself. For instance, the first area of the exhibition, which tells the story of the years leading up to World War II, is a long hall of glass cases filled with artifacts flanked by narrative explanations on small cards. Almost imperceptibly the glass of the facing cases are built out in places to create narrows and bottlenecks, forcing the viewing throngs into uncomfortable proximity, a

psychological effect which amplifies the display's stories of persecution and pogroms. Likewise, dim, maze-like areas dedicated to serving witness to the horror of the death camps open unexpectedly onto pristine areas lit by natural light, offered as psychic space for contemplation when evidence and accounts become too overwhelming.

Similar to the role architecture plays in telling the story of the Holocaust Museum, form and content cannot be separated in textual representations because the form of representation influences understanding (Eisner, 2001). The representation offered here is also an invitation for the reader to think about her own emotional responses, not only to the content but also to a form that celebrates paradox (Lynch, 2000), creates competing priorities within the text, and resists cleaning up the complex story of making meaning of change. Further, it presents opportunities to reflect on how the process of engaging with a messy text that interrupts a linear narrative compares to the experience of engaging in a change process with regard to the choices and emotional responses it evokes.

Judgment Without Rules: Trustworthiness and Rigor in Postmodern Research

*I am cautious when I encounter definitions of intellectual rigor that are bifurcated
from creative urges, spiritual awakenings, or cosmological imaginations.*

(Slattery, 2003, p. 195)

Traditional concepts of trustworthiness and rigor stem from legitimacy issues caused when qualitative inquiry is evaluated using quantitative discourses that extol strict adherence to method as the measure of "truth" within research (Rolfe, 2006). However, a postmodern theoretical framework grounded in a social constructionist epistemology is skeptical of the scientific metanarrative in which the quantitative discourse is grounded

(Rolfe). Postmodernism recognizes that what “counts” as knowledge is historically and contextually bound (Denzin, 1997), and “not only do different methods produce different findings, but the same method employed on different occasions in different situations will also have a different outcome” (Rolfe, p. 9). Postmodernism places the measure of “truth” in the representation rather than the method, knowing that the text will be different based on which “self” the author uses to create the text (Lincoln, 1997; L. Richardson, 2000; Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005; Rolfe). Additionally, the author is not the single central or authoritative voice from which to judge the “truth” of a text, as knowledge is recreated with each reader and each reading (Derrida, 1974; Rolfe). This is not to say that all readings are equally valid, only that they all are legitimate and have equal right to be heard, while paying attention to evaluative issues of trustworthiness both between and within research paradigms (Rolfe). Postmodern representation creates space for “both-and” rather than “either-or” choices regarding “truth”, accepting differences in interpretations and simultaneously deferring any attempts made to chose between them (Rolfe).

While triangulation is a method-dependent standard of trustworthiness employed in traditional qualitative practice, L. Richardson (2000) rejects the image of the flat, exact, and fixed triangle as limiting. Instead, she proposes that postmodern texts are legitimized not through methodological triangulation, but through a process of “crystallization” which creates space for multiple representations:

...the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, alter, but are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within

themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays, casting off in different directions, What we see depends upon our angle of repose. Not triangulation, crystallization. In postmodern mixed-genre texts, we have moved from plane geometry to light theory, where light can be both waves and particles. (L. Richardson, p. 934)

With the imagery of the crystal in mind, what we “see” when representing research “depends on how we view it, how we hold it up to the light or not” (Janesick, 2000, p. 392). There is no single truth and the measure of trustworthiness in postmodern research is not in objective measures, but in the writing and representation (Richardson, & St. Pierre, 2005; Rolfe, 2006). Because of this difference in approach, between-paradigm judgments of validity or trustworthiness can only be made on an individual basis, with prudence, practical wisdom, and recognition that scientific metanarratives are an expression of power rather than of objective truths or natural laws (Rolfe). Instead, Richardson and Pierre offer criteria for legitimizing creative analytical practices (CAP) that address both aesthetic and empirical lenses and are congruent with postmodern discourses:

1. *Substantive contribution.* Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) social scientific perspective? Does the piece seem “true” – a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the “real”?
2. *Aesthetic merit.* Rather than reducing standards, another standard is added. Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytical practices open up the text and invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?

3. *Reflexivity*. How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? Does the author hold himself or herself accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people he or she has studied?
4. *Impact*. Does this piece affect me emotionally or intellectually? Does it generate new questions or move me to write? Does it move me to try new research practices or move me to action? (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 964).

Portraiture also relies on “resonance” as a legitimation measure (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997), an idea that is conceptually similar to aspects of CAP criteria. Resonance also blends empirical and aesthetic choices and must be present for both participants and myself in terms of “the synergy of context, voice, relationships, and emergent themes” (p. 260) within the whole of the portrait. As a result of resonance, the portrait “feels” credible and believable to the reader as well, and it is recognized as authentic, in that it “holds together” in a way that allows for insight, identification, and recognition (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Finally, transferability of findings is determined by the reader within qualitative research, based on the researcher's ability to provide rich, thick description in representation (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). The postmodern theory this inquiry is framed by recognizes that “truth” is context bound (Rolfe, 2006) and thus transferability is dependent on the meaning the reader makes of the representation. Additionally, this research sought not to provide specific strategies about meaning making in a transformational change process, but to be a “provocateur of understanding, portraying

the common in problem-setting rather than problem-solving ways” (Stake & Kerr, 1995, p. 57-58). Implicit in this provocation is the recognition that while I as the researcher influence the meaning made, each reading is a re-presentation the reader creates as she brings her “self” to the text (Stake & Kerr). Because this study was grounded in a postmodern theoretical framework, interpretive sufficiency (Christians, 2005; Denzin, 1997) became critical. Interpretive sufficiency involves having data that allows representation to “possess that amount of depth, detail, emotionality, nuance, and coherence that will permit a critical consciousness to be formed by the reader” (Denzin, p. 283). Thus, thick and rich representation is pivotal not as an expression of specific “truth” within the text, but – like Magritte’s art, where new knowledge is constructed with every viewing – as fodder for possibility and the construction of new meaning (Stake & Kerr).

Postmodern qualitative research is rigorous not because of strict adherence to method, but because of the reflexivity and flexibility employed in an attempt to be responsive to the “messy reality of the research project” (Rolfe, 2006, p. 13). Crystallization, CAP criteria, and interpretive sufficiency were used to establish postmodern legitimation for this study by “stressing subjectivity, emotionality, feeling, and other antifoundational criteria” (Denzin, 1997, p. 9).

Summary

This chapter presented the qualitative research design and methodology for this study exploring how individuals in a higher education organization make meaning, both individually and in relationship to one another, of a process intended as transformational change. A qualitative design was used to make meaning of participants’ stories through

social constructionism and postmodern epistemological and theoretical frameworks, respectively. Case study and portraiture methodology reflect an interest in understanding the process in a bound system and acknowledged the voice of the researcher as particularly salient in the inquiry process. Participants were selected through ongoing theoretical sampling and data was collected through the use of interactive interviewing, participant observation, document collection, and researcher journaling. Data was analyzed using both empirical interpretation and aesthetic narrative development and is presented in a textual form that reflects a postmodern paradigm.

CHAPTER IV
PRESENTING AND (RE)PRESENTING THE DATA

To recapture spirit we need to relearn how to lead with soul...how to infuse the workplace with vigor and élan. Leading with soul returns us to ancient spiritual basics – reclaiming the enduring human capacity that gives our lives passion and purpose.

(Bohlman and Deal, 2001, p. 6)

Acorns, Volvos, and Values-Based Change

“...so, this is what I think. And some of what I’m saying sounds like I’ve been thinking about it for a long time, but actually it’s just coming to me now as we talk,” Mac begins, either as a caution or an explanation, when I ask about his process of leading change. But I know him well enough to know even if he has not considered the specific question in relationship to his own approach, his interests in the area of organizations and leadership mean in this moment he is drawing on a complex framework of resources to answer the question.

I have been visiting the department for just over a month now and it is our second conversation seated around the small table in his garden level office. The space is modest, compared to what one might think fitting for a Director of Residence Life at a large, Research Extensive university. No bigger than a traditional residence hall room, it very well may have been one at some point. The four floors above us still house undergraduate students and it is not unusual to hear music from the hall’s piano room overhead or

excited student voices entering or exiting the building outside on the walkway just above Mac's windows. The buff walls are bare, save for a large, white, dry erase board on the north wall, giving the impression he has not been here long or, perhaps, does not plan to stay.

In actuality, Mac has been Director for three years, joining the department initially in an interim role and then earning the permanent position in a national search. He moved to this office a year ago and is slowly making the space his own, having rearranged the furniture recently so his desk is no longer the barrier it had been when it grew out of the center of the room and separated him from the door and anyone entering.

“Yeah, it felt good to change it,” he said excitedly when I commented on the new office arrangement, “It’s a much better flow. The energy in here is much more me than it was before. Now I just need to get stuff that has more impact on the walls. I’d like to get a little waterfall.”

Even without a waterfall, Mac's space is tranquil compared to the kinetic outer office, which serves as a passageway from the lobby's information desk to other offices in the department. Residence Life, one of the functional units within the larger division of Housing and Dining, also hosts the floor's kitchen as well as the humming, grey communal printer shared between offices. As a result, there is a constant stream of colleagues traversing back and forth to pick up documents or drop their lunches in the refrigerator. Additionally, visitors to Residence Life, in their quest for information, must navigate between and peer over partitions of various heights that rise like a grey flannel skyline subdividing the area into individual workspaces and casting grey shadows onto a mottled, darker grey carpet.

While the partitions delineate office space, they provide little privacy for confidential phone calls or quiet contemplation of a project for either Shannon, Mac's personal assistant, or for the various student employees who report to her or one of the Assistant Directors whose offices line the north wall opposite the Director's office. "Get that down in your notes!" Shannon instructs me one day when I am tucked in a corner observing the office. She has popped up from behind her partition just outside Mac's door to crinkle her nose and point down the parquet-floored hall, where the reverberating echo of two University Dining employees has interrupted her work. They are discussing meal plan rates and laughing over the morning's meeting while their lunches warm in the microwave. The pungent, wafting scent of reheated leftovers makes the office smell like a Las Vegas buffet line and I cannot tell if it is the odor or the noise that Shannon finds most disruptive. There is an intense quality to her frustration, and it may be Shannon's energy as much as the noise, continuous traffic, or bustling moments of crisis management that contributes to the frenetic outer office feel.

More private space has been promised to Shannon, but, as in most large systems, the structured process of drawing up plans and getting approvals has pushed construction timelines to the horizon. Until the walls and doors of a permanent office area can be built, she is left exposed and must make do with unending interruptions and distractions, an atmosphere that does not seem particularly supportive of her workload or style.

Like decisions regarding the layout of his own workspace, attention to structural and physical changes in the outer office are a reflection of Mac's desire for deeper organizational transformation in the department. His approach is not to impose change as a mandate from the top, but to foster space where the best of what everyone brings

can emerge in a process of co-creation. While currently focused on Residence Life specifically, he also hopes to similarly influence the larger Housing and Dining division of which his department is a part.

“I think part of it is seeding slowly,” Mac continues, answering my initial question about change, “so, the longer that I’m here the more I realize there’s a wide range of things I’ve come to know about how organizations and people work. But I’m not someone who says, ‘Okay, forget all this, I’m focusing right here and I’m going to get to that place.’ I’m not a construction engineer. I don’t put each little thing in place and then go on to the next thing. What I do is say, ‘Here’s the field,’” he has leaned forward while speaking, excited about the possibilities he sees, and pauses to sit back in his seat so he has space to gesture, lobbing small invisible items in equally invisible arcs around the table, “I throw a seed there, I throw a seed there, throw a seed there, throw a seed there—and now that we’re talking about it, it comes to me that there’s a story about the acorn planter! Have you heard of that?”

“I don’t think so.” I say, and he pauses for a moment, gathers his thoughts, and tells me this story:

During World War II, a young Private stationed in France was injured in a battle and became separated from his unit. Left for dead, the young man was found by a rural French man who took the soldier into his small, sequestered home and nurtured him back to health.

“How are you? It’s good to see you!” Rich hugs me, patting my shoulder and standing back to look at me like a long lost uncle. “Sit down, sit down.” He slaps the arm of a sofa, and then sits in his own seat, swinging the tall leather desk chair around to face me.

It’s been three years since I worked for Rich, the Director of Housing at a Big Ten University. The opportunity to do some leadership development with students has prompted me to pause my dissertation research for a week and re-

For a long time the soldier drifted in and out of consciousness as the man brought him tea and other medicinal things to help him heal. As days passed, and the soldier spent more and more time awake and alert, he noticed that every morning the old man left the house with a long stick and a small but weighty bag around his waist, returning several hours later, unburdened, to share a meager meal together. When the soldier was finally healthy enough he asked, "What are you doing every day when you leave this house?" "I'm planting acorns," the man replied. The soldier was taken aback. "Why are you doing that? It's barren out there!" "I've planted over 100,000 acorns," the old man continued, "perhaps only a tenth of them will grow, but I am planting a forest."

Under the old man's care, the soldier eventually grew healthy, returned to his unit and went back to the United States where he lived a full and happy life. After twenty years, the soldier, now a not-so-young man himself, returned to France to pay his debt of gratitude.

turn to the campus where I worked for four years as an Assistant Director in Housing and Residence Life, a department structured identically to the one I am studying.

I have flown in and am consulting with another office on campus, but a break in our schedule has left me time to reconnect with colleagues and visit my old department, though I barely recognize the space. Rich's entire floor has been gutted and rebuilt, removing any reminder of the ancient building's original life as a residence hall. The newly remodeled entryway looks like a law firm (or a hotel lobby) with dark woods, molded cornices, and Queen Anne accent tables topped with silky green plants.

After asking how I am, about my family, and where I am in my doctoral studies, Rich is excited to tell me about the new strategic plan, knowing that I am interested in organizational change. He hands me a glossy, full color booklet just slightly bigger than my hand. "Hot off the presses!" he says. He tells me about announcing the initiative, the nine months of preparation that followed, a cross departmental project team, feedback sessions, a trip to Disney's corporate institute, two-day retreats, and how the resulting plan will guide decisions and resource allocation for the next three years.

It is an impressive document, adorned in the school colors and peppered with photos of locks, keys, and half assembled puzzles. It is instructive, if not inspiring, outlining principles like "One Housing" and "Seek Excellence," as well as values of "inclusiveness," "fairness and equity," and "responsible stewardship of resources." The plan is divided into five strategic priorities and each is defined on a dedicated

He returned to the same desolate area, but what he saw amazed him. It was difficult to find the old man's small home because the once-barren area had become a beautiful oak forest.

“And the point of the story,” Mac goes on, in case I hadn’t caught it, “is that it’s the acorn planter who kept planting one at a time and eventually he had a forest. But he didn’t import all the trees and dig holes and—” he makes destructive crashing noises, clawing the air with his hands. “And the more that I’ve been here, the more I’ve seen that take place.

“So, it’s just kind of movement here, a little bit here, and a little bit here. And it’s starting to show up! Especially among the Assistant Directors and the staff where I have more contact and where we talk more, where it seems like there’s less of a—what would you call it—a chip on their shoulders. They have access to a lot of information. They feel a lot of discretion. Some of the other staff—I haven’t figured out how to get them to a point where they don’t have that kind of ‘poor me’ kind of feeling to them. But you know, it could just be that it takes longer for the ripple effect to get there. So, I’m noticing trees

page in a neat sentence followed by a string of appropriate goals.

We talk change, about new campus leadership, and about his passion, baseball. Our time together goes quickly and, as we are saying good-bye outside his office door, I cannot help but notice the enormous decorative wooden door frame that marks the entrance to his office. It is especially obvious, juxtaposed against the narrow metal frame on the door to his assistant’s office, just inches away. A quick scan of the other offices and it is clear the elaborate entryway is meant to denote the director’s doorway.

“Rich!! What is this?” I ask incredulously, gesturing to both doors, “It looks like the entrance to Tutankhamun’s tomb!” I pantomime adjusting a pith helmet and grasp the frame dramatically. “Quickly men! Call Lord Carnarvon. This may only be the antechamber, but I’m sure the boy-king’s sarcophagus is in here somewhere!”

Rich doubles over with laughter, struggling to catch his breath. “That was Jean’s idea!” he insists, naming the campus’ interior designer. “You know how she is!”

“Come on, someone had to sign off on that, Rich!” I admonish him, before heading down to where my office used to be. An interesting pattern becomes apparent as I make my way down the hall. Senior staff members’ offices have coordinated executive furniture in rich leathers, dark wood and plush sage-colored carpet. Others have laminated sectional desks set atop oatmeal colored berber carpet.

I surprise a colleague I haven’t seen in over a year. She invites me into her berber-carpeted office, shut-

growing. We don't have a forest by any means, but I'm seeing stuff come out of the ground."

* * *

"Would you want to work here?" Amanda asks me at the conclusion of a Hall Director focus group near the end of my year collecting data with Residence Life. I have always closed interviews by offering to answer questions about my study, but this is the first time anyone had seized the opportunity.

Amanda, who has been with the department for two years, has tucked her dark hair behind one ear and folded her pale hands patiently on the edge of the dark, wooden conference table in front of her, waiting, eyebrows raised.

"That's interesting," I begin, taking a deep breath to reply to what should be an easy question, but I am cut off by thousands of unexpected things flashing through my head. In an instant, jumbled snippets of how and why I got into the field, experiences from ten years at four different institutions, and the process of deciding to leave housing and residence life to pursue a Ph.D. crackle across my synapses. Nanoseconds pass and, for all I appreciate about the positive things happening in the organization, something keeps me from saying "yes" whole-heartedly.

Just as I am recognizing it will be important not to pause too long before answering, I already have and the table erupts in laughter, both genuine and a bit uncomfortable. What individual meaning have each of the Hall Directors made of my hesitation? Still trying to process what just happened in my head, I stutter, trying to

ting the door carefully and tells me about the struggles she has had recently, feeling like her voice is no longer valued in the department and how decisions are being made without thinking about long-term ramifications.

She notices the small strategic plan booklet in my hand. "From Rich," I explain.

"Yeah, I got a copy too. And I know just where to file it." She hooks her toe into the handle of her bottom desk drawer, pulling it all the way open so it tips forward and I can see the small booklet tucked in the very back corner. Certain that I've seen it, she shoves the drawer shut with a satisfied *smack*. ■

coalesce my puddles of thoughts into a stream of something meaningful but all the tributaries seem too complex or self-indulgent. To share everything running through my head would turn the focus onto me. I sense Amanda's inquiry is really more about the organization than about my own experience. I will have to process my personal reaction later, perhaps on my commute home, when I am alone. Eventually, what comes out sounds like a bad break up line. "It's not you, it's me," I say, trying to explain my hesitation, "My plan is to teach when I'm finished, not go back into housing. But I think the department here is on the cusp of something happening, of really moving towards something."

It is the truth and it is enough. Amanda unlaces her long fingers, smooths her hair, and moves on to another question.

* * *

It is a warm Wednesday afternoon in late September and Mac and I are on our way to get coffee at a local chain for one of our monthly meetings. The sun is bright in a cloudless, cerulean sky but the breeze smells of leaves about to turn, promising cooler days ahead. Soon the students swirling past us by foot and bike and skateboard will trade their summer t-shirts, shorts, and plastic flip-flops for fleece vests, Greek-lettered sweatshirts, and other fashions better suited to fall in the Western United States.

We are making small talk as we head to my car, not about the weather or sports or current events, but about the epistemological and theoretical frameworks of the inquiry I am beginning. I have known Mac for four years, and our research chit-chat is a reminder of his former life as a faculty member in my doctoral program, a position he left to take the Director of Residence Life job here three years ago. An extrovert, he has the heart of a practitioner who enjoys working in community with colleagues and believes in the

potential the field of student affairs has to make a difference in the lives of others. He is naturally positive, connecting to those around him in genuine and unobtrusive ways. I have never been in a public space with him where he has not introduced me to everyone near by, from the custodial staff in the union to each individual in the Dean of Students Office.

Mac also has the head of an academician, craving ideas and theories, and reveling in the puzzle of applying them to real world settings. He devours input, creating a sizable pool of concepts he draws on regularly to make meaning of situations or to problem-solve, often connecting information that might initially seem disparate to others. It is not uncommon for him to rise during our dialogues in his office to illustrate a thought with a diagram on his whiteboard or to pause our conversation so he can jot down the author of a resource I have mentioned. So the opportunity to discuss research, even on this short walk to the car, does not pass unheeded.

I tell Mac about the caution one of my committee members shared during my proposal defense. Given the way I have chosen to approach the study, I need to be particularly vigilant about how my career in housing and residence life and indoctrination into that culture might keep me from seeing things important to my study.

“I’m keeping a research journal to help with that,” I say, unlocking the car by pressing the tiny button on my keyless entry remote. The doors unlatch with a satisfying clack. Sun-warmed air bursts from the car and I step back to let more escape before getting in. “I’m also talking with colleagues outside the field. But if you notice me being trapped by my background or think I’m missing something from your perspective, please tell me.”

Mac laughs, swings his messenger bag from his shoulder and puts it in the back seat of my car before opening the passenger door. He pauses, blue eyes squinting in the afternoon glare, to clip tinted lenses to his glasses. “Well you may be *from* housing and residence life, but you aren’t *of* housing and residence life!” He folds his lanky frame into the front seat, still chuckling.

I laugh with him and turn the key in the ignition. I know he means it as a compliment, reassuring me of my ability to be successful in my chosen research paradigm, but there is an uncomfortable and strangely familiar tightness in the center of my sternum for a reason I cannot immediately place. Focused on driving and intent on making the most of the time we have together, I transition us into a conversation about what has been happening in the department since my last visit and try unsuccessfully to push the lingering feeling away.

* * *

After a day at the University, I often drive home in bumper-to-bumper traffic, inching its way through the city streets and winding out onto the interstate. I’m not particularly fond of driving, but I have learned to value the ninety-minute commute as precious time to listen to recorded interviews through my car stereo or reflect on what has transpired during my weekly visits.

Today, the car behind me honks as I brake to create space for an old, boxy, white Volvo wagon to swing out of a Target parking lot into our lane of cars, all creeping slowly through the recently turned, green light. The driver of the Volvo, a young, goateed man in his twenties grins and raises his lean hand, palm open, toward me before pulling out into traffic. I return the smile and gesture over the top of my steering wheel. In the crush of

crawling traffic, sudden signal-less lane changes, and flaring tempers, the brief exchange is like a rush hour *namaste*. “I, the human being in this glass and metal box, acknowledge you, the human being in that glass and metal box. And in this moment, when we both want to get wherever we may be going safely and soundly, we are one.” For a split second, I see and, as a result, am seen. It is a moment of simple pleasure in a stressful drive.

The light turns red before I can pass and, punctuated by a second disgruntled honk from behind me, I watch the wagon’s tail lights disappear down the next block. My thoughts turn, surprisingly, to a week ago, sitting around the conference room table and struggling to answer Amanda’s seemingly simple question. “Would you want to work here?” It has been a topic of reflection I have been meticulously avoiding since then.

If the context was different and the intent of the question really was to know something about me, would I have shared any of the numerous things that flashed through my head? Would I have explained to the group assembled around the table that despite ending up as an Assistant Director of Residence Life at a Big Ten school, all I really wanted to be when I got my master’s in College Student Personnel was a Hall Director? My first position after my graduate degree was at the same mid-sized institution where I had gotten my bachelor’s degree two years earlier. I was responsible for the daily operation of a hall housing 220 first-year women. Though I didn’t know it at the time, a career in housing and residence life was a compromise, a half way point between the pressure (real or imagined) to pursue teaching and any of the other professions I might have chosen.

The hall director role was eclectic and unpredictable, organized around simple tasks such as completing and turning in paperwork as well as more complex and creative

processes like building communities, designing educational programs, or advising students. It was absent the paper grading or class preparation or building politics I had watched both my mother and my aunt, elementary and middle school teachers respectively, navigate for years. It was also filled with teachable moments organized not around didactic reading or arithmetic lessons, but opportunities for connection and meaning making, things I loved most about learning. Moments of simple pleasure where, as with the Volvo driver, a willingness to both see and be seen by a student, inside and out, might help them better see themselves and thus what else they were capable of. And, in those moments, if I were willing to look, I might also glimpse something about myself.

Amanda's question brought up my own issues of connection and disconnection with a field I care about passionately. The question for me was not would I work at her institution specifically, but would I ever return to the field at all. In my experience, alternative or creative approaches to practice are welcomed with open arms in developmental (read "soft") arenas which require educational or social programming, yet often shunned as impractical for the rigorous and pragmatic area of quick-paced, daily operations, evidence of a bifurcated housing and residence life culture that struggles to balance administrative and student development demands. Like the Volvo and driver in rush hour traffic, often it is easier or more practical to focus primarily on the mechanics of the car, rather than deal with the less concrete, messier needs of the driver inside. For example, as a returning hall director who was recognized for having a history of successful student staffs in my buildings, I was invited to sit on a panel during a supervision training session for new hall directors. Amid my colleagues' insistence on the importance of paper trails and confronting misconduct immediately in proper supervision,

my suggestion, in all seriousness, to “find something amazing about each one of your staff members and then love them” was interpreted as me mocking the training process and, midway through, with a growing tightness in my throat and chest, I was asked to step down from the panel and join the audience.

If there had been time after Amanda’s question, I’d have told the group assembled around the table about other times and places as my career advanced (because the field won’t let you be a Hall Director forever), where administration was an end rather than a means; places where external pressures and fear of failure meant we planned the joy out of most of the initiatives we tried, leaving little space for the magical innovation that comes from moments of uncertainty and risk. I would have told them about the mixed emotions I had when a supervisor once told me she would love to “vacation” in my head or a Director of Housing determined to create departmental change charged me with delivering a workshop to his leadership team (my supervisors) teaching them to “think like you do—out of the box.”

However, my experience has been after professional development workshops, *My interest, as researcher, in exploring how people in an organization make meaning of a transformational change process is regardless of who is presenting them, we go on thinking much as we always have. After strategic planning meetings or yearly goal setting retreats, work goes on much as it grounded in more than my own life experience. Competing priorities always has as daily demands usurp the best intentions of annual planning. Issues such and growing pressures from constituents are calling on all arenas of as diversity initiatives may be renamed and recast as multiculturalism, or inclusion, higher education to respond by initiating change. While the issues under scrutiny, such as fiscal responsibility or services provided to students, recur historically, the contexts in which we operate have shifted.* Nevertheless, failure to think differently about ourselves and the context of our work, with regard to multiculturalism or any other number of new or recurring issues in *Change initiated on industrial age norms that view organizations as* the field, changes very little about how we *do* what we do. For our attempts at creating

change to be truly transformational, they must alter the culture of our organizations by changing the assumptions and processes that lay beneath the surface of what we do. To be transformed, we must both *act* and *think* differently.

Similarly, it is my belief that creating sustainable, transformational change is based not in a traditional mechanistic understanding of a step by step management process, but in understanding how we make organizations today can be a call to possibility. When change is viewed as a values-based leadership process, a willingness to be vulnerable and *be seen* may also allow us to *see* opportunities we haven't considered before. This is not the tale of a department in immediate crisis responding to external pressure to change something that is terribly wrong. Rather, it is a story of a good people who face daily organizational challenges daring to ask larger questions about purpose and what's possible, and the meaning they make, separately and together, as they engage in the messy process of creating change.

It's Not a Retreat, It's an Advance

I am the first to admit I am not a morning person, not in the traditional sense. While appearing bright-eyed and alert, early morning hours influence how my brain processes information, creating a sort of sludge that keeps things from moving too quickly. This, coupled with the fact that I am also directionally challenged, is how I am choosing to explain why I am standing outside the engineering complex at 7:45 a.m., when I am supposed to be meeting the Residence Life Leadership Team in the law building for their day-long retreat. I know I am close. I also know myself well enough to have planned a forty-five minute cushion for just this sort of "navigational adjustment."

I turn around to survey the area, hoping for an overt hint as to which of the surrounding buildings is the recently completed law school. (The scales of justice

chiseled into the façade would be helpful.) While I've become familiar with the residence halls over the past semester, the academic buildings are still somewhat of a mystery and I am not dressed appropriately for an exploratory, early February jaunt across campus. My own breath is fogging up my glasses and the tips of my nose and ears are tingling with the chill as I trace my steps back to a more familiar area in hopes of finding where I took a wrong turn.

Even on this uncharacteristically grey morning, it is an unusually beautiful campus, absent the architectural hodgepodge of most other large institutions because of a unified design plan initiated in the early 1900s, which rejected the educational norm of English Gothic in favor of a Tuscan influence. The effect is a stunning, integrated use of regional materials in every edifice, whether an administrative office or a classroom building. As a result, there are few of the structural clues I often rely on to get a sense of a campus. The buildings give up scant secrets about the University's response to the national campus housing boom of the 1950s and 1960s (usually evidenced by cube-like, cement structures with little glass or adornment) or the progression of institutional growth over the decades. Other than size and ornamentation, there is little difference between the new business building under construction in the expanse to my right and the residence hall, three decades its senior, across the street.

The architecture whispers the same message I have heard from many of the staff over the few months I have been visiting. "We're different." A number of critical incidents have also put the university in the national spotlight over the past several years. A student body culture that coalesces around both academics and alcohol, a departmental commitment to social justice, the stress of working in an institutional climate of crisis

with a high need-to-know administration, the development of an institution-wide ten-year Residential Campus plan designed to transform the educational experience of students, and constant change within the Housing division all have been offered up as examples of deviations from real or imagined national norms. Each has also been cited at various times as both evidence of professional acumen or explanation of organizational challenges.

I pass Campus Security and, after a quick stop, am armed with a map marked with a black-Sharpie line leading me over a hill and directly to the law school. In the large capital letters of a Romanesque font, the name of the building is carved into the monolithic limestone above the double doors. While architecturally indistinguishable from other campus structures on the outside, inside the building is awash with track lighting, illuminating rich maple furniture with sleek modern lines, earth-toned carpets and walls, and coordinated upholstered couches set in carefully orchestrated conversational arrangements. The whole place smells like a new car. Even at this early hour, well-coiffed, suited people are zipping busily about, and I cannot tell if it is regular attire for the building or the result of a special event. I feel a little under dressed.

The centerpiece of the structure, figuratively and literally, is the dark slate staircase, that drops through all four stories down the center of the building like an enormous grey tongue. The ascent is lit by skylights and marked by wider landings between flights that open at both ends to provide access to the floors. Even with the detour, I am still the first person here and settle onto a bench built along the wall outside room 303 to jot down a few notes in my journal before the Residence Life staff arrive.

Namita is the first to appear, carrying coffee and a bagel from a shop across the street. One of five Area Coordinators, she joined the AC team just this past fall along

with Lizbeth who is also new. The three other current ACs, Sarah, Dana, and Jason, were hired when the position was created three years ago to provide judicial support to Hall Directors, whose high conduct loads left little time for attention to other things. (Since that time, the AC position has evolved to focus on larger supervision and management issues, and Judicial Assistants have been hired to assist Hall Directors with judicial administration.) Sarah, Jason, and Dana each had been Hall Directors here for at least three years prior to assuming their current roles, where an internal search promoted them over their peers. While most of those who were passed over have left, there are lingering hints of the tension it created as ACs grapple with larger questions about establishing their place and purpose in the organization.

Namita greets me, smiling brightly (she must be a morning person), and sits down on the bench, tucking one leg underneath the other so she can face me, and setting her breakfast between us to add cream and sugar to her coffee and slice her bagel in half. She is dressed in jeans, a sweater, and an all-weather jacket, and I relax a bit about my own attire.

Gathered in a small, windowless conference room, the Area Coordinators, sans Namita who is on an extended trip visiting family, have been discussing the dynamics of their group and how they fit within the larger structure of the department. Their comfort with and respect for each other is obvious, as they nod in encouragement or turn to listen to one another over the course of our ninety minute focus group together.

"I think another thing that's changed compared to the previous two years, because it was a new position, is that I don't think we felt like we had very much authority as a group to make decisions and to take projects and implement them." Sarah inhales, pausing for a moment to choose her words, while her colleagues wait patiently. "And it's not so much about our individual confidence, but our confidence as a group, as a peer group. And I feel like we're pretty confident now making a decision and going back to the Assistant Directors and Mac and saying 'We made a decision.' Versus, in the past we probably would have said, 'We're kind of thinking that a decision needs to be made. How should we make that decision?'"

Noises of agreement circle the table. It is a philosophy shift for the department they say, initiated by Mac. Responsibility for decision-making should happen at the level of impact. Sarah goes on to offer an example, "Hall Directors supervise Resident Assistants, so then they should really have the majority of the responsibility for RA selection and training. And because we supervise Hall Directors, we're responsible for Hall Director

“So how are you? How is it going?” she asks.

“Good, good.” I say, moving my things to make room for her, “I got lost this morning, but I’m here now, so it’s all good. How about you?”

“It’s been a very busy week!” She talks briefly about crises and administrative responsibilities, licks cream cheese from her fingers, and then shifts to talk about my dissertation. “Are you finding anything interesting since we talked?”

“Well, there’s a lot going on here. When you’re doing research, it’s all interesting!” I say, laughing. I realize I am not awake enough to talk research at this hour, let alone collect data, and consciously try to focus my attention in preparation for the day.

“I wanted to tell you,” she pauses to snap the lid back on her now cream-colored coffee, “I’m very interested in your topic. It’s so good to do organizational studies in higher education. We don’t look at ourselves like that too often, especially student affairs.”

Namita’s path into the field is slightly different than most professionals. Instead of a

Training. Where, in the past, I think those things were much more centralized.”

Moments later, the conversation shifts just slightly to how the AC team is viewed within the department. Jason, who has been relatively quiet up to this point, leans forward to grab the edge of the table with both hands, pulling himself physically into the conversation. He examines his fingers momentarily before beginning.

“When the three of us were hired as Area Coordinators in an internal search, it set up a dynamic with the Hall Director staff that weren’t hired. Since I’ve been in this position, I’ve struggled with feeling trusted and competent in terms of how I’m viewed by the Hall Director team.” He releases his hold on the table, in favor of resting his wrists on its edge and cupping one hand inside the other. “And I think it has declined in some ways, but I think it’s still prevalent. I worry about that, particularly with the culture that’s sort of just trickled down with returners, especially. I think new people have heard that message and you can’t help, I think, but be infected by that sort of talk.”

Jason shares a recent story, where a group of current Hall Directors did not trust their feedback about a candidate was taken into account when ACs made a hiring decision. “They think because this person was still hired, how could we have possibly heard their voice.” He shakes his head, ever so slightly, as if he cannot quite make sense of the conclusions Hall Directors have drawn.

Across the table from Jason, Sarah nods, her blonde-brown hair dropping momentarily into her

master's degree in college student development or university administration or counseling, all standard preparatory programs in the field, she has a master's of business administration. Her background gives her a unique perspective in the department and

"Now I heard—and this may not be true—you have an MBA?"

"Yes I do!" Namita responds excitedly, though I cannot tell if it is enthusiasm for her degree, or excitement because I have unearthed this fact elsewhere in the department before coming to meet with her. She goes on to tell the story of how she worked as a graduate assistant hall director while she was getting her master's degree in the Midwest. The experience lured her away from the "pure corporate environment" she had planned to enter after graduation and she shares how valuable her business background has been in housing.

We are in her office, which is tucked at the end of a short maze of narrow hallways in the center of one of the older residence halls on campus. The furniture we are sitting on, a love seat and chair positioned on either side of the entrance door, is mismatched. Upholstered in two different repeating blue patterns, it looks like lounge furnishings from the 1990s and I would not be surprised to find out it had been recycled as office décor at some point when student space had been remodeled. To fit everything into the small space, each chair or desk or cabinet has been squared off against a wall, leaving a walkway in the center

she is correct.

Compared to the

organizational

change literature

in business, there

are relatively few

empirical studies

of change in

higher education

institutions

and even fewer

specifically in

student affairs.

"Mac is

a great leader,"

Namita goes on,

brushing bagel

crumbs from her pants. By her tone she doesn't use

face. "Which is not the case, actually. The feedback was highly considered, but we still came to this decision. So I'm wondering what as an organization or what about me as a supervisor has not helped create the ability for this person to say 'Okay, I'm going to withhold judgment until I can get a little bit more information.' Sometimes I feel like the Hall Directors don't have a sense of empathy about our jobs. I think my Hall Directors have empathy and they believe I work hard and think I'm a good supervisor, but they don't have empathy for the ACs as a group in terms of understanding when we make decisions, we don't make them flippantly. We really have a strong sense of responsibility to them and we take that into account in all the decisions that we make."

"And I haven't forgotten that I walked in those shoes," Dana adds passionately. Located to Sarah's right at the head of the table, she has been sitting with her knees curled up in her chair, and drops her feet to the floor to come fully to the conversation. "And I know things change and all of that, and how they say 'Oh, when you become, then you forget,' and I really feel like I haven't forgot. And that is why it was so important for me to be in this position. I have not forgotten. I didn't just take this position to say 'Ha ha! Now I'm on top and you can screw it!'" The group laughs, as much at the statement as the snarling face and cranky voice Dana has adopted to say it, shaking her fist dramatically in the air. "You know? No. I wanted to better the organization and advocate for you because I understand it, I get it." ■

of the room. The precision of the space reminds me of Namita as she speaks, lining up words carefully and efficiently to get her point across.

"I come from a very different perspective where you get things done, you make good decisions, and there's not as many feelings involved." She has crossed her legs and laid her hands in her lap, while she talks about her experience at the three institutions where she has worked. "I've had conflicts in the sense of I've been in situations where I thought, 'I don't know if I'm in the right field, you know? Because traditionally, in the schools I've worked in and even here sometimes, there's a lot of feelings involved. That's very student affairs. I'm trying to get the right word. It's grey! Nothing is black and white." Despite any past doubts about her career choices though, she says this institution is a good fit for her. The Hall Directors she supervises agree. Amanda says Namita is the best supervisor she has ever had, because she feels supported in her work and Namita intentionally focuses on professional development.

She shares how, despite a rather deep organizational chart, she appreciates that the department is really not very hierarchical, as she has access and autonomy to whoever and whatever she needs. She goes on to deconstruct how the "logic systems" that dictate how information flows within the organizational chart are necessary in a large department, as details are discussed and dispersed at each level and how impractical going to directly to the source could be. "If you go to one per-

"great" lightly, as the arbitrary adjective we often seem to pepper into conversation for emphasis. She means it. "He's trying different things. He's very good."

Just as I am about to ask her what it is that makes him "great" Mac rounds the corner carrying a bright gold bag from the campus bookstore, stretched square by its contents. It is 8:30 a.m., the scheduled start time for the retreat. He stops to say hello to Namita and me, and, after small pleasantries, I tease him that he looks like he just came from buying shoes at the mall.

"No," he says excitedly, opening the bag so I can see the black jackets of the tomes stacked inside, "these are books! Ten copies of Henry Cloud's *Integrity*. We're going to read it and discuss it as a Leadership Team."

I have read the book, which frames integrity as a lifestyle choice, in a leadership class. "That's a good one," I say, hoping he will say more about his selection, but behind him, Sarah, Jason, and David, an Assistant Director, arrive in a what seems like a

son to find out information about a program or system, it's not just one person going to one person. There could be 25 or 30 people going to this person and that's really demanding. In the long run, it could really affect this person's workload—you are increasing their workload! You are frustrating this person, and also the other people in the loop are not going to learn the program or system in any way."

Personnel issues are another area where Namita sees differences between what her business background has instilled in her and how the field of student affairs approaches situations. A hall director's emotional insistence at a meeting earlier this year that she didn't feel valued has led to a series of department-wide dialogues on the topic.

"If someone says, 'I don't feel valued,' I would pull the person aside and ask, 'Well, what do you mean by that? Can you explain to me?' Because 'value' is a very hard word to define, you can't really quantify it. It's very intrinsic. I feel very valued in this department. One of the reasons is, for me, I did not feel this much value at other schools, so I have a standard—" She is interrupted by the ringing of the "duty phone." She is on-call for the week and excuses herself to turn away from me in her chair and speak into the phone in a hushed voice. The conversation is brief, more a question than a crisis, and then she is back, picking up her sentence exactly where she left off, "—to compare it to. It's very hard when you get into those 'value' and 'trust' kind of things. It's very difficult to have those kinds of conversations because you're not going to be able

flurry in the austere surroundings and, with waves and greetings from our contingent, head directly into room 303. Namita excuses herself to follow them in and I am left alone with Mac.

"I'm glad you could be here. I—" His thought is interrupted by the ring of his cell phone, which he pulls by rote from his belt. "Just a minute. I'm trying to arrange a flight." He nods after checking the caller ID indicating it is the call he anticipated, and steps away to converse in private. Moments later he is back, encouraging me, as a participant observer, to feel free to comment at any time during the retreat. He has not been directly involved in planning the day's agenda, but has been asked to facilitate a discussion on the department's vision and mission, an activity that has been slated for the afternoon.

Inside the room, a small, slow motion riot has ensued, belying any sense of relaxation or withdrawal the term "retreat" might imply. Half the ten-member Leadership Team are here and each are busy with various activities, engaging and disengaging with each other or the technology

to—well, it's a very philosophical conversation and there is no actual end to it. And I have a hard time, because there is no solution to the problem we are discussing because it's more, 'Let's talk, let's talk, let's talk!'"

Namita becomes more animated as she continues, "If you are complaining about the job, if you are complaining about the position, it's time for you to go. So that's my perspective, and I think in the discussion, people found my comment too quick at the time. It was a really strong statement. Because what I'm saying to anyone who is complaining is, it's time for you to leave. Complaining without a solution or just being negative about it. Because I feel like, when you are negative, it's actually very contagious. You know, negative and positive emotions are both contagious. It's proven! So instead of sending all your negativity to everyone in the group, if you are really not happy here, maybe this is not the right place for you."

Namita has inched her way to the edge of her seat while she was talking and takes a moment to sit back definitively. "I mean, I didn't really sugar coat it, because I don't think I know how to do that." ■

surrounding them as needed. Jason is at the audio/visual console in the front corner of the room, cuing up a DVD. Snippets of sound, voices and music are spurting through the room's speaker as he searches for the exact spot. He pauses to answer questions from Namita, who is on the floor, wired into the system and searching for something online that will need to be projected later in the day onto the large screen pulled down over a white board at the head of the room. David has flipped open his own computer and is busy checking email, pausing periodically to discuss a student conduct issue with Jason. At 8:45 a.m., Tracy, another Assistant Director, joins the group and (between checks of her handheld device) the conversation about conduct. "I don't think administrative restriction is designed for this," she shares, offering her perspective about an appropriate

sanction for the situation they are discussing, which will ban the student from a particular residence hall.

"Are we waiting, or should we get started?" Sarah asks, "I have an opening activity." She has been waiting patiently, the materials laid on the table in front of her. Mac's phone rings again and he is out the door to take care of an issue, pausing any discussion of beginning. David has closed his computer and I use the moment to ask him

about the department retreats that happen each semester and the term “advance” I have heard in reference to today. He laughs his easy laugh, “Oh yeah. Why do we call it a ‘retreat’ when we don’t want to be moving backwards? It’s an advance. We’re supposed to be moving forward.” He shares, however, most do still refer to the events as “retreats.”

Mac returns and Sarah asks again, “Should we get started. I don’t know who we’re expecting.” Mac runs through the roster on his fingers. Two of the Assistant Directors aren’t here yet. One, Barbara, will come after her budget meeting is over and the second, Angela, is out for the day. Dana, one of two missing ACs, is out of the office today as well, but Lizbeth is not accounted for, so Sarah slips out of the room to call her.

Mac’s phone rings again prompting his exit. There is a brief lull in the activity as we wait. It is nearly 9:00 a.m. and the sun has broken through the clouds, bathing the room in light. The circular birch table is trimmed in a darker maple, matching the overall building décor and, like a pie with the middle scooped out, is open in the center and segmented into five narrow, curving pieces. The Arthurian table is apt, both as a reflection of the retreat design, planned through the shared leadership of the ACs who will each facilitate a section during the day, as well as the expectation of equal participation from the group sitting around it. Echoing the bend of the table, the room’s single arched window frames the view north across campus where slanted campus rooftops stretch into the distance like a small European village. When my gaze swings back into the room, Sarah has returned and Lizbeth, as if by magic, has appeared, though the empty chairs are still a reminder that the group is not complete.

“Have we decided what to do?” Mac asks, slipping through the door and snapping his phone

“Hi, I’m Lizbeth. I’m an Area Coordinator.” The tall, pale-blond woman has marched up the stairs from the floor of the auditorium to where I am sitting in the last row to introduce herself with a

back into its belt clip. He did not play a role in planning the retreat and seems attentive to the group dynamic and process, seeking consensus where other positional leaders might be tempted to initiate with a directive to begin.

“Can we get started?” Jason asks, and suddenly the spirit of the room shifts. The underlying frenetic energy falls away as the group focuses its attention on Sarah, who opens the retreat with a team building activity designed to “get everyone in the room.” She is self-deprecating as she distributes five slips of paper to each person and explains the directions, insinuating that although she’s used the activity before, perhaps she has pulled it together quickly this morning. Each slip is printed with staccato sentences in varying fonts telling each of us to “share some joy!”, “write it down for later!”, “make a wish!”, “get it off your chest!”, and “tear it up and throw it away!” Regardless of the preparation time, teambuilding activities like these are a staple in the field (it would be rare to have a retreat without one) and participation is a given. Moments later the room is silent, as every head dips to jot their answers

vigorous handshake and offer me her card. I have been waiting inconspicuously for a Resident Assistant inservice to begin and while I recognize a few of the professional staff members in the room, I have been largely ignored by the stream of undergraduates pouring through the doors. Inservices are on-site, in-house trainings that usually happen several times a year. They are designed to provide further instruction, usually to student staff, beyond the extensive biannual training that happens at the start of each semester. This one is intended to provide returning RAs with some clarification over changes in the philosophy around conduct and confrontation introduced during Fall Training.

“I’ve heard about you,” Lizbeth reports, looking me straight in the eye. I have been visiting the department for just under a month, networking from person to person to gain access to meetings or line up interviews. In all this time, Lizbeth is the first Area Coordinator I have met, though had she not introduced herself, I could have easily mistaken her for a student. We have a brief conversation and then she announces she’d be happy to be a part of my study (I can contact her through the email on her card) and lopes back down the steps to sit with a group of RAs I assume she knows.

A week later we are sitting in a coffeehouse and halfway through an introductory interview, Lizbeth announces, “I think maybe we’ll be friends.” She has been sharing how she got into the field, weaving together stories of her undergraduate experience at a Lutheran college, the influence of her family and growing up in the Midwest, how she chose to come west for

to each question. In a few minutes, we will each take turns sharing our responses with the group. It is 9:05 a.m. and the Leadership Team's 2007 retreat has begun.

* * *

"They magically called themselves that one day, and they've been calling themselves that,"

Kirsten responds when I ask who is a part of the Leadership Team, a term she has used to describe where the vision and direction for the department should come from.

"And after a year, we went, 'Who exactly is the Leadership Team?'" Michael quips, scrunching

While on paper the Leadership Team consists of Mac and the ADs, throughout the department and at all levels I have often heard the ACs included as a part of

"And it also says who the leaders are and this group when referenced, perhaps aren't," adds Cass, getting serious again.

flecting a perception of who is involved The three senior-most Hall Directors in organizational decision-making or how information flows.

have been discussing changes they've seen in the department. The group, who has worked together in the same complex of halls for their three-year tenure with the department, describe themselves as

"family" and "siblings" because of their longevity and connection. Throughout our time

her master's degree, and her first full-time experience at a small liberal arts college in the South before deciding to return west to join the staff here as the youngest of the five Area Coordinators.

Our conversation began an hour ago, with Lizbeth quizzing me curiously about the purpose of the study that has brought me to her campus. Each question I answered led to more questions. "Now, this is for a Ph.D.?" "What are some of your operational definitions? When I wrote my master's paper, I had to have a list of terms, how I was defining things." "What types of change are you looking at?" "So you're interested in more than just structural things?" "How did you choose our institution?" "Are you looking at more than one institution?" "Is it a case study?" "Are you using qualitative analysis?"

She is voracious and engaged in a way I have not encountered with the other staff I have met here so far. And though research classes have trained me to be cautious of her decree, I am inclined to agree. Were our current relationship not mitigated by ethical considerations as researcher and participant, perhaps we might indeed be friends.

I can feel her trying to connect in a way that is genuine rather than fawning, like the sometimes ingratiating game of "six degrees of separation" we often play in the field, measuring new acquaintances by who else they know. Though throughout our conversation, which diverges and converges with Lizbeth's stream of consciousness, I cannot help but feel she is searching for something. ■

together they shift in and out of their own dynamic as if I wasn't in the room, taking turns finishing one another's sentences or lobbing one liners at each other that poke fun at shortcomings or mispronunciations. There is definitely a familiarity and closeness, and it is apparent they are skilled and accomplished professionals who speak with a confidence only experience can bring. They say they have received criticism they are too close and are perceived as leveraging their combined voices in group decision-making settings, though it is clear while they share a dedication to their buildings, their work styles and perspectives often diverge. There is also an undercurrent I can't quite place in their exchanges, like being a guest at someone else's Thanksgiving dinner, when family conversation shifts unexpectedly to more pointed, context-laden dialogue, and you don't know whether to ask for clarification or look away.

“I think just the name ‘Leadership Team’ sort of makes a big divide, you know?”

Like many third year Hall Directors in the profession, with the administrative aspects of their positions under control, Michael, Cass, and Kirsten each make contributions to the department and to the field beyond the scope of their in-hall responsibilities. Cass is an active member of the executive board of a regional association, and has spent time and energy organizing professional development conferences for practitioners from across the state. Her enthusiasm for the organization has gotten other Hall Directors involved, providing leadership and networking opportunities. Michael has started a group on campus for undergraduate students interested in student affairs work that focuses on mentoring them into the field. Kirsten has spent the year working with another Hall Director to draft and refine a proposal to improve the experience of first-year students by creating a more cohesive and integrated orientation. Area Coordinators in the organizational chart and how that dynamic has shifted the flow of communication from the “big team” meetings the department had during her first year to “small area teams,” meaning HDs often get different information or information at different times. “And that’s something that we brought up, you know. They say they want us to run our buildings. They say they want that to happen, and yet look at all the obstacles we have. We have to do everything. There’s a lot that falls on us and there’s a

lot of expectations, but the communication just doesn't always come from up the chain. entation experience when they arrive each fall. While full funding was not available, the program will be piloted in the upcoming academic year and assessed, get the opportunity to interact with people as often, so there is room for interpretation with plans for full implementation in following years. During our conversation as opposed to really trusting. You don't have those connections. Potentially new hall together I cannot help wondering what is keeping each of them in their current directors coming in don't really have the connections with the people here, which I felt roles. In many ways both the challenges and the contributions they are seeking we really had that first year. We had connections everywhere, so it was much easier to seem beyond the scope of the Hall Director position here. trust decisions."

"My first day was July third, so I've been here for a while now. I love it. I'm really, really happy here. I feel like I have a lot of autonomy to make decisions about what I need to do with my students, for example."

Eva is a new Hall Director, recently graduated with her master's degree in Educational Leadership. She is effusive, speaking quickly and enthusiastically about her experiences so far, her blonde head haloed by the afternoon light streaming through her office window behind her. She goes on to share how despite "cut and dry" sanctions in the department's judicial process her supervisor told her to do what she felt was right for a student with a special situation. "It was less about being consistent and more about doing what was right for that individual student. And if someone does question my decisions, they question them because they want to make sure I'm doing what's best for students, and that excites me so much! That wouldn't normally happen at my last institution.

"It's a flat organization and the Leadership Team has an open

The threesome depends heavily on each other, both because of the focus on area work teams and because of their shared experiences with the department. "We eat lunches together, and go hang out outside of work together," Kirsten explains. "It just makes it more fun knowing that Cass and Michael know the exact same history that you do, so they can relate exactly the same way versus people who haven't been here as long. Because we'll all be like, 'Oh, this is *so* frustrating because this is exactly what happened when, blah, blah, blah!' and new people are like," Kirsten's voice rises to a falsetto, and she tilts her head sharply, "'We don't know what you're talking about! It's great!'"

Michael stands up to move from his desk chair to the small couch across from me, speaking

door policy. This *is* a large university though," she concedes, "and so I think that it's sometimes hard for us to do things efficiently because there are so many people in the department. Sometimes there's a lack of communication, but I feel like that's an everyday part of life. I think that's a normal thing we continue to work on. Though I always feel like I have information in a timely manner—and if I don't, I ask for it."

She stops to think for a moment, squaring up a tablet of paper on her meticulously kept desk. Her office is filled with framed photos, small knick-knacks, office toys, and personal notes or cards taped around the room, each thing in its own particular place. Agendas for this evening's staff meeting with her RAs are stacked neatly on the corner of her desk.

"I feel like we're all working towards the same vision, to have it be a really great experience for our students. I don't think we're ever going to agree on *how* we're gonna do it. I think I'm gonna trust the people above me to make those decisions. If they ask for my feedback, that's great. I'll give them my feedback. But I'm going to support whatever decisions the Leadership Team make. So if they say 'We're gonna have 24-hour desks,' then I say, 'Yay, we're gonna have 24-hour desks!'" Eva throws both hands up in the air like a cheerleader, and then stops to laugh at herself, dabbing the corners of her eyes.

She sighs, "We give a lot of feedback, and so I trust that they're going to take it into consideration. 'Cause I've seen them make some decisions in the past that were good decisions, even if it wasn't what I agreed with." ■

as he moves, "One of the first-year Hall Directors said it feels like everything stays the same here, like we do things because it's always been done and that it would be nice to see more change. I have the complete opposite view. I feel like over the past three years things have been changing so much, I wish there was more stability."

"We needed a *huge* culture shift!" Ann is talking candidly about change across the unit after being appointed Executive Director of Housing and Dining six years ago. Tall and angular, she is an imposing figure until she begins to speak, revealing a warmth and immediate authenticity in both her voice and manner. "We had cultural issues within our department, we had student culture issues within the campus. You know, we had the athletic scandal, we had the death of a student from an alcohol hazing event. We had a reputation—and still have a reputation." Sitting in the incandescent light of her office, she is without pretense, assertive yet open, and articulate about the series of sometimes difficult changes the department has been through over the

past five years, most notably with her decision to require Hall Directors to live in their buildings. While live-in staff are a norm in the field, Hall Directors here had lived off campus for the history of the division, putting in 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. work days and focusing on the administration and management of the buildings. Ann's decision to move to a live-in model was rooted in core beliefs about the importance of a staff presence for student development work in a housing context. "There are key values that I stand for as a director. Not every director does, but these are my four." Ann grabs her slender index finger, counting each value off in succession on her hand. "Academic living and learning programs are critical for me. I'm going to fall all over myself to make that happen. Live-in hall directors and staff visibility and presence in the evenings—and late afternoons and weekends and at programs—is a critical piece I'm going to expect. Student health and safety, and finally, freshman living on campus. Those are the things I go to the mat over, and if it's an organization or university that doesn't want those principles, those points of focus, then don't hire me. That's okay."

Ann's voice drops to a reflective undertone when she calls the transition to live-in staff "the most significant, painful issue" she went through with Residence Life. "I'll just tell you my version of the story," she explains. As she begins, though her manner is still confident and direct, I cannot help but feel the process of sharing is a catharsis of sorts. Ann says she saw urgency in the need for the change. "The focus of the work was very much about getting tasks done, but we needed to take the organization from this administrative idea of producing reports, producing widgets, getting keys counted, getting residents checked in and checked out—we had a great foundation, but we needed to go to the next level." The inability of Mac's predecessor, who had a 30-year tenure

in the department, to share that urgency meant timelines were not communicated and conversations that might have better prepared the department by garnering feedback

“What my predecessor created was an extremely efficient organization, or operational excellence culture. She would come in at 7:00 a.m. and leave at midnight, you know. She was the organization in a lot of ways. She embodied the process. And I mean, they just executed like no one else. It’s just beautiful, you know, in a lot of ways.” Mac slouches back in his green plastic patio chair overwhelmed with admiration for a moment. “And for me—because that doesn’t fit my personality as well—to try to maintain operation excellence and then add all this less concrete, developmental approach has been challenging.”

The cafe umbrella over our heads snaps in the breeze as Mac pauses to drink his triple-shot hazelnut latte, sunshine flickering across his face. The academic year has just begun and he is particularly reflective today about his journey so far as Director of Residence Life.

He describes the department he joined two years ago as “heavily siloed.” “They didn’t have a sense of the big thing—like, what are we doing here? It was not a leadership organization, though they did leadership things. It was a doer’s organization, where precision and task management was emphasized over true student development, engaged communities, and engaged professionals. It was still effective. The budget was excellent. People stayed a long time. You know, there were lots of signs of a healthy organization going on. So I came in saying, ‘How do I become this?’ And it didn’t take

about how to best implement the change never happened. Without full rationale for the already controversial decision, Hall Directors had reason to be even more upset when it appeared to be a desultory pronouncement, absent any input from others in the department. Even with a “grace” period while apartments were being built, where returning Hall Directors operated under the live-out job description and new hires were brought in as live-in or live-on staff, the transition left its mark on the culture of the organization.

The shift was the first in a string of rapid succession changes in the organizational chart. Staff who were once Residence Life Coordinator (RLCs), supervising Hall Directors and taking sole responsibility for a functional area of the department, became Assistant Directors of Residence Life (ADs) with a more project-oriented work focus. The Area Coordinator (ACs) role was created to supervise Hall Directors and relieve some of their administrative work load so live-in staff could focus on student

long for me to realize I couldn't do it!" He laughs wholeheartedly, from deep in his stomach.

"My understanding of how an organization can be run was different than what was in place. My idea is much more engaged, organic, empowered, trusting. You know, an 'I don't need to know everything' kind of organization.

"And so I came in going 'Can I really do this?' It's big, you know. It's one big," He holds his hands out wide in front of him, as if wrestling a watermelon from both ends, searching for descriptive words he cannot find, "You know—big!"

"Huge!" I say, both of us laughing at his pantomime.

"And so it took me a semester to realize the activities were no different than what I'd done before, they just have a lot more impact. Twenty people have to implement versus two."

Several moments pass as we both enjoy our coffees and turn to watch the people and traffic passing on the street. The voices of students playing frisbee drift past us from somewhere unseen.

"So what do you think has been the most challenging as you move in this process?" I ask.

"Dealing with the old school folks. The ones that still were wedded to the old way of doing things, because that's the way it's always been. And I've heard that before, I've seen it a little bit before, and read about it a ton, but then to have my—some people who are closest to this role, be the biggest obstacles really taught me that to lead means there could be some

development in the buildings. Then the Director of Residence Life retired and Mac, who had worked with Ann at another institution, transitioned into the role, first as an interim hire and then in a full time capacity.

"Oh, I don't tell Mac enough, all the stuff he's brought to the department. It's his persona, it's his values, his energy as a human being, as a professional, as a scholar. He asks questions, he listens, he brings theory. Most of our administrators could maybe recite a theory here or there, but Mac brings it into our conversations. He can talk theory to practice." She tells a quick story about how the other Directors would teasingly call Mac "The Professor." *Theory to practice is a mantra that runs through most student affairs master's programs.* "But we value that," she says assuringly. "Now, there are days I wish he'd move faster, but I'm glad he's *evoked most commonly with student development, a tenet of the field. Theory is presented as a tool in a professional's toolbox, both as a compass that charts a course by demonstrating intention and providing rationale, and as a crampon, asserting a foot hold and staking claim to student affairs' legitimacy in the you know.*" *erudite environment of higher education.*

She describes what she's observed about Mac's process of leading change. Rather than

pain involved. And eventually those folks cleared out because it was no longer a fit. But that was the hardest thing about this, overcoming the people that kept trying to stick you into a box. *And* also allowing them to do it, because I had to be complicit. My confidence was low.

“The first two years, even up to August of this year, I noticed I was more in this place of ‘What is the job? What am I doing here? What are we trying to accomplish?’ I didn’t have a lot of confidence, so I’d listen more than I’d speak out. And now I just feel like I know where we’re going. I don’t think the rest of my staff is sure, but I have a *much* greater sense.” He smiles widely behind the rim of his cup, tipping it up to drink the last drop of coffee. ■

initiating a step by step procedure, inaugurated with

announcements

of a new direction

and change to

come, he listened

and learned.

“And through

teaching, through

conversation, he

built capacity.

That’s his term,

you know, he talks about building human capacity.

He set up a process of first influencing his next-in-line

reports, who can then influence and develop the ACs,

who can then influence and develop Hall Directors,

who in turn can really influence and change RAs, who

probably will be able to help us change the student

culture—better than any group can!

“I like my organization right now. I feel like,”

Ann hums a melodic note, waving her hand in a

graceful arc as if brandishing a delicate baton, “you

know? Like the conductor of an orchestra. And it’s

not like they really need the prompt,” she laughs,

“I think with Mac, there really is genuine care about the staff and students.” Michael says, getting comfortable on the couches that make up a small conversation area in his office.

“And he’s getting better with decision making,” Cass adds. “I see Mac as somebody who might want to take the time to really think through a decision. We need somebody who can make a decision and tell us how to move forward, because we’re on 150 miles an hour and Mac’s on 75,” she laughs, “but I feel like he’s definitely getting a lot more comfort—”

“Directorish! Yeah...” Kirsten interrupts her.

“Yeah, directorish,” Cass agrees, as they talk over each other.

“...like he was very flighty, I feel, his first year. Just very ‘Let’s talk about theory. Let’s go, happiness and joy!’ And we’re, like, ‘It’s not all happy and bubbly, cookie!’”

“Bubbly cookie?” Michael asks.

Kirsten crinkles her nose and sticks her tongue out at Michael, who ignores her. “He can be very heady and very theory. Nobody else is up here in the clouds with him,” he waves his hand above his head, “and sometimes he recognizes that he needs to bring it down.”

“Now hold on,” Cass stops the conversation for clarification, “I’m speaking for *me*. For some people, theory’s the best thing ever that could happen,” she laughs. “Me, I’m the furthest thing from theory. I’m practical, so I hate it.”

“it’s just making me feel good that I get to give it. I just give a little signal, and I know they’re going to be there.”

What’s the Song Here?: Visions,
Values, and Leadership

“What is going on at a Sweet Honey in the Rock concert is that people are actually losing this kind of facade that we usually have. As adults we’d like to keep our composure, and singing really breaks down that barrier. What happens is, we are developing a sense of community in that moment...”

In room 303 of the law building, we are watching a seventeen minute movie clip, projected on a large screen at the front of the darkened conference room as the second activity of the Leadership Team retreat. Music swells through the surround sound speakers as the voices of *Sweet Honey in the Rock*, a six-woman group that focuses on “great Black music...a capella style, with a political ring,” harmonize on stage in a performance for their audience and for us. The 2005 PBS documentary, *Raise Your Voice* by Stanley Nelson, celebrates the power of song. The clip we are watching highlights

“Anything using your brain, right Cass?” jokes Michael.

“I’m in the middle,” declares Kirsten, “I like theory sometimes. Sometimes I’m like, ‘This is not an appropriate time to be using that. We just need action.’ Come on!”

“Yeah,” Cass agrees, “action. Mac needs to figure that out.”

Laughter erupts between chattering examples of Mac’s theory tangents, and a suggestion that perhaps he is more attentive to not “going off” in those directions recently.

“Have you heard of the book *The Power of Full Engagement?*” Michael asks, his tone dubious. “He had all our staff, all of us, read that.” The book applies principles of athletic coaching and training to the work environment and suggests managing energy is the key to productivity and capacity, rather than traditional approaches of managing time. “So our all-staff meetings are an hour and a half now, because the book says that people can’t concentrate for more than 90 minutes at a time!” He laughs, “But it was funny, because Mac started eating bags full of nuts! Because the book says you’re supposed to snack on high protein foods or whatever. For him it was like, ‘This is what the theory says so if I’m going to be teaching it, I need to be in it.’ Literally, he carried bags of nuts to meetings!”

Laughter breaks out again, and someone compares theory to rainbow sprinkle toppings.

“Yeah, we’ve learned you can’t just say, ‘Hey Mac, can we do this?’ He’ll be like, ‘Yeah, send me a proposal.’ And by ‘proposal’ he means a *proposal*, not like—”

the contributions of *Sweet Honey's* founder, Dr.

Bernice Johnson Reagon, to the Civil Rights

"I got a proposal the other day for a living/learning community and it was *completely* absent of student development theory!" Mac drops his hand on the table with a smack of disbelief.

"There was not one word about how students develop and why this will fit with that. It was just, 'We want to do this thing and it makes sense practically.' And I realized when I was reading it, for the last two years I haven't pushed people to put theory in. So I thought, it's time for me to ask for it and say, 'I'm not approving that until I see how it relates to theory. How does it affect racial identity development? How does it affect community development when you create this? What are you trying to do?'"

"Because these are people—well, some of them have their master's degrees. And I don't feel like they're using them. And we had this debate about the entry level positions, hall directors, do we require a master's or not? And we used to require it, and then last year we thought, for social justice reasons, we'd remove that requirement. It took me a while to realize that part of the reason we're doing that is because all the people—Area Coordinators, Assistant Directors, and the Hall Directors—said, 'Well, we're not using our master's degrees.' And I thought, 'Well, that's because the person who was here before me didn't believe in that kind of thing.' The operational excellence was outstanding, but theory was, well, it was in there, but it wasn't really. So they were no longer

Movement.

Reagon is

credited with

bringing

song to the

Movement, as a

way to connect

protestors from different communities prior to a

march and, more importantly, afterwards when

setbacks, arrests, and brutalities threatened to break

the spirit of their individual and collective resolve.

"There's something primal in the human voice reaching for its full power," Reagon says *Sitting in the alone togetherness of the dark, I am moved by the clip, the music, and the in a sit-down interview, speaking to an unseen opportunity to learn more about Sweet Honey in the Rock. Introduced to me my first year out over to a group.* The film transitions to Dr. Reagon *of graduate school by another Hall Director on speaking between songs to a concert audience about staff, I own several of the group's CDs and admire the murder of activist Harry Moore in 1951 who mired their commitment to social activism, but organized Black voter registration in Florida in the had no idea about their founder's specific role in the Civil Rights Movement.* a result. "We spend a lot of time trying to stay on this

"A paragraph, no."

"Yeah, and if you want it to go through, you throw some theory on."

"Mmm hmm."

"Or at least that's how I would do it."

More laughter, and as the group settles, Michael speaks. "I mean, the thing is, he knows theory so well that he's trying to describe it completely, versus kind of doing theory for dummies. I think it would help a lot of us if he would just say, 'Oh, this is how this is applicable.'" ■

thinking about the theory, it was ‘Well, you do this because it’s right to do that.’ I realized I need to start helping them use their master’s degrees if I believe in that.

“But to me, that gets to the whole point of why theory is important. Because if you *really* understand it, then you can slowly change what shows up—as in behaviors and other things—towards a better outcome. But the less you understand and the more you rely *just* on practice—if you don’t understand the movement of forces behind the practice and you don’t know why you’re doing what you’re doing or why you need to change it when you change it—you’re always going to be reactive.” ■

side of death—like we gonna make it, you know?”

The product of a parochial education, Reagon shakes her head, chuckling with the audience, “When you could really go for broke!” She turns to face the assembled crowd, her colorful robe flowing out behind her, and speaks deliberately, “You gonna die anyway. Make a *difference!*”

Jason, who brought the clip to the retreat, rises from the floor in front of the AV console, stops the DVD, and raises the lighting level. The room is silent. A soft-spoken man with a gentle demeanor, Jason introduced the piece as a documentary that has

“noise” together, and the gentle negotiations of a lot of meaning for him, and now invites the group to comment on what we’ve just seen as he makes his way back to his seat next to Mac. “That was good,” someone says, and there is agreement around the table.

The group is open and thoughtful, comfortably sharing the meaning they each made of the piece. “I like,” begins Mac, “that singing is a way of knowing and presenting truth.” Namita relates the arc of the whole clip and the connection to the Civil Rights Movement to what she learned in school about the fight for freedom that happened in India in the 1940s and the solidarity building techniques they used.

Dana, an AC, greets me at her door, ushering me into her office, her hands filled with flyers and envelopes from checking her mail at the front desk. She is easy going and conversational, her accent giving away her roots even before she tells me about getting both her bachelor’s and master’s degrees at Midwest universities. She has a long history with Residence Life, and I am surprised at her level of frankness as we discuss everything from communication in the department to the decision to change hiring requirements in hopes of recruiting a more diverse Hall Director staff. Her words echo what I have heard throughout the department.

“Well, basically we started having this conversation last year about who we recruit and how we have primarily in the past attracted the same folks. People that look the same, that have had the same

Lizbeth chimes in, “What I was thinking about, is I have made assumptions about the purpose of how do we help students find their voices?” Jason shares that he often struggles with using his own voice to fight injustice, and that he finds Reagon’s directive to make a difference particularly powerful. “The video,” he says, “reminds me the cost is greater not to.” Throughout the exchange, there are words of affirmation and support for each speaker in turn.

The team thanks Jason for bringing in the DVD, and he recommends viewing the entire documentary. There is a lull no one fills immediately, and finally Mac asks, “Is one of us facilitating this retreat or are we all co-facilitating?” “We’re co-facilitating!” Tracy, an AD, replies immediately. Then, with a brief discussion of what activity should come next (no agenda for the retreat has been distributed), the group moves on. Mac rises to distribute the books he has brought and facilitates a short discussion of when to schedule time for discussion in the upcoming months. A fifteen minute break is suggested and cell phones, handhelds, and computers reappear as people check on projects or follow up on issues that cannot wait until the end of the day.

background, that have kind of the same path. And we said, ‘What are we going to do? How are we going to recruit more people of color?’ We spent quite a long time in our supervision meeting discussing how we were going to accomplish it. And I feel like it’s a double edged sword, because the reason that we’re not recruiting quite as many, could it be perhaps that this area or of part of the country looks the way it does and there is no where for people of color to be able to have basic services, basic needs, met? But then we also have the conversation, ‘Okay, is that just kind of an excuse? Is that our way of justifying? So I mean, there are lots of layers to it. I feel like it’s very complex.’ Dana is gesturing, not to illustrate anything in particular, but in gentle syncopation with her words.

“And one of the things we started talking about was how can we provide opportunities for others who haven’t had, maybe, opportunities. Maybe having a bachelor’s was something that was encouraged, but beyond that, they just have not been able to get into the doors that we all have. So we started talking about, could we advertise the position as bachelor’s, encouraging folks to come from the bachelor’s background so that we could help them, maybe, become interested in a master’s track.”

Dana goes on to deconstruct the complexity of the issue, of not having student affairs master’s degree option on campus, of the potential need for bachelor’s level Hall Directors to travel to other universities if they choose to seek a graduate degree, and what that time commitment might be balanced against an already demanding job.

* * *

“I think there’s always just so much going

“The goal of this planning is to help people move to outcomes, and then the outcomes show them where they have to co-create the way they’re going to get to at the outcome.” Mac has met me at a small but boisterous local coffee shop, the hum of people making it necessary to concentrate to hear him well.

Mac seems tired or distracted, his affect flat compared to the energy I usually associate with him. “Then we’ll say, ‘So the outcome is, we want you to reduce alcohol risk in your building. How you do it, I don’t care. I just want you to create a way and let us know the way your going to do it, your plan, with your objectives and how you’re going to know if you’re successful. Give us what you want to do in order to meet this outcome.’ I don’t want it to be too vague. I want it to be commitment to certain values but not proscribing method so strongly so there’s no freedom.”

“Do you think it’s an accurate assumption that people want to create?” I ask.

“I think some people want to create,” he says, “I don’t think some of our most experienced master’s level people do. I think they’re tired of hearing it. I think something’s been done to them. It’s no longer there, the spark is gone.”

“Something’s been done to them? Can you say more about that?”

“When we got them, a lot of people were enthusiastic about being here, and then they got

on in Residence

Life that it’s hard

to wrap your

brain around it

sometimes. I

mean, sometimes

I feel like our

philosophy should

be just to keep

our head above

water!” David laughs an infectious laugh, reaching

across the small table to touch me on the arm as if

physically inviting me in on the joke. “I feel like it’s

such a fast pace here in general, in Residence Life.

I feel like we have our hands in so many different

things and there’s always a crisis du jour that’s

occurring that distracts you from the more intentional

philosophy, vision, mission kinds of things.”

David has been in his position for six years

with a focus on programming and is the only one of

four Assistant Directors who was not a Hall Director

“So for me it’s a social justice issue because we’re recognizing that our Hall Director position has changed and evolved, and that we’re able to provide more support to those we supervise because they’re becoming live-in positions. Really, when you think about it, why is it not valuable to have someone who maybe has a bachelor’s and has some life experience that they could contribute to the team? And I just think a lot different than when I first got into the field, when I felt like it makes it easier for us to supervise someone who has a lot of experience in Residence Life, right? So why is it that I don’t want to do the hard work and try to bring someone aboard who never was encouraged to be an RA, or never was encouraged to go beyond, or didn’t even know what college student personnel was all about. You know, why shouldn’t I be willing to put in that effort?” ■

here and were like, “Oh.” And I think that’s what our program has done to people here. And they’ve come in with questionable skills in terms of being able to create. I think from what I’ve seen from our folks, if they’re creative it’s because of them, not because of the master’s program. The master’s program seems to have taught them a way to think, but not a way to create. You know, here’s this, here’s this, here’s how this works, but it’s not brought them out as a unique professional who supercedes the master’s. It’s like the master’s—they’ve been subdued by it somehow. That’s how I feel. It’s like they learn the science of student development, but not the art.”

Mac sips his ever-present coffee, “So I want real clear outcomes, and room for emergence. You know,” he says, laughing and nodding towards his cup, “room for cream.”■

at the University before joining the Leadership Team.

His office is filled with bright colors that seem like a natural extension of his energy and personality, and it is not difficult to see why his colleagues value him for his relationship skills. Our time together is always chatty and relaxed, and even when I have come to the department to visit someone else, David most often takes time to connect, stepping out of his office to converse while I am waiting for an appointment.

“It’s just hard to fully engage with *all* the initiatives and *all* the programs and *all* the things that people want us to do for students! I guess if I were to say in my own words our philosophy, I would say that

it’s to manage the work, to intentionally create, maintain, implement some programmatic pieces each year that are new and different, and for students to leave here feeling like they had a positive experience living in our halls.

“You know,” David continues, propping his chin on his fist for a moment in a thoughtful pose, “I have never seen so much change in a department—not that I have tons of other experiences, but definitely the speed and amount of change to me is just incredible. It’s good, because I do feel challenged,

“Susan Komives talks about the work of Residence Life is like managing white water.” says Barbara, invoking the name of a leadership scholar in student affairs. “So we’re in white water constantly, churning things, things are changing, the environment is changing, students are changing, and we have to adapt to it constantly.”

Barbara’s office is surprisingly spartan for an AD who has a 20 year history with the department, with just a few eclectic but carefully chosen personal items on her desk and shelves. If you ask, she has a story for each of them, her face lighting up as she tells you about the special student who

but sometimes I just want to say slow down!” David gestures as if stopping traffic with both hands in an emergency. “Always, to some degree, it feels a little chaotic here, you know what I mean? I feel like we’re in a position of being reactionary to a lot of things. And I always think, ‘Okay, *next year* we’re going to be organized and ready!’”

* * *

Lizbeth is busy moving an enormous pile of books to clear a chair and make room for me in her

“It took me a while to figure it out, but my role is to advance Residence Life’s agenda on campus.” Mac is cleaning his glasses with a green microfiber cloth as he speaks. “Not necessarily politically—although sometimes that’s involved—but to make for the best advantage for our resident students and our staff. So they can get the most out of their experience.” He replaces his glasses, pausing to think while he folds the cloth and tucks it in his pocket.

“Though, when I have to defend the territory it’s mostly because people lack knowledge about how Res Life works, not because they intentionally want to come in and challenge us. It’s my job to protect what’s really essential for students and then get rid of the stuff that’s in the way. And that’s how I see myself. And then advancing the vision—figuring it out and advancing the vision as it emerges, and that’s where I feel I’m doing that now.” ■

office, stacking

paperbacks and

hardcovers into a

precarious tower

on the corner

of her desk. We have exchanged greetings and small

pleasantries, chatting briefly about busy lives when

she transitions seamlessly and unprompted into talking

about her work and her role, pausing only to make sure

I’ve had time to start my digital recorder.

“For the past four years, through grad school and my last position, I’ve worked really hard, from my perspective, worked all the time. And so this

gave her a small stuffed animal or why a certain photo has a place of prominence. She has coordinated leadership programs in the department for much of her career, and her passion for students and advising is obvious.

“I like to use this illustration,” she goes on, spreading her arms out as if measuring the size of an enormous fish. “Everybody wants to tell Residence Life what to do. And we have to say ‘No, this is who we are.’” Barbara shakes her still expanded arms indicating the space within. “And we have to know what this is,” another shake, “but I don’t think we know what this is right now. And I think because of that, we’ve been all the way in everything. We’ve become the can-do people on campus and when administration wants to get things done, often res life people are involved.” She drops her hands back into her lap.

“But it’s getting easier to say ‘no’—and that’s Mac’s leadership. And I don’t think that’s something that people see.” ■

year, I feel like my role as an AC is a lot more professional in the sense of being more administrative—because it’s a step away from students—where I can work during the week and then really have a life, you know, and get more than three hours of sleep a night.”

“But you know,” Lizbeth tilts her head to the side, touching her chin with her index finger as she is silent for a split second, thinking, “I don’t feel this is a role where I’m going to be passionate or most effective for a long period of time. It’s good to be in my role, where I’m this in-between person, feeling all the tension, but it’s also a little draining, you know.” She sighs deeply, the light in her eyes flickers momentarily before she continues with her usual energy. “So it’s been a good experience for me to figure that out. I kind of knew that deep down inside already, but it’s just—it’s enlightening, you know?”

In the last two weekends Lizbeth has been on a canyoneering trip in Escalante, Utah, and at an Association of Experiential Education conference in Minneapolis (an event she learned about at the last minute in an online class she was taking through a student affairs professional organization, booking a flight the morning the conference started and

“Well, I don’t know if the decision was well thought out.” Mac’s voice is crackling through my cell phone. Near blizzard conditions have kept me from traveling to campus. He has left work early and is driving the short commute home in weather he assures me is not yet an issue. Our signal has been interrupted several times, prompting reenactments of popular wireless commercials as we each ask “Can you hear me now?”

“In the meeting itself, the ACs and ADs were convinced that reducing the requirements for the Hall Director position would bring more diversity. And I said, ‘I don’t believe it. I don’t think it’s true. I don’t want to do it. But if you all are all committed to it, I’m willing to try it and see what we get. And really, to a person, they seemed extremely convinced that that was the thing they needed to do. They didn’t believe me.’ He pauses momentarily, perhaps to change lanes or concentrate on driving.

“I thought we could recruit rather than lowering our standard and creating a class system within our organization.” He tells a quick side story about sharing the situation with a faculty member from his doctoral program after the decision had been made and search materials sent out and her similar assessment of the dynamic the choice could create. “And I trust her judgement on that because that’s where her area of research is.

“And see, so, I’m struggling between empowerment and going

leaving that evening). “So I just got all these and,” Lizbeth announces, pulling a specific book from the middle of the stack, “this one was from a three hour presentation the last afternoon. *Soulcraft*,” she says, reading the title from the cover, “was what the session was all about.” Written by a psychologist, it describes a nature-based program that draws on ancient traditions to restore ceremony and initiation ritual to personal growth psychology.

“And in my life, I see so many connections right now. A couple of Saturdays, maybe a month ago, I went to this presentation at a Buddhist center; but it wasn’t Buddhist related, it was just a spirituality talk, not any specific religion. And the main message was, why is it that all of us have this belovedness or preciousness within us, like our soul, this goodness inside of us, but we hesitate to totally let our light shine and give all that love to people? Why is that? So anyway, the presentation at the conference was totally related to that. And this book,” she holds up text, so I can see the title written in a scripty font across a full-page nature photograph, “is a great connection, because this picture is Escalante, which, you know, is

with my own judgement on things. In the case of the Hall Director position, I decided to go with what they wanted. They wanted to do that for the AC position as well, and I said ‘No, we’re keeping it at master’s and we’re going to do recruiting.’ So I drew the line there, because it’s too simplistic an analysis of what’s really going on. They are more practical and I think it’s more complex than that.”

“Well,” I reply, “creating a culture that will attract what you’re looking for probably doesn’t feel like as quick a fix as ‘Let’s recruit bachelor’s!’”

“Exactly. And it felt like this sense of urgency, because when I said ‘I don’t think we’re ready to do this yet,’ they were getting angry, like impatient angry. ‘Well, we’ve got to do something.’ ‘Well,’ I thought, ‘this is not based on any research I’ve seen, but we’ll do it. Let’s run with it and see what we get.’”

Our conversation meanders, eventually coming back to the topic in relationship to systems thinking and unintended consequences.

“Well, it’s like the bachelor’s decision,” I say as an example, “As we solve a problem, what other problems are we creating?”

“Yeah, exactly. And they didn’t think that way and I didn’t bring it up enough. And I’m not so sure I would have prevented the change if I could have—well, I could have. I think we need to go through it and then say, ‘Okay, has this added value?’ And I think it has, I just don’t know if we did it the right way. Because, you know, I could have come in and said, ‘Look—you know, because one of the things that pissed me off that I didn’t tell anyone, was that I was angry when they said

the canyon where I was two weeks ago. There are so many connections in my life. It's awesome!"

A natural processor, Lizbeth reflects reflexively, making connections between experiences others might miss or avoid. It is rare for me to ask an initiating question during our times together. In fact, I ask few questions at all as she shares what is happening in her life and what that means for her in the context of work. Lizbeth makes meaning like the rest of us make carbon dioxide.

"But that has nothing to do with what I was trying to say," she goes on, talking about her transition to the university and the AC role, "I'm still trying to navigate through everything. And in my meetings with David, my supervisor—who I totally love, we have a great relationship—we're just always focused on putting out the fires and all the issues, instead of talking about what's going on with our department and who we are or what our focus is or what our goals are.

"So my point is that there is so much really important stuff in Residence Life that I feel like a lot of my meetings with people who supervise me, and also people who I supervise, end up being about those hot topic issues instead of about making meaning.

'You don't need a master's degree to do this job as a Hall Director.' " Perhaps it is the stress of the drive home, or the weather, or any number of other factors beyond what we are discussing, but there is a frustration in Mac's voice I have not heard before.

"Part of why it made me angry was, I said, 'That's because you've designed it that way!' They undervalued the master's degree, so they didn't set it up where they could use them—so they all felt like they were wasting their master's degree! Because I could have come in and said, 'No, I want you to make it so someone *has* to have a master's degree to do this job well.'" He is speaking quickly as he rattles off his list, "So we're going to have developmental matrices *and* you have to show how your programs in each building are reaching five developmental outcomes from five different developmental theories. You have to show its impact on women and men and students of color *and* you have to assess that in a measurable way both qualitatively and quantitatively. And I want you to write a summary paper that adds on to our knowledge of our students and ourselves at the end of each year. And we're going to put those forward for publication. Now do you need a master's?"

He laughs and as quickly as it came the mood is gone. ■

And that’s hard for me because I’m such a meaning making person naturally. When we were talking about having the retreat, I think it was my voice that was like—and I think I’ve been saying this all along—I don’t understand what the priorities of our department are. I think a lot of the people I work with don’t. So I’m just happy that we carved out that much retreat time for us to talk about that.”

* * *

“My goals in life are to help others grow spiritually the most possible, and in turn to grow myself the most I can spiritually.” Mac sits up straight, from the very base of his spine, and squares the shoulders of his jewel-toned purple, button down shirt. It is a seemingly unconscious posture shift I have come to associate with his full engagement from the core of who he is, as if he is physically trying to move his heart to the front of his being, all the better to speak from it there. “Because to me, that’s why I’m here. Spiritually means learning the positive behaviors and values in life—and learning how to express and take those to the farthest level. Sometimes I do a great job of it, sometimes I don’t, but I enjoy the process.”

“Social justice issues are a priority we get a sense of vision around. I feel like we stand firm with that.” Dana is seated in her office, just around the corner from the three Hall Directors she supervises, hugging her knee to her chest and talking about the department’s vision.

“We feel like there’s an importance for us to train, for our student staff to get training, for our administrative staff to get training, for us to confront and engage on a daily basis with social justice. I could say, since I’ve been here, that’s not changed. That’s been at the forefront. I’ve learned and grown a lot through that, and I don’t know if I would have experienced that in all organizations. I feel like we are continuously talking about how decisions we make impact other people, personally and professionally. I see it in training times, when we spend time bringing in speakers. Just in daily interactions, when we’re selecting candidates, and discussing them, in how we talk about them. How do we call each other on or confront each other on issues. I think you would see that filtered through meetings, through individual interactions, through supervision meetings, during training times. That’s obvious, you know, that’s very obvious. So that is very positive.” ■

I have brought coffee to Mac’s office today and, seated at the table in front of his desk, we are talking about visions and values, both personal and organizational. Since

my last visit, small personal items from have appeared around his office. Between and in front of the books on his shelves. An intricate miniature folding screen with hand-painted panels lacquered to a high gloss sits at eye level in front of the books on his shelf and small carvings fill the space near the computer on his desk. They are souvenirs from his Semester at Sea, having traveled on a voyage through Asia during his years as a hall director.

A national program which sends students abroad on a ship staffed by faculty and student affairs professionals from around the country, Semester at Sea is an experience which is a fixture in the careers of many housing professionals. Students participate in standard academic courses as well as field-based learning to create a diversified and comprehensive study abroad experience as their travels take them across oceans and borders.

“So my vision is to create a community,” he continues, his head haloed in purple-tinted light, “an educational community, where learning is the focus, where it’s incredibly engaging at all levels, where people bring their full personalities to work and to the residence halls. Where they can’t leave here without having been challenged to be their best. So that’s the feeling.” He pauses, enjoying the moment. The room is silent for several seconds. “It’s a nice feeling. And that’s how I know. When I speak in meetings, I’ll know when I hit it for myself, because I’ll get this feeling of emotion coming through, like,” his voice drops, “‘Yeah, that’s what I’m talking about.’”

“Is that uncomfortable for anybody, that level of emotion?” I ask.

“When I articulate it, usually I have emotion, but I articulate it like a faculty

“Well, I think we need to figure out what the vision really is, to have a strong decision made and let us know. Because if Mac wants each area to do its own thing, he has to come down with certain expectations, you know? Because that’s kind of the philosophy, that each area would manage itself, and information has to come down that way.” Cass is leaning in intensely, drawing me in like a co-conspirator across the coffee table in her office. We have spoken several times, and informa-

member. I always give the ‘why’. I don’t give this kind of stump speech where I’m like ‘Oh, everything is going to be beautiful like a rainbow.’ I say, ‘Well, you know human development is important,’ you know, that kind of stuff. So I take people on a journey and explain cause and effect. Or I listen and say, ‘Well, that links to this.’”

tion and communication within the department almost always surfaces as an issue.

"I don't know," she laughs, as we discuss the larger campus, "I don't really pay attention. I'm like this scope." She forms a small tube with her hand. "What happens with our department is where I'm at and I just look out every once in a while." She goes on, laughing, "I'm a details person versus big picture, so I don't pay attention. Like, if you asked me who the president was, I might be like, 'Ahh?'"

"So with the Campus Residential Plan," she says, naming the institution-wide residential colleges initiative that will have a significant impact on housing and residence life, "something I've really implemented is the 'home away from home' for my building. This is my third year here, and I feel like I should be really making the experience in my building exceptional for residents, making it a living/learning community so residents are happy living there and getting the services they need." Cass goes on to share that one of the ways she implements her 'home away from home' vision is by knowing residents' names. Of her building's 500 residents, she says she currently can say hello by name to about 200 students. "That's kind of the idea of where we're going and the vision for it too.

"I guess, if I know where the vision, where we're going with things and the way people are making decisions, then when the decision comes down and I'm like, 'Where did that come from?' we might have a better sense of

I ask where his vision comes from and he shares how it is an ongoing, additive, and emerging process of listening to the people around him coupled with his own values and beliefs.

"And it's funny, because before I started teaching, I worked in consulting," Mac says, referencing a brief corporate stint after a long career in housing and before his transition to faculty. "I used to believe that you determine a vision, mission, and strategic plan, you place it on the organization, and then you say, 'Okay, there you go. Make it happen.' But now that I've been here and teaching, I don't feel that way anymore. I don't feel that a proscribed, predetermined, super-clear vision, mission, and strategic plan is the answer. I think it makes people feel rescued, because traditionally, we say 'Here's where we're going' and everyone says 'Whew, aaah,'" Mac wipes the back of his hand across his forehead dramatically and slumps back in his chair, "Now we can relax."

"And I really want this to be the best place possible." He is back to the edge of his seat, gesturing

not having to ask that question. Like, 'Okay, well, that makes sense because here's where we're going. Here's our goals.' As opposed to feeling like 'This came out of left field. What's this all about? This just created more work for me,' Cass laughs, "which is very much the feeling in the past." ■

over the top of the table. "I want it to be filled with learning and teamwork and conflict that gets resolved, versus unhealthy conflict. I want it to be filled with people wondering—and sometimes they're frustrated, but they have an avenue to use that energy to make

things better. That's what I want and there's no prescribed way to get there in my opinion, but there are a lot of studies, there's a lot of stuff that I can throw in there and merge with what's here and then let the recipe or whatever you call it, cook and then something will come out."

Mac folds his arms in front of him, leaning his elbows on the edge of the table. "But sometimes people want a more traditional way of getting to vision, I think, because they've been taught that that's the way to do it. And I realize that although I have a lot of traditional stuff in me, that I really am not, in terms of my daily life, traditional. It's like, 'Oh sure, go ahead,' and I give power away—not necessarily that I have it to give," he chuckles.

"This is a big place and I don't want to control it. What I want to do is allow it to get to it's fullest—or fuller—potential.

"But I'm hearing from the staff, 'We want a clear vision, mission, and goals. We want—' And then

"I think vision should be a really big, very broad thing that we're working toward. 'Cause to me, goals are more like the small steps to get there. So my small goal is that we're going to get 24-hour front desks, and then we're going to do this," Eva says, indicating the next small step in the staircase she is imagining in front of her, "to get to the next level, you know, to get to the big vision. To me vision is something that I know I'll probably never reach but it's something that I'm totally working towards. I'm constantly like, 'That's my goal that I'm keeping in mind.' So when I'm creating a new initiative, I'm creating that initiative so I can work towards my vision. That's what I think a vision is.

"I think my personal vision," Eva continues, unprompted, "is just to make a difference in higher education. It's very broad. I don't know how I'm gonna do that, I don't know yet, but for right now it's one student at a time. When I meet a student, I really want to teach them something. I want them to learn from me and I want to learn from them. So I guess that's my big vision, to make a difference in the lives of students and in higher education." ■

I say, ‘Did you know we already have one?’ And they say, ‘No.’ ‘Well, you were there when we created it.’ ‘Oh, I didn’t remember that.’”

**Vision for Residence Life
(From their website and
internal documents)**

We build human capacity by putting students first and leading with the heart and mind. We work to create a premiere university experience that accelerates the academic and character development of the student in residence. We strive to establish an inspiring and motivating living-learning environment in which students, faculty, and staff work together to develop deep understanding of shared disciplines, shared goals, and shared responsibilities within the University community. ■

In fact, the Residence Life staff spent a significant amount of time together the year before I began my research, formulating values and coming up with a vision statement in a series of “Town Hall Meetings.” While the meetings still exists in this year’s calendar and are intended as a forum to address broader organizational needs, the time is often consumed with daily operations which overflow from the business meeting earlier in the month.

“And, you know, if I said to the people who want me to create a vision, ‘Well, it’s a Tom Peters’ organization, although his research is kind of messy,” Mac says, naming a 1990s business guru who advocated turning traditional organizational principles upside-down, “where the leadership is there to serve the people who interface with the students.’

So then I could say to Hall Directors, ‘You give me the vision so *I* can help *you* out!’” Mac laughs, giddy with the idea, “I could sure say that! I wonder what would happen if I did? That would be kind of fun.

“You know, so it’s clear to me that one thing that will help them to know the vision is for me to keep saying it. And I’ve noticed with the ADs and ACs, they’re starting to articulate what I’ve been

“So what would happen if in your Hall Director Meeting you all said, ‘Well, we’re going to set the vision for the department?’” I ask Cass. She has just explained to me the history and purpose of the meeting, which is attended and organized by Hall Directors only.

She laughs without hesitation. “Yeah, I think it would be a waste of time.”

“Why?”

“Aaah, because visions don’t usually come from the bottom and go

bringing up a lot. That doesn't mean that I'm the first to say it, but you know, sometimes when a leader says it people pay more attention to it.

“Just recently the Hall Directors put together this proposal, because they want to change their position to be more fitting with where we say we want to be, versus what they're actually doing. And they're like, ‘Yeah, if we only had a vision of where we're headed.’ And my first thought was, I shook my head inside and said ‘It's all around you. Where we're headed is all around you.’ And I do also understand the need to cognitively be conscious of where we're going. At the same time, it's right at your feet.”

* * *

“So what did you want from this time?”

Mac asks the group at the retreat. Copies of guiding documents have been distributed around the table: visions and missions of Residence Life, Housing, and the campus-wide Division of Student Affairs; pages of values and outcomes generated at Town Hall Meetings; a colorful circle illustrating the Residence Life programming model; and a strategic planning model shaped like a Mayan pyramid.

up!” The absurdness of the idea is evident in her voice.

“Organizations don't usually have Hall Director Meetings either,” I counter, congratulating myself on my quick thinking.

The gathering is a bit of an anomaly in the field and I have never been at or heard of another institution where it exists. The formal meeting is the result of an exercise in a Town Hall Meeting last year, where everyone was divided into groups by position and asked to share their accomplishments for the year. While each group from Administrative Assistants to the Leadership Team reported back a string of achievements, Hall Directors felt they had nothing to contribute, an issue they attributed to not being allowed to meet together.

This year, with a meeting time firmly in place, Cass (who believes the Leadership Team thinks Hall Directors use the meeting to “bitch” about what is going on) is able to rattle off a string of Hall Director initiatives: rewriting their job description, revamping their performance plans, providing input on apartments as they are being built, and moving a pet policy forward.

“Yeah. I think we could propose a vision, but I don't think enough information has been given to us to be able to effectively have something realistic. Unless you're on a committee or have a conversation with someone, information doesn't trickle down very easily. We're the last people to know. We're the most influential with students. We have the hardest job. We have the most decisions to make affecting students, but we don't get the information about why. We don't get the vision.” ■

“Which of these do we want to achieve and when?” Sarah asks, paging through the thick, stapled record of values and outcomes. “What are the priorities of our Leadership Team? Or the ADs or Mac?”

“You’re right,” says Mac, “the activity in Town Hall was divergent and we never converged on priorities. There needs to be some reduction.”

Barbara backs the group up from outcomes to the vision and mission, which she says should be the heart, spirit, and mind of who they are. “So when people see us, they know us. They know that’s who we are,” she says. “From there the vision should translate to outcomes.”

“I think Hall Directors just want to know what we’re all about, and I don’t know what to tell them,” Tracy responds.

Barbara shifts in her chair to face Tracy. “They need to know who we are first.”

Conversation stops momentarily in response to, if not acknowledgement of, this

“But, you know what? The image that comes to mind now is from the movie, *The Mummy*. Did you see that?” Mac gets up from the table and uncaps a black dry erase marker.

“Like Abbot and Costello, *The Mummy*?” I ask, eyebrows raised in confusion.

“No, the more recent one.”

“Oh! With, ah—Brandon Frasier!”

“Yes, yes, yes. It’s one of my favorites. So the image that came to mind when you were speaking was of the final scene in that second show, where they went into

small impasse regarding different perceptions of the purpose behind things like visions and missions and outcomes.

Jason breaks the silence, “We have been a culture where we talk about things for a long time and don’t incorporate them into our daily practice.” He is holding the edge of the table with both hands as if anchoring himself. “I would be excited and energized if we could move forward together and know our plan

this pyramid," he is drawing the stair-step structure on the edge of the board as he speaks, "and they fought the scorpion kind of guy, and they won somehow, and the thing was destroyed—"

"Yeah, yeah, and they were running!"

"They were running. And they couldn't get out, because it was all starting to spin around and get taken up, but the balloon came and saved them." There is a slight question in his voice, as if confirming that we are on the same page and I am not thinking of black and white, pith-helmeted vaudevillians.

"Yes!"

"But the image that came to mind was of this." Mac trades his black marker for an orange one, scribbling a core of fire through the center of the pyramid. "Because it came up through the pyramid, this dynamic energy of flux. So the structure creates some clarity, but it still has this explosive energy that makes it a little messy. But there is enough structure to see there was structure and enough energy to show this movement, this aliveness about it.

"And when we were talking about, how do you do both, how do you honor both the people who want structure and direction and the ones who want spirit and inspiration in a vision, this is the image that came to mind. Structure, so new people who come in have what they need to be successful. But space for the fire to take them up, so everyone has room to create. And I want it to be measurable, so I have an accountability issue, which is, I want them, as

for doing that. So it's part of who we are, that we're in a culture where we know who we are and where we're going."

"I think it's like knowing self," says Mac. "It's an emerging process where people have an idea of what it is, but we need a common language to be able to discuss it." He compares the process to preparing scrambled eggs that don't cook all at once.

"It's just so hard to see how to get there!"

David interjects. "I need baby steps."

Tracy combs her fingers through her hair before I have sat in this very meeting a million sorting through the papers in front of her, agreeing times before as departments I've been a part of that the outcomes are overwhelming and need to be wrestled with integrating individual perspectives narrowed down. "I don't know what each of these on the role and purpose of visions, outcomes, and things is," she says, waving the strategic planning goals into a larger organizational plan. Student model by its corner, which takes the process through ten affairs is a field filled with assumptions, some shared and some not, that are rarely checked. In "I think this answers it," Lizbeth says, holding such meetings, I have found it both sad and ironic the same model up for Tracy to see, showing her that in a discipline where we as practitioners pride ourselves on our ability to help students make "No it doesn't. It doesn't. It all starts to get meaning—individually and in groups—we often into a big ball in my head. We don't know the process have difficulty making meaning for ourselves.

professionals, to take this to the next level, be creative, really make their halls sing in way that are beautiful, without me having to tell them how.”



and I don't hear anyone in this group saying they can facilitate this process in the group.”

Lizbeth gets up, demonstrating kinesthetically a meaning making process she saw a consultant do once by drawing an enormous mural based on feedback from the organization.

Sarah sighs softly across the table from me.

“I'm frustrated because we're talking about how we're

going to talk about what we're talking about.”

The discussion continues, including brief dialogues about who needs to be present, if they need to change the vision and mission or just make sure everyone understands the documents they have right now, and whether or not to use the pyramid model.

“No matter what we use,” says David, “it doesn't get me going. How are we going to help our staff to learn the vision, and goals. This might work for a business model where you're working with widgets and money, but when you're working with people...” his voice trails off. “It doesn't get me going.”

The room is silent for a moment, and Mac says, “It's hard to admit this. It's hard to be an internal consultant. It may take someone from the outside to lead us through the process.”

“The first strategic planning thing I went through here with the department,” Ann's voice drops to a whisper, speaking about her start with the housing division almost six years ago “was painful. It was *painful* for me. All we could get at—we had a facilitator and we spent *months* cranking out a strategic plan that looked like what your grandmother and I would call 'milktoast'. This is what we do, not this is what we want to be. And for the life of me, we could not get at what we want to be. There was this sense that what we were doing was stellar! 'What do you mean want to be? We're great!'”

Ann throws her hands up in the air dropping them on the table, fingers spread, and leans forward. “We're a dinosaur! Every new director that's come in here since I've got here comes in and goes,

“Well, what I hear people saying is that we need to internalize our vision, mission, and values. I think I could do the process,” Barbara offers, “I just don’t know about an outside facilitator. We can’t stop our organization as we do this and that complicates things.”

“Mac,” Jason says, and something in his voice tilts the world in his direction, “I don’t know if I want to let you off the hook that easily.” It is not the quiet, cultivated voice that introduced the clip or facilitated the discussion about *Sweet Honey in the Rock*, and Mac sits up in his chair.

* * *

Eva and I have been meeting long enough so that our time together has settled into comfortable dialogues. Our discussion today, about two weeks after the Leadership Team Retreat, centers around her perceptions of the department, using the metaphor of song to talk about vision and what unifies them.

“Have you ever been to an orchestra concert,” I ask, “and there is this brief period of tune-up at the beginning, until someone taps the baton—you know, and they all—” I do my best to imitate the noises of different instruments. “There’s that whole sort of cacophony and then, at some point, it all comes together and music starts. And I’m wondering, based on what you’ve said, if it feels that way here, sort of in the tune-up phase?”

“Yeah, I like that.” Eva nods, her eyes squinting slightly, as if listening for a symphony to begin.

“This place is so archaic, I can’t believe there are things you don’t have in place.”

Ann sighs, “The first strategic planning thing was painful because I could never get the department to really help define—because they were so threatened because saying anything aspiring meant they were currently failing.”

“Wow,” I say, “that’s a dichotomy.”

“Do you see? And there’s a cultural issue that used to exist and still kind of does on our campus, of this pass/fail, this you’re great or you suck. And very critical—a very, very critical, always criticizing culture with little affirmation.” ■

“So, I wonder who’s tapping on the podium. Does that metaphor make sense?”

“Yeah.” Eva pauses for a moment. “I feel like I’m too new to answer that question.”

“Why? Why are you too new?” I ask.

“Because I only know what I’ve seen, you know, I don’t—so my initial answer will be Mac, because I see him as the leader. But it could be Ann, you know what I mean? The messages I get usually come down from Mac—but I’m sure he gets some of that from her.

“What I’m not seeing us do actively is say ‘That’s what I want to see.’” Mac says. “When we see good things, we’re like, ‘Oh, thank God!’ but we don’t really make a point of it.

“And then I noticed Ann this semester—twice I think it’s been—I’ve noticed when something goes wrong, she is here physically. She comes down, she looks for people, she really seeks them out and she says, ‘This needs to be fixed.’ When things go right, you get an email saying, ‘Hey, nice job.’ So the intensity of what we see, in terms of making meaning, is that you get her attention when you do things wrong, but when things are going right you won’t see her. And, I haven’t, you know, given her feedback yet, which I will—but it took me a while to notice why this group” he gestures toward the outer office, meaning the Assistant Director team, “felt punished by that group, by her and her staff, and it’s because of all the energy we get when things go wrong and how little we get when things are going well or we have a break through. So, it’s just an interesting dynamic about, how do I make sure that I’m not doing that myself.

“So something happened at one of the residence halls. And I thought, ‘Well, they’re adults, they’ll work

And who does she get her messages from? It could be the president. I don’t know. I guess, through my eyes, I would say Mac is the one who’s getting us ready and trying to get us all on the same note.”

“Okay. So can I ask, why isn’t it you?”

Eva laughs, then stops and starts several times.

“I would say—I don’t think it has to do with—I think it’s—” She hesitates for a moment, taking a breath to refocus herself. “I don’t feel experienced enough yet to be making the decisions about what should be happening. I think I have ideas and I’m sharing those ideas and I feel like my ideas are being heard. But I don’t feel like I have enough experience to say, ‘I think we should do this.’ I feel like I’m still learning. I’m totally comfortable giving my ideas, but I’m not necessarily comfortable being—like starting these brand new initiatives yet. Maybe next year.”

it out. I trust that they'll do it. But what was wanted instead was for me to jump in and be right there, to take a lot of initiative, and put a lot of energy around the problem. And I thought, 'You know, I don't mind doing that' —especially until the staff gets a sense of how to handle things. What I *do* mind is when I have to do that, but I don't have time to go to an awards ceremony, where an employee is being recognized, where there's no mistake and I don't have to go fix anything. I have to show up and say, 'Nice job.' ■

“Okay, so what is ‘tapping the baton’?” I

probe. “What does that mean? Is it only starting

initiatives or

is it also, you

know, how you

are and whether

or not you call

people back to the

purpose of why you're here?”

Eva's eyes light up as if something has occurred to her. “So maybe it's a different person every day,” she says. “So it could be me today, because I had a half an hour conversation with the Administrative Assistant in my building—who is resistant to the idea of having to run a 24 hour desk—talking to her about why we would do that, and why would it be good for our students, and trying to get her to see that, you know, even if it's gonna be more work for us, that it might be a good thing for our students. So maybe it was me that day. You know what I mean?”

“I do.”

“I think,” says Cass, sitting in her Hall Director office, “Mac's philosophy is that he wants each area to run their own area. So, he wants ADs to be able to share with the ACs, and then have the ACs kind of run the Hall Directors. But then it doesn't feel like us as Hall Directors really get to run our own building. It's not necessarily working because we can't make certain decisions without AC or AD approval to really be able to make that happen.”

“Can you give me an example of—”

Before I can finish my sentence, Cass offers an illustration, speaking rapidly as she charges through the jargon of their conduct process. “Yeah, we can't do any sort of judicial decision above probation. Like, we can't do suspension and abeyance or held determination and abeyance without permission from an AC. We can't refer a student to Judicial Affairs without permission from an AC. Like, no major decisions can happen. We need to sort of run through any—or at least I feel if we're gonna do any sort of job action with RAs, we need to kind of sort of run it by our AC first, because they may overturn our decisions. We can't terminate somebody without it potentially being overturned.”

“I wonder how much of that is legal, you know, due process?” I ask, offering a possibility to make meaning of the situation.

“But, you know, the message is ‘We want you to be able to run the hall. But only if your supervisors do this or this.’ But *we're* limited. You see what I mean?” ■

“Some people really, they just want someone to tell them what to do and their idea of a leader is somebody who’s going to speak to that other person next to them—*for* them—and transfer what they want to the group, instead of transferring it themselves. You know, like” Amanda snaps her fingers as if to say “Do it now!”

Amanda and I have joined Eva in her office for a Hall Director focus group. We are the last people in the room, as the others have had to rush off to meetings and other commitments.

“Yeah,” Eva agrees, “because what some people think of as a leader might be different from what I think a leader is.”

Amanda concurs emphatically. “Right!”

“So,” I begin. I have been holding this question since our conversation began. “Are you a leader?” I ask Amanda.

“Yes!”

Turning to Eva, I make the same inquiry, “Are you a leader?”

“Heck yes I am!” she laughs excitedly, and Amanda joins her.

“I can lead the people who aren’t even underneath me.”

“Right!” says Eva, shouting the affirmation like a cheer.

“I can lead the people all the way above, and that’s where I feel—like that’s leadership.” declares Amanda “Not looking for that other person, like they’re the one.”

“Right!” ■

“And maybe it was me the other day,” she is speaking quickly now, “when I was talking about the problem we were having with locks and saying ‘I don’t care whose fault this is, I don’t want to blame anyone. Look, we just need to get it fixed because our students need to be safe.’ I was advocating for our students. So, yeah, maybe it could be a different person every day, depending on, you know, what the situation is or” Eva smiles, “it could be having a positive attitude.”

* * *

“Who’s leading the discussion?” Mac asks.

After lunch, the Leadership Team Retreat continues with a discussion of the Hall Director search process and what they should be looking for in candidates. Sarah rises from her seat and uncaps a dry erase marker. She agrees to get them started and record what they cover on the board, if everyone will take responsibility for facilitation.

Over the next half hour the conversation covers a diversity of topics, from competencies and attitudes to degree requirements to training and development offered to new hires to marketing the

position in the upcoming recruitment season. “It would be cool,” says Jason, “during interviews to be able to talk about expectations Hall Directors can have during their time here and vice versa.”

Through it all, Mac is engaged in the conversation, offering words of encouragement or asking for clarity. “I’m glad you used the word ‘commitment,’” he tells Sarah at one point. Later, when the group shifts to talk more about how to use expectations to market the position, he asks “What’s the purpose of this conversation?” and shares an example to illustrate the importance of organizations representing who they are as accurately as possible. He knew of a university in the western United States, many miles from actually being in the mountains, that used photos shot with long lenses in all its national admissions brochures to make the mountains seem closer. Students who came to campus felt deceived.

At one point, the group stalls a bit, dichotomizing an overall attitude and a skill set as either/or wants in a successful candidate. In the lull, Mac offers a four cornered model he has jotted on the corner of his yellow tablet, summarizing the conversation so far and offering a way to think about the myriad of qualities they have raised that influence a Hall Director’s ability to be successful.

“What I heard you saying is, we need to be aware of attitudes, knowledge, skills, and practice. And these things aren’t mutually exclusive.” Mac goes on to explain how they could use the model to think about what a strong candidate might look like, and how each of the four areas might counterbalance each other, giving them a more inclusive idea about different ways someone could be successful, rather than the traditional method of a single profile.

What Mac shares doesn't take long, and he illustrates the model by drawing the four quadrants in the air in front of him. As he briefly covers how the framework reflects the qualities the group named earlier, it looks as though he is tossing tiny invisible objects in small arcs through each square.

The group pauses, contemplating the input and a few people nod. Then the conversation moves on to other things as they discuss what sort of questions they might ask in an interview.

Blame, Accountability, and Stuff Coming Out of the Ground

“Do you know what occurs to me, now that we're talking? The difference between,” Mac pauses to write the words on his dry erase board in his distinctive script, “*blame* and *accountability*. How do you know when you're blaming and when you're just holding someone accountable? If someone says to me, ‘You should have paid attention and written that down in a meeting,’ I can say, ‘You're right. Thanks for holding me accountable.’ But when does it switch from accountability to blame? You know, I've read Deming's stuff, which is to drive blame out of the

Over his shoulder, I can see Jason's desk stacked with piles of paper that must be an information management system of his own design. Despite what appears to be a busy time, he is relaxed and focused on our conversation, bridging the arms of his upholstered chair with his own, an elbow resting on each side and his hands folded loosely together in front of him. The window is cracked slightly, and he explains that his office can get quite stuffy with the late afternoon sun. The sounds of construction ride in on a crisp March breeze.

“I had an experience a couple years ago,” he says, “where we—the ACs—were in discussion with the ADs and Mac, and we were all talking about these candidates. And Mac had talked and drew some things and then we kept on talking. And afterwards, my supervisor pulled me aside and said, ‘Mac was giving a directive, and you and your peer group didn't key in. He was letting you all know what he wanted to see us do.’”

Jason pauses, lost in the moment. “And I completely did not hear it that way. I heard it as him joining in. And my supervisor was coaching me saying, ‘Be really aware when Mac talks, because he doesn't join in all the time. And you can kind of sometimes tell the difference between when he's saying ‘What about this?’ or when he's giving more of a directive.’ And I don't know that I have it pinned down, when he's doing that, but I know it's in my best interest, for my own future and just

system and just focus on how you can improve the system to serve people so they won't make mistakes, they'll be successful. But when does

"I feel like every live-out job description Hall Director was really bitter. I mean they hated it here. They hated it." Amanda is speaking about the evolving culture of the organization, specifically the Hall Director group. She began working at the University two and a half years ago, during the transition from live-out to live-in staff. "There was just this negativity. But my own experience has been very positive and hasn't been that way and I was really happy to see those people go. I'm really happy we have a whole bunch of new Hall Directors in here and I feel like there are a lot of people that are positive about things. It doesn't mean there hasn't been issues and stuff this year, but the new culture is more positive. Our opinions are valued. We can really do a lot of things we want to do."

Eva nods, as Amanda continues, "It's just interesting how it still feels that even though some of those people who I feel were really bitter have left and there's definitely a much better culture, how there's still that transfer over of that negativity. The people now who have been here for a long time, they experienced a lot of those people who were under the old job description and—"

"It almost seems like," Eva interrupts, "the culture used to be that they had so much to complain about that that's how they bonded. They just bonded over complaining about crap. So now, when there's not that much to complain about, the people who have been

it tip from accountability to blame, do you think?"

Mac

spends most of our time together standing up and sitting down as

he goes to and from the dry erase board, building a model of blame and accountability in multiple marker colors. There is very little of our customary small talk today, as he seems to be seeking input to help him process an event in a standing meeting he had earlier today with Ann and Directors of the other units in Housing and he began by introducing the topic when I walked in the door. Mac feels he has been blamed by the other Directors for not remembering and following policy that was covered briefly months ago with no context and no follow up.

my learning to know. Because she indicated that we had missed the boat as an AC group. She said, 'You got the closest to going with what he was wanting to do and reframing what he was saying, but you missed it too, Jason. You missed it too. And your group did too.'

"And so, it was one of those ah-hah moments really, about leadership style. And I guess I am still not always clear. And I think that that's on me, but I think it also might be—if we're going to work well as a team—as our leader, maybe we need to know what he wants. Even if it is to say, 'Folks, this is what I think we should do.' I don't know. If it's happening, it's sometimes very subtle. And I don't even know if he is—I don't know—completely aware of giving a directive as opposed to saying 'This is my opinion.'" ■

here for a while and who were influenced by that old Hall Director group jump on any little thing and just complain about it.”

Eva goes on to share an example about how some Hall Directors were upset with a plan introduced by the Leadership Team to pay incoming Hall Directors additional money above the base salary depending on education and experience. “For example, you’d get \$100 if you have your master’s and another \$100 if it’s in a student affairs related field. And I think there was more if you had Residence Life experience as a graduate student. So we as current Hall Directors will still end up behind someone who comes in with all the same experience that we did, even though we’ve worked here for a year. So it feels like my year of service isn’t being valued—and that’s what people were saying. Which I agree, but at the same time, I’m of the mind set of, well, we’re trying to move ahead, we’re trying to be competitive. So yeah, that sucks that someone is going to be making more money than me, even though I’ve been here a year longer, but I would rather see the department be able to stay competitive and move ahead. It’s not worth getting upset about.”

While complaints are raised in meetings, much of the objection happens over emails. Messages are sent between and among the Hall Director group in a downward spiraling dialogue, a dialogue Eva feels is most often initiated by senior Hall Directors.

“So we kind of talked about, where does that come from and it must be that they have history so they’re bringing all this baggage to every situation. So how do we get them to let go of that baggage? We can

Mac and I go on to process the happening at the meeting through a systems thinking lens, attributing “blame” to event thinking, which is focused on the players involved in an occurrence and what they do or do not do. Systems thinking, we hypothesize, might be aligned more closely with holding people accountable, because it takes into consideration how the environment does or does not support individuals ability to be successful.

“So all of our Residence Life staff does this kind of thing,” Mac points, straight armed towards the board, waving his hand in a circular motion to encompass the area where he has written *blame/event*, “and it’s like ‘You did this!’ And we had that roll call thing at the beginning of the year. To me, most of the people wanted to blame the individual who was in charge of the staff that did the roll call. But what systems thinking would say instead is, what was it allowed that type of thing to emerge the way it did?”

Roll call refers to skits usually performed during annual training times, where student staffs from each hall “introduce” themselves to one another as a way to build staff pride and department spirit.

* * *

Roll calls are a tradition here and have a long history in many housing and residence life departments nationally. Performing Lizbeth is taking a reprieve from her AC duties and

talk to them about it and acknowledge that things have happened, but at some point you *have* to let it go. And how do you do that? I don't know."

Nekane, a Hall Director with a bachelor's degree and no housing and residence life background, is often the subject of the emails that are distributed among the group. He is one of three professional staff of color in the department. "The only person who I feel like is really targeted for maybe not knowing what is going on," says Amanda, "is Nekane. And that's just from the lack of Residence Life experience."

Eva continues the story, "It's really frustrating, because he sends out a lot of emails, asking a lot of questions—which is good because he doesn't know what's going on. Well, what happens is that a couple of select people sit there and make jokes about him and how he's so stupid. But me and Amanda are like, 'Wouldn't you rather him ask these questions than not know?' It's good that he feels that he can ask his peers, but little does he know that because he's asking his peers, all this crap is going on around, behind the scenes. Even some of the comments that get written back to him even are so like," Eva makes an irritated gasp, rolling her eyes in the process. "They'll copy and paste stuff from like a handbook, instead of just being, 'No, we can't do that, like, here's another option.' They're like, almost belittling him and being like, 'Well, you should know this and blah, blah, blah!' It's almost mean. So far, it's not showing that we're a very supportive group." ■

processing her year with Residence Life, particularly *mances often include lip syncing popular songs, parodying current television shows* feedback she recently received about the department. She has been holding individual "reflection meetings" *and movies, or spoofing professional staff or organizational culture. While most of* them make meaning of the past ten months. "One *ten light hearted or clever and without incident, it's not unheard of for things to* of my Hall Directors, Alexis, feels like dialogue is lacking in our department. She's the one that did the *be taken too far and tip toward mockery or* roll call at the beginning of the year, and she feels *derisive satire.* like, 'Okay, at this point I know that I messed up, but I feel like I wasn't forgiven for that. There are people in the organization who judge you and stereotype you and whatever their first perception is of you, that doesn't change. They don't allow you to grow.' And this is just how one individual feels, like, as a department we aren't able to be open and messy with each other."

Lizbeth connects that to a message she got during training at the start of the academic year. "One of the ADs was going to say something about how she felt during the white privilege presentation and she first had this *huge* disclaimer like, 'I don't want to offend anyone,' and then she shared what she

felt. So that immediately set the tone of, it's not okay to be really authentic, to be able to

share without having that huge disclaimer. I felt like, ‘I don’t really know what everyone thinks about anything because I feel like everyone’s really politically correct about how they talk—about how they talk publicly in meetings.’ It’s hard to talk openly about what you think here. Is it the power dynamic or what?”

The wait staff at the tea house brings our iced blueberry teas, setting them on the distressed coffee table in front of us, and Lizbeth takes the moment to turn towards me, sitting cross-legged on the overstuffed couch. She has dyed her naturally very-blond hair a deep auburn and the change makes me see her face in new ways. Whether it is the change in hair color or her year with Residence Life, Lizbeth’s eyes don’t seem quite as bright as when I met her striding up the auditorium steps ten months ago.

“And just to make a connection,” she continues, “the other Hall Director I met with, Kenza—she was new this year—*also* felt like people seem to be afraid to make mistakes or offend others. And most of it stems from the roll call incident, which she believes is her biggest memory of the year. How *sad* is that?” Lizbeth sounds as if her heart might break. “And Kenza *was* offended by the roll call.

“So the backdrop for me is, social justice is a deflection sometimes, of taking responsibility for your own life and who you’ve become and how you treat people. And sometimes if you can point to social justice, you don’t have to look here,” Mac lays his hand over his heart, “to say ‘What does this mean?’”

It is near the end of my time with the department, and I have been sharing some things I have found particularly salient over the arc of my stay. Specifically, we are discussing what feels to me like a paradox in terms how often a commitment to social justice comes up in conversations about change and contrasting messages around kindness or how other people should be treated. The Hall Director email chain is one example.

“How are you going to get to social justice if basic human kindness isn’t—”

“Present,” Mac says, in a rare interruption. “That’s the social care side.

“Some of the people in the organization,” he indicates up and down an imaginary organizational chart, “have a social justice lens and they treat people unkindly, using that as the rationale for being unkind or being abrupt. And, that’s okay, I understand that you’re helping that issue, but also the method you use has ethics. It’s the modal values that get compromised for the end values. And they both need to be in play, not just one or the other. Like, if you treat people kindly, but towards a socially unjust end, you know, that’s not good either.” ■

Her staff was *very* impacted, but she thought it would have been enough for me to just talk to Alexis. But our department totally blew it out of proportion because there were a bunch of returner Hall Directors that emailed Alexis—publicly! It went to all the ACs, ADs, and Hall Directors and was basically bashing Alexis and her team. ‘That was really inappropriate. I was so offended, blah, blah, blah.’ There were a lot of emails. And then we had this big discussion as a group about it during training. We called an *emergency meeting* to talk about it! And Kenza felt like people weren’t really willing to forgive Alexis. And the truth is, Alexis at that time was not really ready to really apologize because she didn’t understand at that point how really offensive it was. But Kenza was saying that set the tone for the whole year. What happened was impactful, but the response was even more impactful. As a new person, Kenza felt like ‘Oh, I don’t ever want to make any mistakes. I don’t want to ever offend anyone.’ And then she said something very wise, she said, ‘I think we need to identify what our culture is as a group and whether or not we all want to change it. Like, what is the culture? What does everybody else think the culture is? And do we need to change any part of it?’”

* * *

“I feel like, even in my last two years here, I’ve seen the culture of the AD group change *drastically.*” Amanda is sharing some of the ways she’s seen the department adapt and grow over the past two years. “I feel like I kind of came in as Hall Director at the end of a lot of things. People would talk about the ADs, like, about how they hated

“Mac had the ADs read a book, *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team.*” Sarah says, turning toward me in her swiveling conference table chair. “And I see change happening within the AD group, that they’re developing trust, and the ability to have conflict and that kind of shared commitment. And I think that that trickled down to us as ACs.”

Sarah attributes the change to Mac’s positive influence and what he brings in terms of “books and

each other or some of them didn't like each other for whatever reasons or they'd get frustrated about different things and not confront each other. And I remember having conversations with Mac and he'd always say, 'I just really want to encourage people to be able to go to that person with their problem.' And

"I've heard that some folks feel like the AD group has changed quite a bit, and I was wondering if you felt that way as well," I ask to kick off the focus group with Assistant Directors. Everyone is present except for David, who had a meeting he could not cancel.

There is a long pause I want to attribute to the early morning hour or the absence of David and his natural attention to relationships. Where other groups have spoken about their own dynamic in ways that felt candid, the ADs seem to close ranks a bit at the question. Perhaps it is the more political campus-wide environment in which they operate or a history of an organizational culture of blame. Regardless, the topic seems like something tender, where no one wants to say too much lest something fragile or faulty be exposed.

Barbara is the first to speak. "Our role has changed from when we were Residence Life Coordinators. We're the same four people. I mean, we played this role as RLCs and then, as we got to be ADs, our role has changed. So I think that's accurate."

"We've slowly started transitioning," Angela adds, "but the big change is probably when Mac

that was at least
a year ago at this
point, and I feel
like I can see that
difference. They
all seem, to me,
to get along fine. I
don't think they're
best friends or
anything, but I feel
like they really
support each other
and they want to
work together as
a group and that
they support us as
Hall Directors. I

things," as someone who lives in the world of ideas.

"I feel like the supervision piece is really hands off, though," interjects Jason, speaking about the relationship between the ACs and ADs. Each AD supervises at least one of the ACs. "It's kind of me managing my area and I ask the occasional question when I need something, as opposed to being really deliberate about my professional development. It might be part of the culture around crisis, because I think we spend our one-to-one time, for example, putting out fires, rather than saying, 'Let's talk developmentally about... you know, whatever —or about us.'"

"I feel that way too!" Sarah agrees, and goes on to wonder if this is just how it is when you move up in an organization. "I don't feel like there is much focus or attention either from a direct supervisor or from the ADs as a group on supervising the ACs. So I don't know what it is, but I kind of miss that."

Dana, who has been quiet for a while, joins the conversation. "Yep. I have that same thought, exact same thought. 'Oh, maybe that's just what happens when you—'" she laughs, and there are nods and "yeahs" around the table.

"I do know I do a lot more—and I think it's appropriate—asking for what I need, articulating those things," Dana goes on, "more than I ever did in my earlier days. 'No, I'm good with that, thanks!' or 'You know what? Hey, I need a little bit more of a direction.' But um, yeah, I occasionally say, 'Yeah, I want that, you know, 'How do I get that?'"

There is a pause in the conversation, each AC lost momentarily in their own thoughts.

came. The Director who had been here for a long time before he came retired—not that she held things up or anything. It wasn't even due to the transition in leadership that we changed. I don't think we can give him credit, it's just that the stars aligned and things just started moving in a different direction."

"I think we've all worked really well together all the time." Tracy says, "I mean, even when the previous Director was still here—when she spent most of her time dealing with a long term crisis on campus—I thought the four of us worked really well together and continued to manage and do things that we needed to do for Residence Life."

Tracy pauses, and, when no one else speaks, continues. "The way we make decisions is very different, I think. I think it's Mac's leadership, in that our previous Director was very—she kept a lot of things on her own plate and not on ours. Meaning that if something happened, she just made that decision and didn't involve us as RLCs; us or the Hall Directors or anything like that. I just don't think she did that. It just wasn't—and that's okay. It's just a difference in leadership with one not being necessarily really better or worse than the other. And I'm not saying we weren't a good organization before, because we were a *great* organization. It's just a different way to meet the needs of our student population."

Near the end of our time together, after dialogue about campus and the ACs and the Hall Directors, Angela comes back around to the topic of the ADs and the idea that perhaps their dynamic has evolved. "I think," she says, "as Mac

feel like there's a
difference there,
even in how they
communicate
with each other.
Whereas before it
was very separate.
'Don't step on my
toes. This is my role.'

"Yeah," Eva chimes in, "like I always see the ADs in each other's offices, asking 'What do you think we should do about this?' Like, when all the crises have been happening, they've been working together on that. And," Eva's voice rises, excited to share a story, "even last night, a couple of the ADs stayed after and helped us clean up after the end of the year banquet.

And they were so helpful, when

"It is kind of interesting," says Dana.

"It's interesting?" I ask, thinking she has more to say about the topic of development, but Dana has been thinking about the process of the focus group.

"Well," she shrugs her shoulders lightly, "it's interesting because we don't often enter into this type of conversation, you know? It kind of feels like you're pouring out your soul—not that that's bad. I'm saying that it's interesting." ■

"I haven't by any means talked to everyone," I say, sitting in Tracy's office with the other ADs, "but it seems like there are folks who are focused on 'We are operational,' and there are folks who are like, 'I'm not quite sure what is going on, but maybe if I could create something, that would be sort of cool—but I don't want to do anything wrong.' And maybe that's some of the dualistic thinking you were talking about before. So does that perception seem accurate, or am I way off?"

"The AC position was created to do—to supervise Hall Directors and help them with day to day op-

has come in, I feel a lot has shifted and changed in a good way. Not that it was bad before, it's just very different and it seems to fit, it seems to fit pretty well."

"Could you say more about that, that 'a lot has shifted'?" I ask prompting Angela to continue.

"Um, to me he's a totally different leader—and I don't, that's why I'm not saying it's good or bad, it's just very cyclical. I think you can have two people that can do a job very well, but they're very good at two different things. I think that's exactly kind of what happened. He's totally, to me, different than our previous Director—but she was still really good I thought, just really good at different things. So I think the group as a whole was ready for a change. I think Mac's so good at the people aspect, empowering people. I think he's really good at conflict, which is stuff that she wasn't as good at, from my perspective. And so it's just made us all as a group, change what we focus on and how we do the work that we do. And I think it fits just because that's where we are in today's time. I think in fifteen years it will be like, 'Okay, I need somebody who can do this other aspect.' And it shifts back in a different direction. So right now I just feel like it fits."

"You mentioned conflict. What has the role of conflict been in the organization?"

"Oh, I just mean, um, in any group this big, meaning 25 people, that there's always conflict. And I think there's always been—how that's showed up has just been different. And I think our previous Director kind of avoided the conflict so if it was there, it was more, to me, hidden or behind closed doors or

they have nothing
to do with it. They
were just guests
and they stayed
and were totally a
part of it. And so,
it seems like it's
becoming a little
less, 'This is my
thing and I take
care of this!' and
more like, 'Let's
help each other
out on stuff.'"

"Right,
right." Amanda
agrees. "So I think
the relationship
with them
is better."

* * *

"I feel
like the last two

erations of the halls." Barbara offers by way of explanation, "And we, as Assistant Directors, play a much larger role in terms of connecting with the university."

Angela, who has spoken little for most of the focus group, takes a deep breath and shifts energetically to being fully engaged, as if, perhaps, a nerve was touched. "The AC job was designed to be operational. I mean, that was, from my understanding, a main point of the job. So I guess it's kind of hard to hear that sometimes because I feel like when people say 'operational' that it's bad that we're operational, because then they're just doers. But the reality is we need doers. So the ACs were created, in my opinion, to be operational; to manage our staff and to supervise them well and to make sure the buildings run. Because we as ADs were being pulled too many directions. We couldn't do that well *and* develop programs *and* sit on campus—*and* move the unit forward! It was too much." Angela sighs in a way that suggests both frustration and exhaustion.

"So yes," she continues after a moment, "I think that's very true about ACs. And part of it has been the personalities in the role have wanted to expand it more—which I don't think we've ever resisted, but we also don't want to take away from the point of the job, which is to manage and to supervise and to be operational. I *always* hear us asking for new ideas, new initiatives, who wants to sit on this task force, who wants to sit on this committee? But I don't feel like they—'they' meaning Hall Directors and sometimes ACs—get to know us as people, because then, I think, you hear people differently the more you know them. And I'm not saying we do everything perfectly, because we don't. But yeah, I could see

with certain people. Very rarely did I ever see healthy interaction like that in a group. And so that's definitely with Mac, because he'll kind of challenge that a little bit more. And I think we've come leaps and bounds with that."

"We?"

"The four—the five of us," she says, being sure to include Mac. ■

months has been

very positive and

very—it seems

like there's been

some individual

personal growth,

maybe?" Cass is pondering the department culture, talking aloud as if puzzling out how she feels with her Hall Director peers before committing totally.

"Amongst them?" asks Kirsten gesturing over her shoulder with her thumb towards what I assume, in this windowless space, is the Residence Life central office.

"Amongst them." Cass affirms.

"Amongst the five, yeah." Kirsten says, meaning Mac and the ADs.

"Right." Cass goes on, now that nouns and pronouns have been sorted out. "We've brought up a lot of stuff, I think, as a Hall Director group and I've just seen some reactions to things that I haven't seen in the past—more support. The last two months there has been a huge—I have felt *really* supported, which I hadn't felt a whole lot first semester. Something

why they would say they're more operational. Yeah, that's a long answer but," Angela has run out of energy, and shakes her head, "I don't know."

"So, with supervision—and this is my own lens—" I interject, "are there not a billion ways to be creative on a supervision, operational level? You know what I'm saying?"

"Well there you're hitting on something." Barbara says. Music that sounds like the soundtrack to a daytime drama is coming through the ceiling from the piano room above us, aggrandizing the moment in a way that doesn't feel appropriate but is still hard to ignore. "I feel like sometimes people are complaining about, 'Well, I'm limited.' And I'm going, 'Well, what's keeping you from doing something in your hall. What's keeping you from creating a great program in your hall?' Or for the AC to pull his or her area together and put together some new thoughts and new ways of doing things and as a team coming up with some creative programs. I think sometimes they limit themselves. I think they think there are limits there, when there really aren't. And I need to," she laughs, "figure out how to change that thinking, you know."

Barbara goes on, "Well, I think one thing is, we don't talk about our work from a philosophical standpoint a whole lot. About this is what our purpose is, this is what our mission is. So what does that mean for us? And this is how we reflect on that and let it inform our work. I don't think we talk about that much. And I think we need to talk about it more and have those conversations with folks."

Barbara continues, explaining it's a "learning thing" for ACs and Hall

happened January-February-ish, I have no idea what. Maybe it's us. It could be us. It could be us—I go to the AD/Mac meeting so I see a little bit more of that, so it gives me a little bit more trust in the department.”

“I don't know.” Kirsten counters, “I don't go to the AD/Mac meeting and I feel that same change, change in the ADs being more supportive and more, like, that immediate reaction ‘We hear your concerns. We will try to get this done for you.’”

“Just so we're on the same page, what would you define as support? When you say that, what do you mean?” I ask.

“Getting what we need in a timely manner.”

Cass replies immediately, “Acknowledging us, acknowledging our concerns, our issues, or—”

“And acknowledging our accomplishments too.” interrupts Kirsten.

“Yeah,” confirms Cass.

* * *

Whether it is the tone of Jason's voice or the motion of Mac sitting up, everyone at the retreat is focused on the two men seated next to each other.

Directors. While the ADs could probably sit down and explain how the vision and mission inform their work, they need to be better coaches for ACs and Hall Directors, helping them to be develop as critical thinkers. This is particularly true specifically for Hall Directors, she says, who often come out of graduate school as dualistic thinkers who just want to be told what to do. “I think we're going to have to train people every time we have new folks coming in. And I think it's about their development, it's about maturity, it's about their moral development and processing through that for themselves. You know, if you're 24, 25 years old you're just solidifying who you are, your identity, you know, all of that.”

Noises of agreement circle the room and I wonder aloud if our conversation has any connection to the series of dialogues that have happened in the department about individuals feeling valued.

“I think it goes back to graduate school,” says Tracy, speaking quickly but carefully, as if she has been thinking about it for a while, but is voicing it here for the first time. Beyond basic knowledge, she says she has noticed a difference between the Hall Directors who have their master's degrees and those who don't, in their processing and world views. She hypothesizes it's because the graduate experience teaches master's students they are experts and can make decisions.

“And so, and then they come to us and it doesn't line up anymore. You see what I'm trying to get at? It then is, ‘Well there's so much to do with operations and not always time to implement new programs.’

“I don’t know if I want to let you off the hook that easily. I feel like I want direction. I feel like I’m spinning,” Jason continues, gesturing towards the myriad of documents on the table. “Are you saying you can’t do this?” he lays his right hand over the pyramid model of strategic planning.

Mac takes a breath, “I don’t think it’s a ‘can’t’, it’s what’s most effective. The challenge is to get it done and still balance autocratic and inclusive styles of leadership. I believe that when the process is turned over to a group, good things happen.” His exhale sounds a bit like a sigh. “It just takes time.”

(In)Conclusion

I cannot decide and have turned the music on and off several times. The commute usually goes faster distracted by lyrics and melodies but this morning nothing suits me. With every song, percussion or vocals, harmonies or bass, something grates against me and I am unable to relax into the drive. Music off, however, and the car is too silent, too empty. It does not take long to fill the space with nerve-wracking thoughts that press against my brain and set my pulse fluttering in my neck.

Two months have passed since my final official visit to the department of Residence Life. Most of that time I have spent immersed in the data, listening to and transcribing interviews, reviewing and writing notes, and struggling with how to turn multidimensional individuals and events into two dimensional words on a page. The idea

And nobody is asking your opinion all of the time like when you were in your grad program. And there’s something about, ‘Well, I have my master’s now so I know it all.’”

Real life experiences, Tracy says, is where master’s level Hall Directors learn what their degrees mean. “Because with the Hall Directors who don’t have their master’s, I don’t see any of that. I see them as saying, ‘Help me learn, help me grow, I want to be here. This is a great opportunity. What areas do I need to improve in?’ Where people with their master’s, there’s some kind of, I don’t know, some kind of door we have to get through first to help them, I don’t know. It’s just something recently that I’ve noticed and I’m really trying to, you know, wrap my head around. But there’s something there with the master’s degree. There is a difference.” ■

now of spending time with the flesh and blood people I have been thinking so obsessively about, all of us two months older and two months different, feels oddly intimidating. It is almost one year from the date I began my research.

Mac called Friday to ask if I would come facilitate an activity or two at the department's day-long, off-campus retreat that is a part of their annual August training. Today, Monday, I am traversing the familiar drive with a manila folder full of handouts and an outline for a workshop focused on creating dialogue around the spirit in which work is done. I've intentionally included a final concrete step creating an action plan to operationalize the meaning they make from the dialogue.

The thought "should I be doing this?" surfaces in the quiet. I am caught between wanting to give back, to express gratitude through the action of contributing something, and a sort of low grade and multifarious terror swirling around my purpose and ability to be successful today. Undulating tension about my role rises through my center. Can I cease to be the researcher and be only a consultant? Do I need to? Can I be both? I try to drown it out by cranking a track from the musical *Wicked* through the stereo.

"So I guess I would say the retreat was a cooker, you know, I felt some pressure internally from what was happening."

We are seated in Mac's office for what will be our last scheduled conversation and he is reflecting on the year and where to go from this point on. "What it told me is, they are more present with the idea of vision now. And, I also got the feeling that maybe we should start simple, and then I can inject complexity."

In our time together, Mac has spoken of struggling to find a way to help the group make meaning given the differences in how they each approach complexity. "So the image that comes to mind," he says, "is of a document on a computer, where it says 'Practice, Model, Philosophical Underpinnings, and then it has blue links where you can click and it goes to the site or to another document to explain, 'Here are the philosophical underpinnings of this.' Click. 'Here's how the model works, here's what it looks like.' Click. 'Here's the theory.'" He is tapping his finger on the table to illustrate each mouse click.

"Then the practical people can say, 'Here's what you do, and I just want to know that. That's all I want to do. But I know it's based on something, because I see the blue link thing.' And others might say, 'I tried it, it didn't work.' And I'll be able to say, 'Based on the underpinnings, what would you do differently?' 'I don't know, I didn't look at those.' 'Well, look at them

“I’m through accepting limits,” the vocalist sings,

“‘cause someone says they’re so...”

And what about the group’s perception of me? Will language I use regularly when working groups, such as “authenticity” or “showing up” feel like it has been chosen with my knowledge of them in mind? Will I even use that language today? Just as importantly, can I show up as authentic if my mind is overflowing with all these thoughts? I am racing inside.

The music crescendos and I turn it off mid-verse. Something like excitement bubbles up next to my apprehension. Annual training has always been one of my favorite times in the cyclical calendar of housing and residence life work. Additionally, the carrot Mac has dangled as a bonus for agreeing to come in on such short notice is the opportunity to watch him unveil the interactive model he began developing after the Leadership Team Retreat last February. The hyper linked document connects departmental practice to underlying theory and philosophies. It includes resources as broad as scholarly literature, campus and divisional missions, inventories and assessments, and popular literature

and let me know’ And then they can go and see how that practice is based on a theoretical underpinning. If it’s not working they can diagnose for themselves, ‘Well, then that would mean this would work, because that’s how it was constructed.’

“I’m going to separate it into the super complex—what I consider deep issues, the less complex but still abstract issues, and then the concrete ones. The complex, deep stuff I’m going to keep to myself for now. I’m going to bring out the mid stuff and the concrete stuff, because I noticed a lot of them are concrete learners. So they need to say, ‘What does that mean and what does that mean *for me*?’ So it was a fun insight to realize, ‘Wait! Let’s start with the most practical!’ Then, I’ll bring part of this deeper stuff in as it relates, but to me that’s where the fascination is, you know. To them, they’re like, ‘What do I do with this?’ So the common ground is in the middle. They don’t want to see all this other stuff.

“But if I were to question any of the staff, I could probably *elicit* the responses that the strategic plan, once it’s in writing, will be about. It’s already embedded in the staff.” Mac smiles broadly, “They just don’t know how to articulate it, I think, in a way where they know they know it. That’s what’s really fascinating to me! For instance, every now and then Jason will say something in a meeting and I think, ‘That’s what we’re talking about!’ But he doesn’t know that’s what we’re talking about. He says it, but he doesn’t get that it’s the strategic plan and it’s living through him, in what he’s doing. He’s making it happen!

recently read by the staff as part of professional development initiatives. It is not a static vision, but instead intended as a living document under

“And I’m not in a rush. I see genuine change is happening, so I don’t feel like I’m behind or the staff isn’t catching up. We’re doing great in a lot of ways.” ■

constant construction. Again, my mind shifts back to the tension between researcher and consultant, and I travel the rest of the way with an 80s mix pounding out of my speakers.

In deference to my erroneous sense of direction, Mac has offered to drive to the retreat site together. When I arrive at the office to meet him, I find the space has been transfigured. The imposing grey dividers are gone, replaced immediately inside the door with an inviting seating area of overstuffed couches and chairs in cheerful shades of purple and mauve. Along the windows, where Shannon’s unused desk once stood (office space away from the disruptive hustle and bustle was found for her midway through second semester last year) is a series of workstation “pods.” Like three-petaled flowers, the multiuse student desks face each other and are stocked with colorful supplies.

“I know!” Mac says when I greet him and marvel at the change and the warmth of the new space. His own office space is essentially unchanged, however, and the bare walls offer silent testimony to a schedule that continues to leave little space to contemplate finding something meaningful to fill them.

It is a relatively short ride to the retreat site, a University-owned science and nature center comprised of wide hallways filled with hands-on displays on everything from the flow of stream beds to the rotation of the stars. Our space for the day is a large second story room with comfortable chairs and a glass-walled, panoramic view of the surrounding wooded area and a jagged mountain backdrop. As the group arrives, there are faces I don’t recognize: staff newly hired after both expected and unanticipated changes

at every level of the organization. Lizbeth is gone and a new Area Coordinator has not yet been hired. During our last meeting in the tea shop she excitedly announced her plans to move to Alaska and pursue a master's degree in outdoor education, sharing the serendipitous story of how her heart led her to apply and everything just aligned to make it happen. Kirsten too is missing, having found a job at another institution with more responsibility than her Hall Director position here. I find myself wishing for a moment with Cass and Michael, wanting to speak to them about what Kirsten's departure means for them and their work, but the energy of the group won't allow it. Angela also will not be joining us, having dropped to a part time schedule. She is splitting her reduced time between Assistant Director responsibilities and working with Ann on special projects for the broader Housing and Dining division. A new AD has been hired and duties for all have been reexamined and redistributed. I am filled with questions about the changing dynamic, fresh perspectives, unforeseen gaps, and what meaning the new members have made about the department in their first few weeks. I am also being introduced by Mac and, as he turns the group over to me, all my queries fall away in order to focus on facilitation.

The morning goes quickly despite the amount of alone time I have while waiting for the assembly to work through discussion in dyads and small groups. As I watch the group, the body language and postures, and hear snippets of dialogue, I cannot help but make a mental record of what to jot down later. I'm uncertain in this moment how I might use the notes, but the idea of needing them and not having them later seems like an easy error to avoid. Cass' voice rises above the others, commenting to her discussion group that she does not have enough information based on the instructions I have given to successfully do the activity, so I make my way to her side of the room to provide some

clarity. What feels like moments later, the small groups are reporting back to each other about commitments for the upcoming year. I collect the marker-covered newsprint with promises to type up the ideas and return them to Mac for distribution to the group. My time is done and I settle, at least a little relieved, into a participant-observer role, happy to catch up with Eva on the walk to the cafeteria for lunch and chat with other staff over nondescript casseroles, crinkle-cut carrot sticks, and overcooked green beans.

After lunch it is Mac's turn and we gather in a smaller adjoining room where the shades can be drawn. The group converges around a conference table and overflows across the back of the room, lining the windows to lean against the ledge or sitting on the floor, backs against the wall. Mac is readying his presentation, seated at the smart module at the front of the room, when someone dims the incandescent cans above us, setting faces aglow in the refracted light of the LCD projector.

Mac laughs at being left in the darkness in his corner of the room, and assures the group what he has prepared won't take long. The demonstration is just a preview of the model and his intent is to spend more time with it later, making meaning of it as a group. As he begins to share his hopes for how the living document will be used, with everyone contributing to it as it grows, Mac rises to stand in front of the console. Outwardly he is relaxed, but something in his glance towards me conveys an eager nervousness. "There is a story," he says to the group, rubbing the palm of his hand gently with his opposite thumb, "of an acorn planter that some of you have heard me tell. I'd like to share it with you all now:

During World War II, a young Private stationed in France was injured in a battle and became separated from his unit..."

CHAPTER V

CECI N'EST PAS UN CHAPITRE CINQ

The Cat only grinned when it saw Alice. It looked good-natured, she thought: still it had very long claws and a great many teeth, so she felt that it ought to be treated with respect.

“Cheshire Puss,” she began, rather timidly, as she did not at all know whether it would like the name: however, it only grinned a little wider.... “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?”

“That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat.

(Carroll, 1865, chapter 6)

Prologue

We spent two weeks every summer at my grandparents' house in St. Joseph, Missouri. The visit was our annual family vacation, and, I came to realize as we got older, also served as a small break for my grandfather, who was my grandmother's sole caregiver most of the year. Though I have seen photos of her walking with a cane, I cannot conjure any memories where she was not in a wheelchair or did not have a serving tray on the dining room hutch filled with medications in amber vials of various sizes. She suffered from polycythemia and thrombocythemia, both rare blood diseases, the complications of which left her victim to cancers, broken bones, organ failures, and strokes, as well as many equally as harrowing medical treatments.

How did I end up here, frozen, watching my cursor blink like a heartbeat against the screen with hands that would rather lie folded in my lap than disturb the mouse or keyboard? Is this how chapter four started, all blank pages and burning retinas, while I ferreted about searching for somewhere to begin? (Is this how it always starts, with agony and doubt, all erased by the amnesia of a written page?) How can I tell you what this means, if I do not believe that I can

Given her fragile state and the incompatible rambunctiousness of children, it
tell you what this means? I cannot tell you what this
never took longer than a day or two for my brothers and I to be banished from the air
means.
conditioned comfort of the living room to play outside. Mornings were fine, the backyard
Why do I do this—make plans like mental
shaded and cool for a few hours, but by mid-day the heat and humidity left the three
gauntlets to be run? Propose things I don't know how
of us listless and exhausted on the screened-in patio, our small, sweaty bodies sticking
to do? I fool them all with well turned phrases and
uncomfortably to the plastic cushions of the wrought iron outdoor furniture. By the
texts that speak with confidence I do not feel. "And for
afternoon, my brothers frequently had an invitation to play in the house of the boy whose
my next trick..." I am a wizard behind a curtain. I am a
fenced-in yard butted up against the back of my grandparents' lot (his name escapes me
magician running out of sleeves.
now, but I do recall he had a cocker spaniel named Tarzan). Banished a second time by
"Chapter V," I type and then tap, tap, tap delete.
virtue of my gender and too antsy to sit quietly in the house, I often spent my afternoons
I am well-read. I know the voice that goes here. "Im-
at the top of the enormous magnolia tree in the front yard hoping either for a breeze
plications for practitioners include..." I am well-trained.
or that my grandfather would see me if he came outside. He too was often exiled from
How easily I could be seduced into tidying this all up
the living room, expelled to the porch if he wanted to chew tobacco or whittle sticks.
with summary themes and bullet points. What does
Grandpa was a trickster, full of stories and mischief, and always good for an afternoon's
this mean for practitioners? Write it and be done. Done!
diversion. During our annual visits he would build backyard swings or carve willow
Everyday they give Ph.D.s away for less. (Will someday
whistles from sappy branches we had broken from a neighbor's tree at his direction. He
someone say, "They gave her a Ph.D. for this!") And yet
once made us an incredible slingshot using the rubbery straps that were supposed to hold
I cannot do it. It hurts me somewhere inside to try. I do
my grandmother's catheter bag in place.
not know what a postmodern chapter five looks like,
"“What are you doing up there, monkey?” he said one day, tilting his face up
but I know what it does not look like.
so I could see the green seed company logo on his yellow-mesh baseball hat, his face
"Chapter V," I begin again...
twisted into a squint so he could see me against the sun. His fingers were hooked into his
suspenders and his belly made a round shadow on the ground.

“Why is it so hot, Grandpa?” I whined, laying my head against the cool tree trunk.

He hung his head momentarily, before disappearing into the garage. Minutes later he backed out his pea green El Torino, dropping it into park to idle at the end of the drive.

“Well?” he said, standing at the hinge of his open car door, his arm draped across the white vinyl car top. He had stopped to exchange his ball cap for a straw fedora, which meant he was headed into town.

“What?” I called back.

“Get in the car! I’ve got gum.” He climbed back in and slammed his door as I scrambled to the ground. Gum, a treat forbidden at home was always an enticement. Plus, if Grandpa was running errands, it almost always meant a stop at the local dairy (a store he called “the Milk House”) and an ice cream cone for whichever grandchild was lucky enough to be along for the ride.

The interior of the immaculate car was ice cold and always smelled like Grandpa, of Vitalis hair oil and Juicy Fruit gum. To my surprise, we didn’t go to the Milk House, or the grocery store, or the bakery—all standard destinations for my grandfather. After a short drive he pulled the car to a stop along side an empty city park with an unbroken view of the horizon, rolled down the electric windows, surveyed the sky through the wind shield and commanded, “There, watch right there.” He pointed to an anemic, wispy cloud in the distance, one of several that hung languidly in the sky.

“Grandpa—”

He interrupted me with a tut-tut, and grabbed my sunburnt chin, turning it away from him, back toward the cloud. “Keep watching,” he said.

We spent a chunk of the afternoon watching the cloud slowly disappear, rolling steadily into and out of itself and evaporating at its lacy edges like a doily unraveling. He told me stories of water and sunshine as we contemplated the cloud's shrinking girth; accounts of farming cool rich top soil in the early mornings that became unbearable by afternoon, tall tales of huge fish that got away because a storm rolled in over the Missouri river, mythic yarns of dusty minor league baseball games where he played so hard in the hot Kansas sun his tongue stuck to the roof of his mouth, and simple reports of being grateful for the shelter of leafy shade trees after a long day painting church steeples. He also peppered me with questions. Had I ever dug a deep hole? How much water had I drank today? Did I see how the world looked fuzzy and wavy farther down the black topped road? Why did I climb to the top of the magnolia in the afternoons and hide under the leaves and branches?

"Have you ever seen that before?" he asked, as the last of the cloud vanished from sight. He reached into his shirt pocket and produced a single stick of gum, tore it across the middle and handed me half.

I shook my head. As a fifth grader, it had never occurred to me to look at clouds that way. I popped the gum in my mouth and returned the crumpled foil and yellow wrapper to Grandpa who promptly stuffed it back in his pocket to keep from cluttering the interior. He turned the key and the car roared to life, coughing musty air through the vents until the air conditioning kicked in and we drove back toward home, stopping at the Milk House for a gallon of 2% and a scoop of praline and caramel ice cream.

"You didn't get anything done today, Grandpa," I said, wiping my face with a wadded napkin on the way back across the parking lot to the El Torino.

“Well,” he began, placing his hand over mine and pulling my cone towards him to lick melting rivulets before they dribbled down my fist, “you were the one who had to know why it was so hot. Now,” he pulled a stack of napkins from his pocket and wrapped them around the bottom of my cone, “get in the car.”

* * *

There were more car excursions on other summer visits, such as expeditions to strangers’ farmland to hunt for whirling dust devils in hopes of discovering how they formed, or trips that progressed from cemetery to cemetery in search of rhyme or reason in the placement and purpose of headstones—and the religious beliefs that might reflect. My grandfather, while full of information, was never one to give absolutes or definitive answers on the matter at hand. Though sometimes maddening (“Come *on*, Grandpa! Just *tell* me!”), there was power in puzzling things out myself and, as a result, in knowing not only what I thought about things like the water cycle and weather, but also why I thought them. My understanding was embedded in an awareness of the rich contexts of stories, in my own experiences, and in the conversations my grandfather initiated with journeys of meaning making most often beginning with four small words: “Get in the car.”

I know the “rules” of producing research, of constructing publishable reports detailing how and what knowledge was generated. I know how to categorize findings into distinct themes and how to provide literature as reference points, positioning the new knowledge in relationship to existing research to make meaning for the reader. As a practitioner, I know I counted on distinct themes and research with easily consumable, brief, and summative formats (Kezar, 2000) to meet the limitations of my time and my busy life. Synthesis and bullet points are nice too (Kezar), and I confess, I’ve done it.

I've skimmed the front of research articles, only to flip to the findings and implications to get to what "matters" (perhaps much like one might flip to a dissertation's fifth chapter). Yet, if "the form of representation one uses has something to do with the form of understanding one secures" (Eisner, 2001, p. 139), is there not reason to be cautious?

Placing this study in a postmodern framework means we cannot confine dialogue over how knowledge is being generated to the discussion of methodology in chapter three. Even in qualitative inquiry, where researcher objectivity is not the intent,

"...the patterns of epistemology can help us decipher the patterns of our lives. Its images of the knower, the known, and their relationship are formative in the way an educated person not only thinks but acts. The shape of our knowledge becomes the shape of our living; the relation of the knower to the known becomes the relation of the living self to the larger world. And how could it be otherwise? We have no self apart from our knowledge of the self, no world apart from our knowledge of the world. The way we interact with the world in knowing it becomes the way we interact with the world as we live in it. To put it in somewhat different terms, our epistemology is quietly transformed into our ethic. The images of self and world that are found at the heart of our knowledge will also be found in the values by which we live our lives."

(Palmer, 1993, p. 210)

it is difficult
to ignore the
whispers (or
shouts) from the

"Research words, figures, and tables are not the experiences or objects they represent. Nor are they long the offspring of the researcher. For immediately on release, they become creations also of the reader, differing from reader to reader, yet carrying common genetic threads. The researcher influences what the reader will create....In research as in all communication, all representations are, at least to a degree, misrepresentation...representation differs from reality. Just as Magritte's [pipe] is not a real [pipe], researcher's expectations are not the real [educational] settings. Researchers create new meanings, often treating the constructed meanings as superior to the trace of the direct encounter, calling the new meanings 'underlying variables,' 'theoretical constructs,' or 'interactions.' At first, these fictions may be taken for what they are, *surrogates*, but gradually the persevering ones assume their own reality."

(Stake & Kerr, 1995, p. 58-59)

world at large insisting "truth is out there" (Denzin, Lincoln, & Giardina, 2006) or deny how that pervasive world view might have an impact on the manner in which concise and summative research is consumed. Though we may be discerning as perusers of research, we are susceptible to a sort of dualism where ideas matching our frameworks are accepted and those that do not are rejected without exploring

the tacit infrastructures from which we determine our “truth” and the power that holds those infrastructures in place (Denzin et al.).

To frame this study as postmodern is to examine our frameworks and assumptions as we go on a journey seeking to evoke dialogue rather than provide answers around creating change in a higher education organization; attempting problem setting as opposed to problem solving as an outcome (Stake & Kerr, 1995). We cannot think differently about creating change, without considering how change might look different (St. Pierre, 1997).

Here, chapter five is an attempt to create grey by questioning those things we take for granted in terms of the purposes, processes, and effects of research (Clough, 2002) and to not only acknowledge the messiness of creating change, but the messiness

“...we must learn to live in the middle of things, in the tension of conflict and confusion and possibility; and we must become adept at making do with the messiness of that condition and at finding agency within rather than assuming it in advance of the ambiguity of language and cultural practice. In addition, we must be on the lookout for each other as we negotiate meaning and create new descriptions of the world. We can never get off the hook by appealing to transcendental Ethics. We are always on the hook, responsible, everywhere, all the time.”

(St. Pierre, 1997, p. 176-77)

of consuming the research of creating change. The process is messy because exploring

“What is truth? What is evidence? What counts as evidence? How is evidence evaluated? ...How is evidence to be represented? How is evidence to be discounted or judged to be unreliable, false, or incorrect? What is a fact? What is intelligence? What are the different discourses—education, law, medicine, history, cultural or performance studies—that define evidence?”

(Pring, 2004, p. 203)

the implications of how participants in the study made meaning, by necessity must also be an expedition into our own meaning making. To read the text, to be “in” the text, is to be in relationship with participants (Stake & Kerr, 1995) and engaged in ways that demand we acknowledge how we are a part of rather

than a part from their experiences around change (Palmer, 1993).

Just as knowing the “rules” of art is prerequisite to breaking them (Spence, 1997), so too here it is my intent to break the rules of chapter fives that would have me tidy up a year of research into easily consumable “bites” of implications and “to do” lists. By continuing to skirt the edges of narrative in providing theoretical context, the aim is to create space that, like Magritte’s and his pipe discussed in chapter three, both invites the reader (you) into the dialogue as well as disrupts and troubles the traditional discourses (Stake & Kerr, 1995) of higher education, student affairs, and housing and residence life.

“While some have characterized the complexity of postmodernism as leading to an abyss, the use of postmodern theory does not mean there is nothing to say or do or hold on to. Many postmodern researchers forefront the necessity of continuing to do our work even while making visible the myriad of ways such work is (un)graspable, (im)possible, (un)intelligible, (un)knowable, and provisional. This is not a failure of postmodernism—this *is* the work of postmodernism.”

(Pillow, 2000, p. 22)

Now...get in the car.

Making Meaning of Making Meaning

The afternoon sun is bright after the dim recesses of my most recent favorite coffee shop. A maze of rooms, the coffee house, which clearly once was an actual house, is full of nooks and corners—each perfect for a day of writing when it is important to be out in the world but not bothered by it. My cell phone, denied a signal for hours inside the shop, pings unexpectedly announcing new voicemail. In a single move that is both Pavlovian and Barnum-Bailey-esque, I swing my computer, messenger bag, and heavy tote of books to the same shoulder and cantilever myself by leaning in the opposite direction so I can reach into my pocket and retrieve my phone. (To think, I used to mock a friend, who, when in the final stages of her Ph.D., traveled place to place with a rolling cart filled with research, an ergonomic keyboard, and various small household

comforts like some sort of dissertation sherpa.) A Wisconsin number I do not recognize is scrolling across the small screen. I am surprised to hear Lizbeth's voice speaking with polite Midwest excitement in my ear. She has returned to the continental 48 states after her year-long degree program in Alaska, is currently visiting her parents near Milwaukee, and would love to speak with me if I have the time. "Thanks so much, Pamela!" she says brightly, and, after quickly rattling off her number, promptly hangs up the phone.

* * *

"What I appreciated about it was that you could take yourself right there, you could be in the room. That's what I liked about it," Alys says, speaking about what struck her after reading chapter four. I have sent drafts out to a network of study participants and colleagues alike, asking for feedback and reactions and Alys has been kind enough to not only read it, but also to meet to talk with me.

I find a quote from Carroll's Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and, for inspiration, type it below my lonely title, "Chapter V." Perhaps I can fool myself into thinking I have the momentum of half a written page. My mind is circling, thinking everything and nothing, all possibility and little progress.

A full-time practitioner and Ph.D. candidate, Alys has a long career in housing and higher education. She has worked at Research Extensive universities across the Midwest and is currently the Director of Student Support Services at a midsized public institution in the western United States. Both reflective and an external processor, as talk it seems Alys is thinking aloud as she speaks, raising her eyebrows in surprise or squinting with more focused thought as ideas occur to her.

What is it I'm doing? I think of Mac, and in a self-indulgent moment wonder if the oscillating doubt and excitement I feel trying to create something here in front of the computer—uniquely mine and true to who I am, but for and connected to and dependent on others all the same—is anything at all like his process of leading change? Does this feel anything like how it is for him? Slowly puzzling things out rather than forging forcefully ahead? Being pulled in so many

"While I may not have been a part of these specific conversations," she goes on, "if you've worked in housing, you can imagine those types of conversations and interactions took place. And also it's very real in terms of what the different types of people are thinking – different, meaning their backgrounds and the places where they're coming from, because it is diverse in that sort of way—I appreciated that a lot."

It is late and we are meeting in the only open venue we could find, a 24-hour Starbucks. Seated in overstuffed faux velvet easy chairs, the darkness outside has turned the window next to us into a chiaroscuro mirror. Out of the corner of my eye, like an out of body experience, I can see us each holding our drinks with both hands and leaning forward ever so slightly to better hear over the alternative-techno beat being pumped through the speaker in the ceiling above us.

“I also felt like—and obviously I don’t know Mac at all—but I like that he came through whole and real.”

“What do you mean?” I ask.

Alys raises her index finger to hold the conversation while she sips her tea before responding. “I like that he came through as not perfect and that you were honest about that and were questioning things in places. What I *really* liked was that it also seemed like he was questioning things too. I liked that a lot. That felt more real to me. When you first talked about him in the beginning, you know, I thought ‘Oh, here we go. Either he’s some kind of miracle worker or this is going to be some glamorized version of what really happened.’ But it wasn’t that way at all. It was *very* real and what was really nice about the whole thing was the internal and external conflict that was there resonated all the way through. So I liked that piece of it a lot.”

I smile at the word “resonated” and wonder if Alys has read anything on portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997) in preparation for her own research. From a methodology perspective resonance deals with how believable and authentic the portrait feels to the reader. Her use of the word is a small gift, intentional or not, and I make a mental note to be sure to include it in chapter five.

“I am curious about what Mac’s going to think about it. I’m just curious what he’s going to feel about it, in that it’s a pretty—we talk a lot about authenticity and being open, but we’re rarely that—I mean, think about what he went through. I think that could be a whole additional piece, that conversation between you and him. He really opened himself up. Like, talk about leadership! That’s pretty huge. Agreeing to do this is pretty huge! Because that’s a pretty naked picture of yourself. You get to see him and really think about him and what leadership is—who does that? Who spends time with a leader that way.” Alys laughs, and runs her hand through her hair. “Because I get caught on those CNN *Revealed* shows, where they do biographies on public figures. I think it’s so funny how fake those things are. Revealed to who? What are you revealing?”

“Right,” I add, “just a mask below a mask.”

“Yeah! But he really did it. And I think—wow—I don’t know if I’d even be willing to do that. How would I feel about that? I’d like to say ‘Oh yeah, then I’d learn a lot about myself.’ But that—it’s big.” Alys pauses, breathing deeply and exhaling like a sigh, “It’s big to do that.”

* * *

“Hi!”

An instant messaging box pops onto the corner of my computer screen with a startling but cheerful *ting!* It’s late, and I had forgotten I was still logged in to my account.

“I can’t believe you’re up!” Eva types, before I can respond.

“I’m writing,” I explain, checking the time. It’s 2:40am.

“Urg! :(I’m at work.”

It is 8:40am in Morocco I calculate, and pause to think about all that Eva has been through since her decision to move to North Africa eight months ago, shortly after I had seen her at the August mountain retreat. Visa and paperwork issues kept her husband from re-entering the U.S. and with barely a moment’s hesitation Eva resigned her position at the University, packed her belongings, and crossed the ocean to be with him. They are still trying to work out what happened and Eva keeps a weekly blog chronicling their legal tribulations as well as her adventures working for a Moroccan university and living in a Muslim country.

We chat about her new job as the executive assistant to the president and how impressed they

“I think my first reaction was ‘Wow, I can actually read this!’” Vince laughs, breaking a piece of bread from the loaf the waiter has just placed on the table and dipping it into a plate of infused olive oil. “Because at first, when you asked, I was like, ‘Yeah, I’ll do this because I like you, but I’m afraid it may be painful.’ So I think it’s interesting, because I read it as more of a story.”

I have known Vince for years after working together at a large Midwestern institution in different student affairs offices. I’m grateful he has made the time for a dinner conversation, making special arrangements to travel in order to meet me. He is the Director of a University Union but began his vocational life in corporate U.S., returning for a master’s in higher education in his early thirties. Always up for good dialogue, Vince is both good-natured and brazen, laughing often and peppering his speech with exclamations or arguing points as a way to deconstruct and question what he himself believes. We have settled in at one of his favorite restaurants and, as he recommends starters and talks to our waiter

are with her knowledge of student development theory and universities. Her master’s degree is a welcomed novelty and Eva shares they are finding more and more for her to do outside traditional executive assistant duties. She asks how I am doing, if I have seen anyone she knows recently, and says how much she misses the bagels at the small off-campus shop where we used to meet. Eva types as quickly and energetically as I remember her speaking, with rapid-fire sentences all ending in exclamation marks or emoticons. While there certainly have been struggles the past few months she says she sees the experience as an opportunity to learn.

“It also has made me grateful,” she says, “for so many things, here and at home. Speaking of home, I’m done with your chapter. Finished it last night.”

“Oh?” I ask, as cautiously as one can when typing on a keyboard. I sent a draft of chapter four to several participants, mostly those who had asked about it during my visits, and Eva is the first to respond. While I am dying to know, I am also nervous to hear what she thinks. How would I feel to read a part of my life reflected back to me in imperfect fragments?

“I LOVE it! It makes me miss it so much!”

“Whew! :)”

“lol! Seriously, I love the way you explained people and places. You did a very good job articulating people’s mannerisms and personalities—and they sounded like them!”

about the specials, I find myself looking forward to an evening of banter and ideas.

“I don’t read a lot of dissertations,” he says, “and from my experience doing the thesis, you know, it was all about me and not about the reader. It’s all about copying the same language from different charts over and over again. So it’s like, why in the hell would you ever read that?” He laughs, making a face implying the absolute absurdity of such a thought. “And I appreciated the story because I thought you did a good job of—it doesn’t seem to paint a picture of right or wrong, which is where my mind is trained to go in terms of the black and white dichotomy of either they’re doing it right or they’re doing it wrong. And it’s clearly more complex than that. Like, yes, they’re doing it right *and* they’re doing it wrong,” he chuckles and then pauses for a moment, becoming serious. “I would probably say the potential lasting thing for me after reading this though, is I think it shook my confidence a little in terms of what I’m doing.”

After a moment, when it is clear he will not continue without prompting, I ask, “What do you mean?”

“Well, they don’t call it transcription for nothing.”

“;)”

“Anything else strike you, reading it or thinking about it afterwards?”

There is a slight pause and I can imagine Eva tilting her head to think for a moment before going on. “I enjoyed reading Mac’s piece. It helped me understand what messages he was sending to ADs and ACs. And then how they came down to us as Hall Directors.”

“*Eva is typing...*” the screen tells me, a signal that a long reply is coming, compared to the staccato sentences instant messaging usually produces. I take that moment to back up what I have written this evening on my hard drive and a flash drive and also somewhere out in cyberspace.

A full paragraph of Eva’s thoughts pops into the small IM window. “I’ve been thinking and thinking about it. I didn’t know anything about the previous director or what the department had been through. That explained some of the resistance that I had seen in the staff, especially the 3 Hall Directors who had been there the longest. It sounds like that director’s style was very much ‘do it this way’ and that’s not Mac’s style at all. Not even close. I wish I had known.”

“What?”

“More about what had happened.”

“Why?”

“I think it makes me see them differently. They could be so frustrating. Maybe I could have done something different, thought dif-

“Um, how little meaning I take time to make. So the reality is, we do concerts and comedy really,” he says, speaking about the major programming his Union sponsors on campus, “and so there’s a part of me that’s fearful of looking at, reflecting on, how much impact we really have on students, on development. I mean, I certainly do other things on campus. But are we really doing something meaningful in the Union or are we just the entertainers and is that enough?”

Vince sighs, “So here we are, half way through the semester, you know, and we’ve just rushed through and you’re just trying to keep your head above water. And there was one point somebody in the story talked about—I made little notes as I went—‘Oh, we’ll get it organized and we’ll be better next year.’ And I feel like that’s my entire career! ‘Oh, it will be better next year.’ So you have a staff member leave and that changes things, or, you know, you can say ‘Oh, I’m still in my second year here.’ So there’s always some reason why it isn’t this year. So part of what I took from it is the importance of making meaning of these things. And I don’t know if that was your intent or not. I kind of assume, knowing you, that if you have a researcher’s

ferently maybe about things if I had known the whole story. Not gotten as upset, at least, ‘cause they maybe had reason to be the way they were.”

“Hmmm. That seems insightful to me.”

“Do you have anymore on the ADs?” she asks.

“What more would you want to know?”

“It just seemed like they were the group that wasn’t mentioned much. It feels like a hole there. Maybe you had a reason for that?”

“Not consciously. Oh...that’s good feedback. Hmm. That could be my issue though...I was an AD when I left my last institution, and maybe that had an impact...either I saw myself or my peers in them. I’ll have to think about that. ”

“You should go to bed. And I should go to work.”

“Good call.”

“Send it to me again if you add anything. Could you send me chapters 1-3 too?”

“They aren’t written like 4.”

“I know. But I want to read them. See how you got to 4.”

“Okay, but be careful what you wish for! :)” I caution her.

“Great! You have a good morning. Get to bed!”

“You have a good morning too... get to work! :) Take care.”

“You too. ttyl” ■

bias, that is part of it. I mean is that even a question? So, does it really matter if you make meaning or do you just do what you need to do?"

His question reminds me of a lecture I went to earlier in the month. "Parker Palmer was on campus a few weeks ago, and what did he say? It's a great quote," I share, searching the small notebook I carry with me. "You know, the whole idea of an unexamined life is not worth living?"

"Right."

"Palmer said 'If you choose to live an unexamined life, please do not take a job involving other people.'" Like the audience the night of the lecture (Palmer, September 23, 2008), we chuckle at the thought, mostly I imagine because it feels so true.

"So that's interesting," Vince goes on, pondering the quote. "The idea of self knowledge I'm a little more comfortable with, but I think I externalize the idea of

Sensemaking has been defined as the "making of sense" (Weick, 1995), where significance is ascribed to an event, object, or stimulus by situating it in a developed or emerging cognitive framework (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988). However, Pratt and Ashforth (2003), who explore meaning and meaningfulness at work, are quick to point out that the meaning assigned in the process of sensemaking does not automatically make that something *meaningful*. Meaning(fulness)-making is seen "as a subset of sensemaking: it is sensemaking in the service of answering a broader existential question about the purpose of one's existence" (Pratt & Ashford, p. 311) and helps to answer the question "Why am I here?"

In organizations, sensemaking is a social endeavor where meaningfulness is constructed within groups

making meaning."

"Externalize?"

"Like, how well am I reading those cues from others, in terms of making that meaning. I think I'm more comfortable with the idea of self knowledge, of examining my own motivations or that sort of thing."

"And that's not meaning making?" I wonder.

"It's not the way I was thinking about it. Yes, it probably is, but as I was reading through this," he says, tapping the cover page of the manuscript he has set on the table beside him, "there were different

of individuals in project teams, departments, and divisions (Weick, 1995). As a result of this social information processing, individuals tend to resolve doubt by “triangulating on a limited set of meanings” where the “resulting consensus serves to ‘validate’ the set: social speculation becomes social fact” (Pratt & Ashforth, p. 311).

Because of the social constructive nature of sensemaking, Pratt and Ashforth (2003) contend that if and how members perceive their work as meaningful can be influenced and facilitated by the organization. Also, they believe sensemaking from a Western European perspective is irrevocably tied to identity (Pratt & Ashford; Weick 1995) because the ability to answer the question “Why am I here?” is grounded in the question “Who am I?”

Consequently, organizations can then encourage meaning(fulness)-making *at work* by enhancing factors that positively impact worker identity, or in other words, help to define where we belong and how we relate to others. Pratt and Ashforth (2003) go on to suggest two interdependent sets of practices to that end, one focused on advancing the organizational goals, values, and beliefs, and a second centered on changing members’ relationships to one another. They also advocate fostering meaningfulness *in working* with practices that nurture work as a calling. Callings frame one’s work as simultaneously valuable from a societal perspective and also an expression of one’s authentic self. ■

parts where I think I even wrote in the margin, ‘How did you know this?’ Like being able to see the light in somebody else’s eyes change. And I think, okay, do I pick up those cues? So I don’t know if I make meaning that way. When my staff are responding to me or me to them, how well am I reading those cues from others, in terms of making that meaning? I was thinking more of that idea of meaning making as sort of that relationships piece and how we interact with others.”

“I think Palmer called it relational trust,” I offer.

“Yeah, that piece of ‘How well am I attending to those things?’”

“I wonder too if those things are related, the way you’re framing them, self knowledge and meaning making?”

“Right, right.” Vince says, nodding.

“I think it’s sort of interesting that we pride ourselves on how we can poke students and they should be making meaning...”

“Right!” Vince interjects.

“...but how many times have you ever been in a meaning making organization?”

“Or,” Vince adds, “we make the assumption that we’re educated enough that we no longer need to make meaning—”

“Or we’re in this white water and we just don’t have time to do that—”

“Or that we’re developed enough.” Vince goes on to tell a story about trying to engage his staff in planning development sessions for the year. “I’m struggling right now with how to provide what my staff needs. I want to provide professional development, I do, but I’ve also said, ‘Hey, I need your help.’ And it feels like one Assistant Director in particular keeps coming back and saying ‘When are you going to do something about this?’ So that part where Mac talked about trying to empower other people, through the rest of it there was almost a sense of them not—like, I’m not convinced people want to be empowered, want to be developed. Well, that sounds harsh.” Vince shakes his head, his frustration evident. “But sometimes I do think they want it done for them or just want it to be a right answer or a task.”

“Do you think that could be more of a fear-based reaction? ‘If you do it or just tell me what to do, then I don’t have to take responsibility for it, especially if it fails.’ So is it more about getting the fear out of your organization before it can be about empowering?” I ask.

“Right. ‘I don’t want to put myself out there.’ Sure, probably. And I just think, we’ve certainly convinced ourselves that we work too much and these

The transition from modern to more complex postmodern organizations has three specific and interdependent ramifications on the people who are a part of those organizations (Hirschhorn, 1997). First, the ability to make good decisions collectively and individually requires “more information, insight, and intelligence...both daily and over the long run” (Hirschhorn, p. 3). Second, where once “doing” characterized work, postmodern organizations require a focus on thinking and mind work. Finally, rather than engaging in rote tasks, individuals are instead required to make more decisions.

Additionally, where suppressing doubt and ambivalence in the single-minded pursuit of one’s goals was the modern workers’ ideal, postmodern organizations require individuals who see doubt or not knowing as a motive for learning and are willing to be vulnerable to one another and take risks in order to learn from experience (Hirschhorn, 1997).

are really busy jobs, which is what I read in here.

And of course I'm thinking 'Like housing people

are any busier than anybody else?' But then I know

Ting!

"Hey!" pops up in the window of my instant messenger program next to a photo avatar. It is a picture of a puppy, a miniature breed small enough for a tiny Moroccan apartment.

"Hey Eva! How are you?"

"Good! Guess what?"

"What?"

"They asked me to teach a class next quarter."

"Congratulations!"

"I'm so excited! Scared, but excited too." Eva shares that the course will be directed towards first year students, to help them make the transition to university life. She wonders if student development theory will "work" in Morocco. "I guess I'll find out!"

"There's an article in there somewhere." I tell her.

"Maybe someday. :) I wanted to tell you I liked the additions you made to the chapter—the AD parts."

"That's good to hear. I feel better about it too. Thanks for pointing out that hole in the story."

"Reading it, do you think change is happening there? Don't you think?"

"What do you think? :)," I reply, delaying my answer by turning her

we do the same

thing," Vince rubs

his scruffy chin

thoughtfully, "and

so there's a part

of me that thinks,

is it really that

way or is that part of what we make? I mean, if you

say it enough it doesn't matter what reality is because

the perception eventually is going to become the

reality. It's hard for me to quantify that, but I know

we feel really busy and *feel* really swamped. So how

do we want to engage in development, in meaning

making, if it does feel like that? And I get the not

needing one more thing, you know. So is that just an

attitude change? Do we need an attitude change? I

don't know."

We pause to order our meal from our waiter,

Todd, who has been lurking politely around our table

trying to both do his job and not interrupt us. It is

However, the transition from modern to the postmodern creates what Hirschhorn calls hidden psychological injuries. Modern rigidity depersonalized roles and relationships and protected workers from the conflicting emotions that are a part of true interdependence and vulnerability. Basic human emotions such as passion, insecurity, joy, and anger which were once suppressed in the modern system may now be left unaddressed, organizationally and individually. The impact of these unaddressed emotions may be inappropriate coping by individuals who frame peers, supervisors, supervisees, or another department, as major threats to their security and, more notably, their identity (Hirschhorn). ■

question around, a strategy Eva has noticed in the past, calling it “being research-y.”

“How did I know you were going to say that? :) I do think change is happening—slowly. I say slowly because it would be too difficult to create long lasting change quickly—it would be hard to get everyone on board. I’m at work, hold on a minute.”

There is a lull in our exchange and I imagine Eva responding to some request from the president or replying to an email in his name. I wonder if culturally the pace of organizations is different there and what sort of change issues a higher education institution deals with 5,000 miles from here.

“There was a lot of talk going on about vision and mission while I was there,” Eva continues, sentences popping to the screen in rapid succession as she hits return after each completed thought. “I think Mac is sharing the vision he has for the department and slowly it is filtering down. It felt like Mac and the ADs maybe too, were trying to get all of us understanding what the vision was and where we were going. They didn’t want us to just memorize it, they wanted us to feel it, understand it, and know how to implement it into our everyday work without us having to ask for their permission, like ‘Is this how I should do it?’ They seemed to want it individualized within our everyday work, so everyone could understand the big picture goal and find their own way to work towards it. Anyway, those are my thoughts on the matter!”

“I agree with you.” I type. “I do think change is happening.”

quiet for a moment, as we unwrap the silverware from our carefully folded napkins and lay them across our laps.

* * *

“If I would have read the exact same chapter four years ago, it would have been different, obviously, very different for me than when I read it this past summer,” says Agnes, her voice crackling over the computer speakers, “because of where Jody is at professionally and me being on the outside of it but being able to look in and watch those dynamics play out. And it felt very parallel to me right now, in a lot of ways, to Jody’s experience.”

Agnes’ head is bobbing emphatically in the small box on my screen. After working together nearly a decade ago as Hall Directors, video web chats are the newest way we have found to keep in touch. We both followed a career path in housing and residence life, but where my arc found me focusing on leadership development, Agnes’s passions led her to do social justice work. Her partner, Jody, is the interim Director of Residence Life at mid-sized public institution out East and has been working with

"I thought you might! Hey, I am still reading Chapters 1-3... I read a little bit here and there when I get a chance :) It's bringing back lovely memories of APA! haha ;)"

"lol"

"Hope all is well! I've got to get going. Take care!"

"You too!" ■

the challenges of an inherited staff accustomed to a different leadership style.

"And honestly," Agnes goes on, though I've

never known her to be anything but, "Jody was on

a small upswing at that point too, with the group

dynamics when I was reading it, where Mac was

trying to infuse a different sort of philosophy, a different way of being. I saw that Jody was trying to work towards that. And so for me it was a mirror kind of—a mirror image of what's going on here. And, quite honestly, it's a mirror image of how I've experienced and seen a lot of organizations. So I think that the story that you unfold is a very common story. And it's a very common story that most of us don't hear. The way you laid it out, as I was thinking about the boxes or the middle part of the narrative, is that if you think about how you sectioned it out, it's like okay, so what I'm reading here, does this person over here know this? You know? Were they taking that time with each other, in that same space, after having this interrelated relationship with you, I wonder? What conversations were they having about their conversations with you afterward and did that actually help them to hear each other's stories differently or not?"

Agnes pauses to drink coffee out of a giant ceramic mug. Her family is out today running weekend errands. "The rest of us are relaxing," she says, turning her laptop around so I can see her dog Murphy curled up, half asleep on the couch next to her.

"So, you know the part," I say, shifting our conversation, "where one of the ADs quotes Susan Komives—who is actually quoting Vaill—but that part about working in white water? Well the second part, Vaill—and Komives—says, is that as a result of the

white water, we need to learn a different way to work. So, if things are in white water and that's the excuse for why we work the way we do—there's no time for meaning making—then how do we learn to work differently rather than just continue with how we're working?"

Something has struck a chord with Agnes, and she sits forward, jostling the laptop on her knees. "I feel like that little piece there, Pamela," she says, saying my name to make sure she has my attention, "is the ongoing conversation I can recall sitting at management team meetings and having constantly. Because in the one ear you've got the complaints about there being too much on people's plates, there's too much to do. What do we take off? It was never a conversation about how do we do what we're doing differently and still maximize and produce what we know we can do really well. So that conversation, I feel, is the constant reoccurring conversation at the table—the complaining about too much on our plates, but never really talking about how do we do what we do! And we don't *know how* to have that conversation."

"Really? Say more about that."

Vaill (1996), a professor of management and organizational scholar, uses the term *permanent white water* to characterize the current turbulent, complex, and changing environment in which we all operate. He uses the metaphor to illustrate that externalized, mechanistic ideas of organizations "running like clock work" fail to account for both the complexity of social systems and the feelings such systems evoke through the "demands they place on mind, body, and spirit" (p. 9).

Permanent white water is characterized by events that are surprising, novel in the problems they present, messy, costly in terms of finances or other finite resources, and unpreventable. Further, permanent white water is experienced not only as events or happenings, but also as feelings such as a loss of direction, lack of control or coherence, and a "gnawing sense of meaninglessness" (Vaill, 1996 p. 43). The idea of white water disrupts traditional assumptions of organizations experiencing normal cycles of change and stability and instead frames change as a constant.

Learning, Vaill (1996) suggests, is a response to permanent white water. However, traditional institutionalized frameworks of *learning as doing*, on which most continuing education or professional development initiatives are modeled, are inadequate both philosophically and in practice when faced with the demands of complex social systems. Several tenets of traditional learning are explored, illustrating the mismatch with white water. Included are assumptions about learning such as, it is cumulative and answer-oriented,

“I think it’s practice oriented. I think people are more comfortable and it’s easier to have the end results conversation. It’s just like, ‘It doesn’t matter to me how you do it, just make sure your Hall Directors get this done, and then get this done, and get this done, and get this done.’ Instead of us saying, ‘Well, let’s talk about how do we do our work and what can help us be a better organization, and why.’ And we don’t ask the hard questions!” Agnes is animated now, making staccato gestures with an open hand. In the background I can hear Murphy, disturbed, jumping down from the couch.

“Why do we think it’s a good thing to have 12 people doing the exact same thing?” she continues, “Why do we think it’s a good idea to whatever, fill in the blank, you know? We just don’t, we don’t think about systems very well, so there’s not a lot of systems thinking that occurs. That’s where the flaw is. Or we rely on one person and we leave it at that. So we don’t think, when there’s this large body of generalist jobs or folks that do a similar thing, we don’t do the systems thinking. Because again, we think it’s more important to allow our staff to do what

it should be a relatively private process, and it moves the beginning learner from the discomfort of not knowing to the competence and comfort of expert knower, all of which are untrue about learning in white water.

Learning in permanent white water, therefore, means *learning as a way of being*, a constant, where all experience is learning:

...being refers to the whole person—to something that goes on all the time and that extends into all aspects of a person’s life; it means all our levels of awareness and, indeed, must include our unconscious minds. If learning as a way of being is a mode for everyone, being then must include interpersonal being as well as personal socially expressive being—my learning as a way of being will somehow exist in relation to your learning as a way of being. In short, there are no boundaries in being. There is not something about a human of which we would say, ‘This is not part of human being. (Vaill, 1996, p. 43)

Vaill suggest seven modes of learning as a way of being, acknowledging further exploration will uncover others. Included are self-directed learning, creative learning, expressive learning, feeling learning, online learning (outside of institutionalized offerings), continual learning, and reflexive learning. These modes interact and compliment one another as they reframe lifelong learning as an endeavor in *being*.

Drawing on the work of Senge (1990), Vaill goes on to make connections to systems thinking, suggesting that learning as a way of being is both a prerequisite to and

they want to do the way they want to do it. And what we value instead are things like allowing the ADs

Woodard, Komives, and Love (2000) draw on the concept of permanent white water (Vaill, 1996) to speak directly to student affairs practitioners in a monograph focused on 21st Century leadership and management. Throughout the piece, a technique of raising *myths* and asserting *heresies* is used to encourage readers to examine assumptions and reflect on personal convictions. Myths are inaccurate beliefs within the field based in tradition rather than empirical substantiation. In the field they are treated as truth when in fact they are false. For instance, one myth within the field is that student affairs professionals are focused on the holistic development of students (Woodard et al., 2000), when in fact research shows the work of the profession is concentrated on students' psychosocial experiences (Kuh, Bean, Bradley, & Coomes, 1986). For as much as the mantra in student affairs has been that faculty are concerned mainly with students' brains and practitioners with everything else, it seems our focus has been equally as concentrated.

Heresies then are "opinions or assertions that are at odds with widely held beliefs or accepted practices" (Woodard et al., p. 13). They are viewed as radical in that they challenge deeply held assumptions in the field, and while seemingly harsh initially, are intended as a learning tool to encourage dialogue and self-examination. One heresy raised early in the piece is that "student affairs professionals tend not to challenge their own assumptions about their knowledge, beliefs, values, students, faculty, and organizational function" (p.

to supervise the people in the way that they feel is the best way to supervise them.

part of systems thinking. While an important development in conceptualizing and understanding social systems and the experience of permanent white water, systems thinking is not readily used in organizations today. Vaill hypothesizes this is due to the nonsystemic way institutionalized learning as doing models teach us to think and also that when system thinking is taught through institutionalized lenses it "loses most of its power and beauty" (Vaill, 1996, p. 104). ■

And when we say that, we mean, "Do it the way that's most *comfortable* to you."

I tell a quick story, reminding Agnes of my brainstorm as a third year Hall Director at the school where we worked together. I went to my supervisor with a plan created with my graduate assistant and RAs to staff the building differently. It redefined the RA job in a way we thought made sense for our community and created space for people to work to their strengths. Our building was one of only two high-rises on campus and we proposed piloting the plan, with the second building as a sort of "control group" from which to measure success. The proposal (which did happen to contain the theory supporting the idea) was promptly denied.

"Because you made people uncomfortable and it negated consistency!" Agnes says, as if stating the

21). They acknowledge that in a field focused on learning and development this is a particularly poignant and troubling assertion, yet true as a recognized part of being socialized to a culture.

Those within the field, they warn, who hang on to the idea that normal organizations experience oscillating periods of stability and change, beware. The belief that one need only wait long enough for a stability break in which to catch one's breath is an outdated assumption. Trends in higher education such as globalization, knowledge as capital, technology, and rising costs with greater accountability have contributed to continuous change as an organizational norm. There is no break coming.

In an environment of ongoing and rapid change, modern ideas of working harder or longer to overcome challenges no longer suffice (Vaill, 1989). Instead, new ways of leading are required, including challenging the myth within the field of student affairs that only positional leaders "do" leadership (Woodard, et al., 2000). Vaill (1989, 1996) advocates a broad philosophical shift, challenging us to work collectively smarter, work reflectively smarter, and work spiritually smarter. Woodard et al. (2000) use this framework to build a case for leading and working differently in student affairs.

To work collectively smarter, professionals in the field must become systems thinkers, able to see how salient issues, processes, and outcomes cut across the boundaries of divisions and departments. It means acknowledging the need for shared leadership as well as "changing work expectations, re-

obvious. "And again, That's what's valued in the job."

"But what about autonomy?" I say, evoking a buzzword in the field.

"Sure. Within the rules. Yes. And so then we don't question why the rules are the rules. So it's the whole thing about questioning again. For who's benefit are these rules in place? And it usually devolves back into the least common denominator and what's easiest to manage—not to lead—but to manage."

"So then we just can't change organizations?" I ask, wondering what the last few years of research have been if that was true.

"We're flawed! Human beings are flawed. You're talking about changing something that is so widely, variably driven. And you're talking about the whole cycle of socialization, doing that differently too. Like how we're socialized, how we're rewarded, what are learned behaviors, how we probably function in organizations." Agnes stops to shake her head, "So on one level, commiseration is always a nice thing. That I can commiserate with this story—'Oh, I can relate to this.' There's a relate-ability factor,

ward systems, structures of task forces, and strategies for sharing information" (Woodard et al., p. 85). It means training and developing staff who are comfortable with the ambiguity of not being able to know everything and who are able to address complex problems by crossing rather than maintaining boundaries.

In exploring how to work reflectively smarter, a process of making shared meaning individually and in groups, Woodard et al., (2000) assert the heresy that "many student affairs professionals prefer acting to reflecting and doing to thinking" (p. 85). Attempts to do more with less lead to constant and ineffective crisis management modes, where we are "so consumed by metaphors like 'putting out fires' that we do not step back to see the big picture" (p. 85). Regular staff meetings should include time for reflection, meaning making, and trend identification that allow participants to see emerging patterns and respond proactively.

Finally, Woodard et al. (2000) suggest working spiritually smarter by encouraging deep investigation of personal values, beliefs, authenticity, consciousness, and faith that can serve as rudders in permanent white water. Vaill (1996) frames "spirit" as a word "that captures our intuitive feeling of something that pervades, energizes, weaves through, infuses, saturates some person or action or thing or concept in our experience" (p. 215). Working spiritually smarter therefore becomes a source of collective meaning making and can foster transcendent connections to others and a greater, meaningful workplace community (Woodard et al.). ■

which I'm sure you've heard already. And the other thing is that, quite honestly, it was enjoyable hearing Mac's voice. It was enjoyable hearing that there are people out there who believe in the work that we do in a different way—and want to do something in a different way. Because, unfortunately, it *is* refreshing to hear. And his way of being should not be refreshing to us—but it is."

* * *

"Hi!" Lizbeth waves from the door and squeezes her way past milling patrons waiting for their names to be called for Sunday brunch. She leans in to hug me and says "I'm so excited to see you!" into my ear before sliding into the opposite side of the nouveau diner booth, to finish her thought "I can't believe it's been a year! I'm so glad we could get together!" It has been a year and several months since I last saw Lizbeth in the small tea house and she announced she was leaving her Area Coordinator position.

Lizbeth is traveling through on her way to an interview at a college at the southern edge of the state. The position includes coordinating leadership programs and in her call a week ago, Lizbeth asked

for advice about the job because she knew I once held a similar position. She wanted to talk specifically about a presentation she was asked to give as a part of the interview.

“So tell me,” I ask her, after juice and coffee have been ordered, “what was Alaska like? How was being at home? What’s next for you?”

Lizbeth tells stories of ice climbs and wilderness survival hikes that were a part of her academic program, and of more emotional challenges encountered in the part time job she had working with at-risk teenagers. She reflects on isolation and weather and sunlight and Inuit culture and the things she has learned, both while in Alaska and since returning home to stay with her family for a few weeks. She talks briefly about the job interview she has, other possibilities, and her back up plan to take a friend up on an offer to do out door education trips in Utah for a year. “But my heart really is set on this job,” she concedes. Though she is nervous about the future, about not knowing for certain what is next, underneath it all is an excitement at the possibilities this point in her life holds. This is the Lizbeth I first met on the auditorium steps.

“Enough,” she says, waving her hands in front of her as if clearing space, “enough about me. How have you been? How’s the dissertation? I would love to read it!”

“Really? I would love that—if you wanted to. Especially chapter four, the findings. I’d be curious to hear what you think.”

“I’d be honored to read it,” Lizbeth says, pressing her hands sincerely against her heart.

Over eggs and coffee, we spend the rest of our time together in meandering conversation, wandering from leadership theory to presentation styles to books we are reading. We talk until well after the plates are cleared and get up to leave only because of

the growing crowd at the door waiting for tables to be cleared. Our morning ends beside my car with mutual thanks and well wishes, and (after digging through my ever-present bag of research) with Lizbeth disappearing down the street, a worn copy of chapter four tucked securely under her arm.

* * *

“What this also made me think about,” Alys continues, thumbing through the copy of chapter four that is balanced on the arm of her chair, “is no one ever looks at their whole organization—well, I guess I shouldn’t say no one. Maybe this is where I’m at contextually right now, but I think it’s fascinating how little we know about the work that we do—how it’s impacting students, staff, each other. Not just the work we do, but impact of *how* we do it. Because we have no real idea how it’s impacting staff, a student—no one sees it. But my perception is leadership, whoever it is, whether it’s me in my own little organization or you in yours, we don’t see things holistically. We don’t have any idea. So you’re incorporating conversations that are happening with Hall Directors and you, and the Director and you. And that’s pretty huge. I feel like organizationally we don’t have any idea what’s going on.

“I think about it,” she goes on, sharing an example, “with something like intent and impact, something as basic as that. Most of the time if I think about so and so whoever administrator, who is saying hurtful or agitating things on campus. Is she really that crazy? Well no, probably not.” Alys smiles mischievously, both conceding and yet leaving a little room perhaps for craziness, “She just has no idea about the impact of what she just did or said had on the campus—or me! And you’re really showing that in a complex way and your readers, wherever they’re at, can make new meaning of it for their

own situation. For instance, maybe I don't like what just happened with my supervisor, but maybe they don't *hate* me and all other people! Maybe it's that *I* can't see what they were trying to do. Or maybe somebody's thinking they're planting a seed, and if I would be a little patient, if I would change my paradigm or how I'm viewing this, maybe I'd

A friend sends me an email, subject line: "You'll Love This!" The body of the email is a single link, www.ted.com, which takes me to TED: Ideas Worth Spreading. "TED" stands for Technology, Entertainment, Design, but the text of the site claims they are about "ideas that matter in any discipline." Each year the organization hosts a four-day conference where invitation-only presenters have 20 minutes to speak on what's important to them, whether it be their research, their work, or a cause. The distinguished list of past speakers includes an array of contributors from scientists to humanitarians, artists/musicians to entrepreneurs, and environmentalists to iconoclasts. Recent lecturers have included the likes of Bill Clinton, Isabella Allende, Stephen Hawkins, and documentary photographer James Nachtwey. The website is a library of these 20 minute lectures on digital video. My friend is right. I love it.

I watch hours of lectures and happen across one by Daniel Goleman, psychologist and author of the book *Emotional Intelligence*. The title of his talk is *Compassion: Why aren't we all Good Samaritans?* (Goleman, 2007) based on his current focus of research, social intelligence.

"When do we choose to help?" Goleman asks. Social neural science, he says, indicates we are all hard wired to have empathy, to be prepared to help. He tells the sto-

see something new. So, I think organizationally, people could learn a lot, thinking more holistically, more complexly, about their organizations, in housing or not. Just, 'Oh, I wonder what my colleague is thinking when they do that. They can't just hate all people. What are they thinking? What are they doing?'"

"Right, right," I say, intrigued by what Alys is saying, "and how do I explore that and find out more? Why are they doing that? Because I really don't think anyone is getting up in the morning and plotting how to make other people miserable, like some sort of super villain!"

"Right!" Alys laughs.

I tell her about my instant message exchange with Eva and how she wished she had known more of the back-story of both the organization and her peers. Our conversations spirals off into a discussion of the power of story, in the context of this study and in

ry of a study at the Princeton Theological Seminary, where a group of divinity students are asked to give a practice sermon. Half are given the biblical parable of the Good Samaritan, the story of a man who is left for dead on the side of the road after being robbed and the lesson involved in who stops to help him. The other half of the divinity students are given random bible stories. One by one the students are sent to another building to give their sermons and along the way they pass a man doubled over in obvious pain.

“Did they stop?” Goleman asks, “Did contemplating the parable of the Good Samaritan matter?” No. What mattered was how much in a hurry they felt they were in or if they were absorbed in what they were going to talk about. “We don’t take every opportunity to help, because our focus is in the wrong direction.” Goleman is traversing the stage, pausing to look at the audience or moving to his notes on a podium.

“The simple fact is, if we are focused on ourselves, if we’re pre-occupied as we are so often through the day, we don’t really fully notice the other,” he tells the audience and encourages them to pay attention to the distinction between focusing on the self and focusing on others. One way to assess this in interactions with others, he shares, is to see how long it takes the other person to ask a question with the word “you” in it.

He goes on to share information from a Harvard Business Review article called *The Human Moment at Work* (Hallowell, 1999). The major finding of the piece, he shares, is that in order to make real contact with a person in the work-

Alys’s data collection, where she has been interviewing the mothers of first-generation, Latina college students.

“How I interact with people will be different,” she says, talking about the impact of her research process so far. “I say that all the time and I think the same thing would be true no matter where we work. If we were truly other-focused enough to know our students’ stories—each other’s stories—we’d all do our work a lot better. If you really knew what people were going through, you would do your work better. I just feel like we could solve a lot of stuff by just listening.

“And what I like about it, this idea of stories,”

Alys goes on, “is that, similar to Mac’s story, they are magnificent stories in themselves. You don’t have to do anything to them. You don’t have to take anything away, you don’t have to smooth the edges. You can just tell them as they are, with all the complexity with which they exist, and that’s what’s supposed to come out.” She folds her arms defiantly. “I think it’s what we should be doing all the time. I don’t think anyone should graduate with their master’s and go into higher education without doing that.”

place the “fundamental thing you have to do is turn off your Blackberry, close your laptop, end your daydream and pay full attention to the person.”

Goleman contends, based once again in neural science, that our empathy is what separates us from Machiavellians or sociopaths. He goes on to emphasize his point by cautioning the audience that there is no correlation between intelligence quotient and emotional empathy. “When we focus on ourselves, we turn that [empathic] part of ourselves off if there’s another person there.”

The emotionally intelligent solution? Goleman says empathic action requires one thing, citing as an example the “urban trance” that kept him from seeing the homeless in New York City, “Simply noticing.” ■

“Doing what?” I ask.

Later, reflecting on my conversation

“Going and hearing—in a systematic and intentional way—going and hearing multiple stories.”

with Alys, I am reminded of a book from the

second year of my doctoral program. Robert Coles’ (1989) *The Call of Stories* was the first

“And,” I add, liking where this is going, “learning how to ask for someone’s story in a way

text we read as an introduction to the student development theory course. An auto-

We sit together for a moment in silence, leaning back in our chairs to contemplate this idea

his own story and literature to emphasize the

of stories, each in our own way. “I wonder,” I say, importance of story as a way to make mean-

not so much to Alys as to the air, “do we know the

ing and create context, especially in a field

stories of our organizations—our stories—and how where formal knowledge, theory, and jargon

to find them, how to tell them—and hear them—in

rule and can distance doctor from patient.

systematic and intentional ways? Beyond encapsulated visions and missions, I mean.

The power of story, he said, begins with knowing your own and in remembering to listen

Narrative happens all over the place in organizations, but are we aware of it? Could we to and for others’, as well as in the reflection re-telling stories evokes.

actually tell that story?”

What if, in today’s complex world

Alys makes a humming noise as if what I have said is a tasty morsel and her eyebrows go up. “Right!

of complex organizations, visions and mis-

sions so lauded and revered in the literature

and in practice no longer are enough? Ripe

Don’t you think that’s huge?” she asks, perhaps rhetorically, going on without waiting for a reply.

with jargon and very often, after hours of

“What I think was the biggest piece for me is how wordsmithing and polishing, cleansed of fully the organization is represented and what that

context or history in pursuit of making short

could mean for those studying organizations. I just

and memorable statements, could visions

don’t think that happens anywhere. Anywhere! You

Current research on organizations has focused on the study of collective identities. In an era of constant and unpredictable change, collective identity is what helps individuals make meaning of their work environments (Brown & Starkey, 2000). However, Brown (2006) criticizes scholars who frame organizations as anthropomorphic super-persons or refer to shared characteristics that make identity indistinguishable from concepts such as climate or culture. He suggests narrative provides an approach to understanding organizations that takes into account the issues of collective identities.

know, we went through all the business fads. What do you call it? The 360 degree feedback and all of that organizational meaning making? How might and can any of it, any of it, give you a full picture of an organization. Or, you read the studies about the best organizations or the best universities and again— is it a full picture? For me, that was probably the thing that had the most impact, just the fullness of the story that was there and what it made me think about.”

* * *

So,” Vince begins again, satisfied that his utensils are lined up properly, “there also seems to be an implicit assumption that we want to make change. Does everybody need some amount of change? Does that make sense? Because there is a part of me that thinks sometimes our desire to make change is much because we think we’re supposed to make change—organizational change. I think sometimes we get caught up in needing organizational change because it feels trendy or sexy or because the people who come in and really change something get a lot of credit for it. I feel sometimes in student affairs we’re sort of seduced by this idea of making change that we may not ever let anything work, you know. Like, do

Grounded in research, Brown (1986, 2006) argues that people make sense of or construct reality through narrative, both in the telling and in the interpreting of stories shared informally member to member and through formal means such as documents, presentations, and media. These stories, however, are constructed through the identity lenses of the players. Thus, he hypothesizes, organizational identities are created from the collective *identities* of its members and rather than resulting in a single cogent story or collective *identity*, produce complex multivoiced narratives filled with contradictions:

The very fabric of organization is constantly being created and re-created through the elaboration, contestation, and exchange of narratives. What is more, the strands of this fabric are not produced ‘unthinkingly’, but woven by reflexive agents with individual as well as group-level aspirations and beliefs. The fabric is both a patchwork quilt of narrative episodes stitched together through shared conversations, and rippled with stories variously borrowing threads from each other, continuing and extending some and seeking to unravel others. Some of these narratives are deeply embedded in central folds of the fabric, with many ties to other stories, while others occupy peripheral positions connected to one or a few stories only....The result is a fabric that is in a constant state of becoming, unraveling in some areas, embroidered over in others. At times, much of the fabric may appear relatively coherent and consistent, as consensus on the meaning of important actions and events dominates, while at

we ever let it run its course long enough? Like, how often should you strategic plan? If it's a strategic plan, it should last a while, right?"

"Well that depends on what you believe about organizations, don't you think? And what you believe about change—what it is, and how it happens—or keeps other things from happening."

"Right. How do you define change." he says, more as a statement than a question, "Because in the story, it's a big enough organization, I assume they're going to have new people, new initiatives every year, right? So that's change, but I don't know if it's deep

In order to create deeper learning in organizations, promoting significant identity change is necessary (Brown & Starkey, 2000). While responding to constant change or flux may be offered as evidence of organizational learning, most often it is what Argyris (1977) calls single-loop learning, which is reactive, lacks reflection, and results in "doing" without questioning underlying assumptions. Denial ("What problem?"), rationalization ("We're too busy."), idealism ("We're great as we are!"), fantasy (gaining satisfaction by substituting daydreams for reality), and symbolism (where symbols restrict rather than enhance meaning) are all ego defenses employed by organizations to avoid the anxiety of self-analysis (Brown & Starkey).

One approach to navigating the challenges of ego defenses in organizations is to cultivate an identity of a learning organization (Brown & Starkey, 2000). The transition to learning organization requires the

other times the fabric may take on a knotted or frayed character as different individuals and groups contest narratively what is truly distinctive or really enduring about their organization. (Brown, 2006, p. 735)

In contrast to traditional approaches, from a narrative perspective, reflexivity, voice, plurivocity, temporality, and fictionality become critical to making meaning of collective identities. ■

organizational change. I mean, it sounds like there's certainly a piece for Mac to really drive that theory piece that isn't there right now. There's not enough in there, in the chapter, for me to know if—my sense is he believes he's starting to be successful but certainly isn't where he wants to be. So it seems that's certainly more of true organizational cultural change, beyond just changing out people or things."

"Or is it more? That's one of the things I've been pondering. Because we seem to operate traditionally off this model where you go for awhile and then you strategic plan and that takes you somewhere and then you go for awhile and then you

group to accept that the boundaries of identity formation are always open and that over time the organization will move through a series of identities that mirror members' evolving concepts of a collective self (Brown & Starkey).

The type and depth of learning necessary to be considered a learning organization requires continuous exploration and evolution of organizational identity (Brown & Starkey, 2000). Much as an individual might ask "Who am I?" in a learning process, so too organizations must collectively ask "Who are we?" However, from a psychodynamic perspective, like individuals who are motivated to preserve their own identities because of a need for self-esteem, organizations behave in collectively similar ways, resisting psychic pain or discomfort of learning by taking measures to preserve an existing identity.

From a psychodynamic perspective, the role of leadership in organizations is to encourage an "emotional climate" where members can both feel a sense of belonging to the group and maintain an individual identity while working towards group goals and self-esteem (Brown & Starkey, 2000). One way to cultivate and sustain self esteem in organizations is to create space for individuals to express their authentic selves in work that is valued by salient others in the group. This involves working to reduce psychological boundaries developed to contain anxiety. Brown and Starkey draw on the work of Hirschhorn (1997) to advocate challenging traditional modern ideas of organizations which suppress doubt and emotions in favor of more postmodern notions that frame doubt as a catalyst for learning and cultivate cultures of openness and vulnerability.

strategic plan. So everyone's asking for that, because that's what change is supposed to look like. Versus more of an approach of we should be learning all the time and how do we do that? And is the change Mac's trying to create more about how do we shift into that perspective of we should be learning all the time and then what change can happen? How do we think differently about what we do, rather than just doing new things with the same thinking, the same approaches. And theory is what works for him in terms of meaning making, so that's what he's bringing. It may not work for everyone. I don't know. Is that too grandiose? Because what I hear him saying—and I don't know if this came across or not—is 'I want this group of people to be the best that they can be and to serve students always to the best that they can at that moment', versus making widgets, checking keys

I ordered the DVD on a whim. When the shopPBS.org email appeared in my inbox advertising a sale and the first feature on the list was *Raise Your Voice* (Nelson, 2005), the documentary about the group *Sweet Honey in the Rock* Jason had brought to the retreat, it seemed like a sign. When it showed up in my mail on a day when writing seemed arduous and painful, I took it as a second sign and popped the disc immediately into my player and sat on the floor in front of the television rather than in front of my computer with the rationale that this was sort of like research too.

Three strategies for promoting identity change over time are offered: (a) critical self-reflexivity, (b) encouraging dialogue about future identity, and (c) cultivating an attitude of wisdom, which is associated with an ability to perceive a broader picture and the connectedness of things (Brown & Starkey, 2000). Wisdom allows individuals to transcend ego defenses and foster empathy, which “permits a more objective view of external reality, a greater receptivity to the views of others, and a more mature view of the self” (p. 114). ■

in and out. To
 images that have
 me, that’s more
 meaning for me
 than a culture
 as a student af-
 change. That’s a
 fairs practitioner,
 more fundamental
 where volumes
 change—how do
 of identity theory
 we see ourselves
 inform the work.
 in a different way,

Immediately it increases my compassion and patience
 define ourselves in a different way? How do we see
 for change processes, because framed as identity de-
 others, how do we measure our success, how do we...
 velopment I cannot see organizations as monolithic
 whatever it is? It’s like the change before the change,
 bodies to be acted upon and am reminded of the very
 the change that makes other change possible.”
 human struggles and need for challenge and support
 “Okay,” Vince says rather loudly, attracting
 (Sanford, 1968) in a developmental process. In what
 the attention of the patrons at the table over his
 other ways might reframing organizational change
 shoulder, “so if change is about new thinking and
 as collective identity development create meaning in
 learning, what about—I can’t remember which group
 higher education institutions in general and student
 it was, the ACs or the ADs—essentially saying ‘I’d
 affair organizations specifically?
 rather be working with people who didn’t have
 master’s degrees’? Wow! That’s fascinating! They
 said the Hall Directors without masters were easier
 because they want to learn more, but essentially
 what I read it to be was they were saying the
 master’s degree implants a sense of righteousness

Beyond the 11 minute clip we saw that day at the retreat, the documentary traces *Sweet Honey’s* history, following them on the road and eventually explores what happens to the group after Dr. Bernice Reagon, the founder, announces her retirement. Tucked amid footage of concerts and the community service work they do is a short scene, less than two minutes, about the role sound checks play for the group.

“The sound check is *crucial* for creating Sweet Honey in the Rock,” says Dr. Reagon. “Sometimes the bodies are there, but we left Sweet Honey someplace else.”

On the screen, the group is in rehearsal but the complicated harmonies seem somehow off. Still singing, the group’s baritone, Ysaye Barnwell, makes a face. Next to her, another member, Nitanju Bolade Casel asks, “Did we just fall apart?” “Yes, we fell apart,” Barnwell confirms.

“And we have to stay there,” Reagon goes on, now full screen in an interview, “until I have a feeling that, in fact, the group has arrived. And that has something to do not only with knowing where the voices are, but also, is the energy there and are people listening to each other.”

In the next shot, Reagon stands with Casel and fourth member of the group, Carol Maillard, working through a harmony that is not sounding right. Maillard and Casel sing their parts separately, both sounding melodic. Together, however, it is an unpleasant mess.

“What are you doing right there?” Casel asks, listening to Maillard as she sings. “We are not getting the contribution we need from you,”

and—although they didn't come out and say it—that those master's degrees Hall Directors can't continue to learn. Really? How much of that is true? And how much of that, from their position, is that the people who don't have a master's degree don't dare challenge anything because they're on thinner ice.”

Reagon says to them both, not in blame but in recognition of their importance to the group. Slowly, the three deconstruct the problem. Moments later Casel and Maillard are singing together in dynamic perfection. Reagon is nodding and smiling beside them, as she says in a voice over, “And once we get out of the sound check, I know Sweet Honey is in the house.” ■

Koplowitz (1987) proposes a model of adult cognitive development as a context to explore critical thinking in the workplace, where thinkers move through four stages, pre-logical thinking, logical thinking, post-logical thinking, and a unitary approach. Pre-logical thinkers respond emotionally and are prone to one-step analyses, meaning any current situation is seen as a direct result of the situation immediately preceding it. Additionally, reactions often are based in emotion rather than logical analysis of an issue. In problem-solving, pre-logical thinkers tend to: (a) focus primarily on one variable without recognizing other variables which may be related; (b) blame others for problems and believe if issues are to be resolved it is these others who must be changed; (c) think concretely rather than abstractly by drawing closed boundaries around the world they know; and (d) have difficulty separating form or method from content, meaning, for instance, talk of about how to resolve a problem cannot be separated from discussion that helps to identify the problem.

Logical thinking, the second stage, is associated with critical thinking and fills many of the gaps identified in the pre-logical stage. For

“Hmmm, Well then, what do you think about their talk about Hall Directors needing to think more critically? Isn't that about learning?”

“Well, the reality is, critical thinking employees *are* more of a pain in the ass than non-critical thinking ones.” Vince smiles and shakes his head, “I mean, in terms of supervision. It may be good, but it's still harder.”

“So, I wonder then, is ‘They need to be better critical thinkers’ code for ‘They just need to think more like me.’ I mean, we say it all the time. We want people to be good critical thinkers, but what does that mean? Is it just ‘I want you to reach the same conclusions I have?’”

Our conversation goes on uninterrupted as Todd brings our appetizer and sets it between us.

instance, analyses of problems involve a more sophisticated process of looking for linear causal chains to identify sources of problems rather than relying on a single step backward. The origin of this chain determines where blame is placed, whether it be on others or the logical thinker herself. Logical thinkers are able to identify multiple independent variables that may have an impact on any given issue. Additionally, they are able to separate method from content and could in a meeting, as an example, talk about *how* to talk about the content they wanted to talk about. However, while much more abstract in their processes, logical thinkers still draw closed boundaries separating one part of their world from others making them less flexible in their thinking. To illustrate, while logical thinkers can separate the function of management from the people who manage, it is still the managers who do the managing—and some people in the organization are designated as managers and some are not.

Post-logical thinkers can analyze causation both linearly and cyclically, understanding “that we often produce those ‘givens’ in our reality to which we react” (Koplowitz, 1987, p. 222). This cyclical view allows the post-logical thinker to consider things in context, including how variables might be interdependent. As a result of these differences, they are able to think systemically (Senge, 1990) and place blame on system dynamics rather than on events or other people. This level of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) opens new possibilities for intervening to the complex post-logical thinker. According to Koplowitz, “whereas the logical thinkers must directly intervene

Vince picks up the chopsticks laid on his side of the decorative plate and opens them in a single deft movement, talking all the while. “Well, that’s absolutely the opposite of critical thinking isn’t it?” He says, popping a shrimp in his mouth, “It’s almost become one of those buzzwords. Mmmm. You’ve got to have some of this!” “Okay.” I laugh, tearing the wrapper from my own chopsticks while trying to take the discussion further along this same line, “so Mac talks about complexity and complex thinking. I wonder, if we go back to this whole idea of what do we believe about organizations—what is an organization—I wonder if it isn’t enough anymore, to think critically in complex organizations. Because if you can’t think complexly to get all the pieces, does thinking critically about the pieces you have do anything for you?” “And what’s the bar for critical thinking?” Vince adds, enthused about exploring this idea. “And do you have to have behaviors then that match? Can you be a critical thinker and still follow along like sheep because frankly, forget it, I’d rather it be easier

exactly where they want change to happen, post-logical thinkers, with their more abstract understanding of causality, can change a pattern by changing its context” (p. 225) and choose to intervene where they have the most leverage. Finally, post-logical thinkers draw open boundaries where information and energy pass freely. For instance a manager could be anyone, regardless of role or title, who engages in the behaviors of managing. As a result, problems within the boundary of “management” in an organization can be resolved by interventions and initiatives outside that boundary.

Finally, the unitary stage is an approach Koplowitz (1987) distinguishes from “thinking” in that it is his belief that individuals who operate at this level “do not work out their answers, but rather have a direct or observational access to them” as “unitary concepts and unitary consciousness” (p. 226). In this stage, while it is understood that boundaries which break the world into distinct events and entities may be helpful in certain situations, the world itself is an undifferentiated unit—there is nothing that is not everything. These approaches are most often found in modern physics and spiritual philosophies. The unitary concept of causality is without boundaries and all-pervading, where, as an example, situations in organizations are influenced not only by linear causation chains or cycles within institutions, but also by world events, individuals’ histories, and happenings in families or group memberships outside the constructed boundary of the organization. Further, cause and effect are not understood as separate events, but as alternate manifestations of a single dy-

today. I see all the reasons. I can deconstruct it in Quinn, “we change the organization by transforming my mind, so intellectually I’m critical, but it doesn’t mean I’m going to act any differently, because God knows I’m going to go along to get along. Does that mean you’re not a critical thinker—or not a critical actor at that point?”

“Ooh, that’s interesting! Okay, so let’s look at Eva. What makes her so able to go with the flow and say ‘Okay, yeah, I understand you’re going to pay new Hall Directors more than me and that’s upsetting, but alright. I get why you’re doing that’?”

“When I read that, I was like, ‘Oh my God!’”

Vince slaps his hand emphatically on top of his copy of chapter four, “I want her to work for me!”

“So is it her ability to think more complexly that let’s her

Emotions go hand in hand with personal meaning making and change (Fredrickson, 2003; Hargreaves, 2004). The process of emotions is initiated when an individual makes meaning of an event, either consciously or unconsciously, sparking a response “across loosely coupled component systems, such as subjective experience, facial expressions, and physiological changes” (Fredrickson, p. 164).

Current studies link emotions with *specific action tendencies*, meaning a particular emotion is associated with urges towards a narrow set of specific possible behaviors (see Lazarus, 1991). For example, fear is associated with the impetus to flee. However, the focus of inquiry typically is on negative emotions and findings are extrapolated to all emotions. Fredrickson (1998)

namic. From a unitary perspective, problems are opportunities to develop personal potential rather than mistakes in need of correction, and therefore placing blame becomes irrelevant. Finally, at the unitary stage individuals see themselves as a part of situations rather than as interveners, regardless of "distance" from the perceived causal chain or cycle identified by other thinkers, and as a result focus on being present and receptive to possibilities rather than active point problem-solvers at the perceived point of impact. From the perspective of logical and post-logical thinkers, the indirect approach of a unitary mind may seem illogical. While a sustained unitary consciousness is rare, moments of unitary perspectives of situations are possible. ■

make different
meaning? 'Let
me think not
only about me,
but about a
bigger picture.'
Compared
to other staff
members who
might say 'I only
see this much.'

suggests this does not do justice to positive emotions and puts forth a *broaden-and-build* theory of positive emotions grounded in her own research.

Positive emotions such as joy, contentment, interest, and love broaden "an individual's momentary thought-action repertoire, but they also appear to share the feature of building the individual's personal resources, ranging from physical resources to intellectual resources to social resources" (Fredrickson, 1998, p. 307). For instance, joy prompts play and leads to creativity, and the emotion of interest creates urges of exploration that lead to knowledge creation and intellectual complexity (Fredrickson, 2003).

This has implications for organizational settings. Fredrickson (2003) draws on other research in combination with her theory to put forward the idea that positive emotions create "upward spirals" towards optimal functioning individually and in groups. Positive emotions in the workplace contribute to employees' effectiveness and social integration (Staw, Sutton, & Pellod, 1994), accurate and careful decision making (Staw & Barsade, 1993), and, because positive emotions are contagious (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Quinn, 2000), the possibility for organizational transformation. ■

Versus, someone who can say, 'I have a scope of the whole institution, or the whole field for that matter, and can make some different decisions based on that.' Is that what let's Eva be more positive? Or, is it an opposite relationship where because she's more positive, she can think more complexly?"

"So, you're saying it's all related?"

"I don't know what I'm saying, but there's something in all of it that fits together for me. Not in a tight little puzzle piece way, but I'd throw all those things in the same bag."

* * *

"Hi Pamela!" Lizbeth's email begins. It is exactly ten days since we had brunch together. The email continues:

I am writing to you from in-state! Yes, I got the job! Just moved here last night and have some errands to run today and lots of logistics to take care of. So, I am absolutely excited to begin my new job as Leadership Programs Coordinator!

I have attached a few initial notes from your chapter 4 that I jotted down for myself to use as a resource as I start my new job...and the reason I am showing you is so that you know what a wonderful impact your paper has had on me, and how much I appreciate the opportunity to start thinking through some of the issues your paper explores. I really enjoyed reading it!

Thanks for sharing this with me—your work is so valuable!

Lizbeth

The attachment (see Appendix C) is two and a half pages of narrow-margined, type-written, bullet-pointed notes in a 10 point font, beginning with a section labeled “Topics Explored.” Below it stretches a list of 40 items, everything from short phrases like “Fear of failure” and “Values-based change” to longer thoughts such as “How do you honor both the people who want structure and direction and the ones who want spirit and inspiration in a vision?”. There are even full blown quotes, complete with page citations and a small subsection devoted entirely to Mac and his perspective. I am both tickled and overwhelmed, though I should not be surprised that Lizbeth, of all people, would layout the meaning she made of chapter four so plainly. The final page is my favorite. Labeled “My thoughts about how this relates to my new job,” the list is framed by what came before it and presented not as a series of absolute truths, but formulated as questions she will ask herself as she begins her new position:

- *What is the job? What am I doing here? What are we trying to accomplish?*
- *What are our pre-existing assumptions, values, and life/professional experiences that frame how we think about change?*
- *How can those elements be limiting if we are not collaborating with students and each other to create change?*
- *What is our song? Our way of knowing and speaking truth?*
- *Identify our culture as a group and whether or not we want to change it...
What does everyone think the culture is? Do we need to change any part of it?*
- *Developmental matrices – how each program reaches 5 developmental outcomes from 5 different developmental theories, for example (show the impact; assess qualitatively and quantitatively)*

Epilogue

It's late enough now that the barista has moved from her post behind the counter to begin the nightly responsibilities of bringing in the large green outdoor umbrellas and mopping the floor. Alys and I have moved on conversationally as well, seeking support as we talk about the value or role of a terminal degree in the field, about programs and rankings and teaching and research, about what's next, about the meaning we each are making of our dissertation processes and the joys, doubts, and challenges along the way.

“I think I struggle with, we're so well-trained as to what findings and implications look like—and that's where I get caught.” I share, talking about how close and how far I feel from finished. “I find myself slipping into that voice and I stop writing. That's not what I want to do. But then how do I write something compelling enough, that when you

put it down, you want to go talk to someone about it? That whole problem-setting versus problem-solving thing.”

“But I think you’ve got that,” Alys says reassuringly.

“Well, I’m not so sure.”

“I think you’ve got that with chapter four. I think chapter five is just helping people put it in a context where they know where to start asking questions or find what might be interesting, key places to probe. I think that’s there. What I wonder is, don’t you think leaving all that up in the air is the cool part. Because, again, when I said I thought this was brilliant, chapter 4, what I think is great about it is that there aren’t any answers—there shouldn’t be—but what’s important is how it made me think!”

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APPENDIX A

University of Northern Colorado Institutional Review Board (IRB) Expedited Review



Application for Expedited or Full Review Guidelines

Section I – Statement of Problem / Research Question

Dwindling financial support, shifting student demographics, public demands, global social change, and the advancement of technology create compelling internal and external pressure for change in higher education (Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Green & Hayward, 1997). While the need for change at transformational levels that addresses not just procedures, but individual values and institutional culture has been acknowledged, little research specific to higher education environments exists. Instead, most often attempts are made to apply models and research developed in corporate arenas, failing to account for the complexity of the academic system and unique leadership challenges in higher education institutions.

Meaning making, whether defined as sensemaking (Weick, 1995), organizational learning (Senge, 1990), or transformational learning (Yorks & Marsick, 2000), has been identified as critical in the change process in higher education (Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Kezar & Eckel, 2002). However, there is a paucity of empirical research exploring individual and collective meaning making in transformational change processes within the field. If higher education is to be responsive to crises both internal and external, the field must be able to use change as a deep and pervasive transformational tool. Critical to creating successful transformation is an empirically grounded understanding of meaning making within the process.

The purpose of this study is to explore how individuals in a higher education organization make meaning, both individually and in relationship to one another, of a process intended as transformational change. At this stage in the research, transformational change will be defined as deep and pervasive, intentional change that alters the culture of the entire organization by changing select, underlying assumptions, institutional behaviors, processes, and products (Eckel, Hill, & Green, 1998). Using social constructionist epistemology and a postmodern theoretical framework, this inquiry will result in a case study that paints a portrait of the “complexity, dynamics, and subtlety of human experience and organizational life” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. xv). The research questions that guide this study are:

- Q1 What experiences do individuals in a higher education organization perceive as salient to their own meaning making in a transformational change process?
- Q2 How do individuals in a higher education organization perceive roles, relationships, and responsibilities in a transformational change process?
- Q3 How do individual perceptions and relationships in a higher education organization create collective/group meaning in a transformational change process?

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Yorks, L., & Marsick, V. J. (2000). Organizational learning and transformation. In J. Mezirow & Associates (Eds.), *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress* (pp. 253-281). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Section II – Method

1. Participants:

The pool from which participants will be drawn consists of adult (18 years or older), employees of the Department of Housing at the University of Colorado Boulder or the college students whom they serve. Potential participants will be engaged in creating change or affected by the change initiative and may represent any level or position in the organization from the Director of Housing to paraprofessional staff to custodians to the students they serve. Administrative professionals, such as the Vice President of Student Affairs, may also be sought out as participants if they are impacted by or have influence over change initiatives within the department. Based on ongoing and continuous analysis during data collection in a co-creative process with each participant, additional participants will be identified in an emergent process. Consistent with portraiture within a postmodern framework, this sampling procedure also allows me, as the researcher, to seek out variants or exceptions as the research evolves (Merriam, 1998). The Director of Residence Life will serve as the initial participant and as gatekeeper to the organization. Additional participants will be contacted by the researcher over the phone or through email as the study develops.

There is no way to specifically predict an exact number of participants due to the nature of the design. Based on my experience in a similarly structured housing organization, I anticipate collaborating with no less than 10 and no more than 20 individuals. This level of engagement should be sufficient to reach a point of saturation, where continued data collection does not result in additional information (Creswell, 1998) about the organization or individuals' meaning making. In addition, I plan to use position within the organization as criteria and would like to select a sample representative of the reach and span of the change process happening at the time of data collection by interviewing one to two individuals at each level of the organization impacted by the change process. As data collection begins and more is known about specific change initiatives, additional criteria helpful in selecting a purposeful sample may need to be developed in consultation with my committee.

Participation in the proposed study will be optional and voluntary. Those who decide not to participate will not be adversely impacted in the continued provision of services related to the Department of Housing at CU-Boulder. The researcher will inform all participants of the detailed parameters of the study and of the potential risks and benefits of participation.

Informed signed consent (see attachment) will be collected from all who agree to participate in the study. Participants will be informed that participation in the study will be voluntary and may be terminated at any point at the request of the participant.

Confidentiality.

Because many participants know each other well and have shared a collective experience during their tenure with the department, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. As such, participants may recognize the stories and experiences relayed in written reports. Participants will be asked to maintain the confidentiality of other participants' information shared during the research process.

Further, study participants are adults, no identifiers will link individuals to their responses, and the data will be collected in a normal educational setting. Therefore, no special arrangements are needed as the sample is not a special population. Digital audio files will be stored in on CD in a locked office and will be destroyed after the study is completed.

Because of the permissions that will be sought and obtained, accidental disclosure will not place the participants at risk. The data sensitivity will be low, and every effort will be made to maximize confidentiality and to provide security for the data that is collected. This study does not include any of the following:

- Research involving the use of educational tests;
- Research involving observation of public behavior;
- Research involving documents, records, pathological or diagnostic specimens;
- Research involving public benefit or service programs; or
- Research involving taste and food quality programs.

Confidentiality of the research data will be maintained in the following ways:

- Individuals will be asked to select the pseudonym under which their data will be collected
- Each participant will be given written assurances of their confidentiality by researchers
- Each participant will be asked to maintain confidentiality of the stories and identification of other participants whom they know

- Electronic transmission of information will be avoided unless consultation with the participant produces agreement that such a transmission will not violate existing confidentiality documents between the researcher and participants
- Interview data and audio files will be secured in a locked cabinet in the home of the lead researcher or on her personal computer

Debriefing information will not be provided to participants. Instead, I will be sharing study findings with participants as the data is analyzed as a means of member checking. At this time, preliminary observations and meaning-making will be shared with participants so they may have further understanding of the study. In addition, a final report will be shared with each participant desiring a copy.

2. Procedure:

Data collection will occur in three primary ways beginning in late summer 2006 and continuing for approximately six months: participant observation, interviews, and document collection. I plan to be in the research setting two to three days per week over a six-month period, spending no less than four hours at the site during a single visit. Decisions about specifically what to observe, who to interview, and what documents to collect will be made in an emergent process determined in co-creation with my participants and co-chairs, based on the change initiative and what is interpreted in ongoing analysis as meaningful for them. Additionally because both case study and portraiture are intimate and relational methodologies, dependent on the transparent positioning of the researcher during data collection and analysis, I will keep an extensive research journal in which to explore and reflect on my role as researcher within the inquiry process, examining the multiple selves I bring to this study and how they influence the manner in which I tell the participants' story.

Participant observation.

Observation in this research will provide an opportunity to gather data that can provide context for the overall study including the setting, participants, activities and interactions, conversation, subtle factors, and my own behavior as the researcher. Observation will also be used provide insight into specific behaviors or incidents to be explored further during interviews.

To document my time with the department, a fieldwork journal, including both descriptive and reflexive notes, will be kept for this inquiry. Again, without knowledge of what specific change will be the focus of the department during my time with them, it is difficult to predict exactly where observation will take place. However, access to the department will be gained through the Director of Residence Life and, as a researcher with a background in housing and residence life, I anticipate observing the daily operation of central housing office, weekly or monthly all-staff or central staff meetings, committee meetings, specific programs, training sessions, and celebratory or ritualized events. Shadowing particular participants in their daily routines may also be a possibility.

Interviews.

For the purposes of this study two types of interviewing will be used, semi-structured interactive interviewing and naturally occurring conversation.

Each participant will take part in at least two 60-90 minute semi-structured interviews, which will be digitally recorded and transcribed. An introductory interview will initiate their participation in the study, and a summary interview will be conducted at its conclusion. A list of possible questions and topic areas for these interviews is attached.

Additional semi-structured interviews may be scheduled with participants as needed, either individually or in small groups, as the nature of the study unfolds with regard to meaning making. Unstructured, informal interviewing will take place throughout the inquiry and will be recorded digitally when possible or noted in my researcher journal immediately following the interaction.

Interviews will be recorded digitally and transcribed, and participants will have the opportunity to review their personal transcriptions for accuracy and meaning and to provide clarification, if they so wish.

Document collection.

In seeking to understand how meaning is made around a change process, public documents such as mission statements, job descriptions, forms, memos, meeting minutes, year end reports, budgets, internal newsletters, and newspaper articles, as well as print and online publications offer insight into the organization and its programs. Such documents viewed collectively illuminate espoused and enacted values and can provide information about organizational culture and how individuals operate within it. For this reason, collection and analysis of such documents will begin prior to interaction with the individuals or observation of the setting and will continue over the six-month course of the study.

Personal documents such as emails, journals, photo albums or calendars will be requested when referenced by the participant in an interview or observation setting and the relationship between the participant and myself is such that it does not seem intrusive.

For the purposes of this study, participants will be invited to be a part of an interactive journal either over email or in the form of an online blog, to provide an additional opportunity and forum to co-create meaning. I will be clear with participants that this form of communication is not private so that they can make an informed decision about their participation in the online journal. As researcher, I will also be taking digital photographs, both for the purpose of documentation of the setting and for use as photo elicitation. Photo elicitation is a technique in which the researcher uses photos to facilitate open-ended interviewing. Objects may appear mundane or uninteresting as a photo however the meanings that participants attached to them will be discussed as a way to “yield something that was already in the experience of the [participants], things about which they might not have spoken beforehand, or could not easily speak about in an interview” (Radley & Taylor, 2003. p. 90). Participants who are interested will also be invited to take photos of images that represent what the change means to them for the purpose of elicitation and insight into their meaning making processes. Photos will most likely be of things (objects and places) and their use in the final study will be negotiated with participants, using Photoshop to obscure or blur content that compromises confidentiality.

Researcher journal.

Journaling as a researcher makes it possible for me to explore and surface the assumptions and discourse-based biases I have regarding the topic and the setting. As someone who has come from a career in Student Affairs, specifically Housing and Residence Life, I am in many ways a product of the discourses of the field. Positioning this inquiry in a postmodern framework necessitates that I deconstruct those discourses, especially espoused “truths” of the field and how they may influence my ability to create space for multiple perspectives. In making this voice explicit and identifying the lenses through which I see the world, I am more able to be open to what I encounter in the field.

Additionally, in choosing portraiture as a methodology, my story and voice become part of the text. Journaling is an opportunity to explore this voice and position, including how they converge or diverge with participant voices and position.

This study will not use deceptive practices.

3. Proposed data analysis:

Analysis of data congruent with a portraiture framework is an ongoing process that involves both empirical interpretation and aesthetic narrative development and is highly attentive to voice. Five methods of analysis involving synthesis, convergence, and contrast are associated with portraiture:

1. listening for repetitive refrains
2. listening for resonant metaphors
3. listening for themes expressed through cultural and institutional rituals
4. use of triangulation to weave together threads of data, and
5. revealing patterns (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997).

Repetitive refrains, both audible and visible, proclaim “This is who we are. This is what we believe. This is how we see ourselves” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997, p. 193). Repetitive refrains are heard from a variety of participants in the inquiry over and over again, in language, actions, and gestures. Refrains can also be seen in signs and symbols in the setting. They may be easily identifiable, or require that the portraitist may need to listen carefully to recognize irony or innuendo. However, once recognized by the researcher, refrains are shared with and confirmed by the participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis).

In analyzing the data, the portraitist also is attentive to resonant metaphors, which may occur infrequently, but express and illustrate large ideas within human experience (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). They are present in the words, phrases, and symbols used by the actors and may give key insight into the core of organizational culture or a life story because they both “embody values and perspectives *and* they give them shape and meaning” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 198). The portraitist must listen carefully for metaphors, always seeking to uncover their meaning and context, and discovering their origins in dialogue the participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis).

Rituals, both institutional and cultural, are aesthetic displays of the organization’s purpose and values (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). They are functions of community life that the portraitist can both participate in and observe, and the data collected can be an aesthetic expression that gives insight and context to emergent themes

(Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis). Within rituals “we see values revealed, priorities named, and stories told that symbolize the institution’s culture” while also providing “opportunities for building community, for celebrating roots and traditions, and for underscoring continuity and coherence” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, p. 201).

Triangulation is a method by which the researcher uses multiple tools and strategies for data collection to find points of convergence within the data (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). It is characterized by the layering of data and involves using different lenses to frame similar findings (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis). However, while helpful as a tool for analyzing data within portraiture methodology, triangulation in this postmodern exploration of meaning making around transformational change will not be used as a measure of “truth” in the findings of this inquiry.

Finally, patterns are revealed by the portraitist in both convergent and divergent processes (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). Voices of participants, symbols, observation, and documents may converge in a “harmony” of clear patterns and themes which can be illustrated in the final portrait (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis). However, triangulation may not be present in the data and the portraitist must attend to the seeming lack of coherence and consensus, reflecting on her on experience and searching for patterns not immediately recognizable to or articulated by the participants (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis).

Section III – Risks/Benefits and Costs/Compensation to Participants

The risks inherent in this study are no greater than those normally encountered during regular workplace participation and are no greater than those encountered in the daily dialogue of the organization. Participation in this study will most likely not result in any direct benefits to study participants but it may help participants to further understand their own meaning making of the change process they are undertaking.

There will be no cost to participants agreeing to participate in this study. The only compensation which may be provided is light refreshments, depending on the location of interviews.

Section IV – Grant Information

This study is not grant-funded.

Section V – Documentation

Researchers will not be providing debriefing information to participants. Instead, researchers will be sharing study findings with participants as the data is analyzed as a means of member checking methods.

The following documents are attached:

- (1) Copy of semi-structured interview questions for first interview and topics to be covered
- (2) Informed consent on UNC letterhead
- (3) Letter of permission from participating organization

60-90 Minute Initial Individual Semi-structured Interview - Topics and Questions:

- How did you come to be a part of the Department of Housing? How long have you been a part of the Department?
- What is your role within the department? What about your informal role in the group of people with whom you work?
- How would you characterize the department? Could you tell me a story to illustrate your point?
- How is the department connected to campus? What purpose does it meet for students/for the campus community? How do think the department is viewed by the campus community?
- What do you think the current change initiative is about? What does it mean for you and your work?
- What is your responsibility with regard to the change that's happening here?
- In what ways have you been able to give input into the process?
- What's working? What's frustrating? Can you tell me a story as an example?
- How do you think change happens?
- If you could change anything about the department, what would that be?
- What do you think makes for a good Housing Department?
- Do you have people with whom you share your perspectives and thoughts about work? In what settings? In what ways does this kind of sharing help you in your work?
- Have you ever been a part of a similar organization? Can you tell me a story about what that was like?
- Tell me a story about another time you've been a part of an organization or group going through change.
- What have you learned about yourself as a result of your experience here?
- What makes your experience with this department the same/different than other experiences you have had with other organizations?
- Demographic information: age, position, gender, ethnicity, etc.
- Subsequent follow-up, probing and clarifying questions
- Please select a pseudonym, or name for yourself, to be used for this study.

Supplementary and Ongoing Interviews - Topics and Questions:

- Subsequent interviews will further explore themes and ideas based on the first interview and other data collected through observation and documents, and will occur either as scheduled interviews or as naturally occurring conversation during my time at the site.

60-90 Minute Individual Semi-structured Summary Interview - Topics and Questions:

- The second individual interview will further explore themes and ideas based on the first interview and other data collected through observation and documents.

UNIVERSITY of
NORTHERN COLORADO



Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership
Informed Consent for Participation in Research
University of Northern Colorado

Project Title: Exploring How Individuals in a Higher Education Organization Make Meaning of a Process
Intended as Transformational Change
Lead Researcher: Pamela Graglia
Phone Number: 970.371.4867
Research Advisors: Katrina Rodriguez, Ph.D. (970.351.2495) and Maria Lahman, Ph.D. (970.351.1603)

The purpose of this study is to explore your thoughts and feelings about change initiatives occurring in the Department of Housing. If you volunteer for this research study, you will be asked to participate in two 60-90 minute conversational interviews, one at the beginning of your involvement in the study and one at its conclusion. Supplementary interviews may be scheduled with your consent, based on how the change develops. Notes may be taken to record naturally occurring conversations we may have during my time observing the daily operation of the department. You may be asked to participate in an email journal or some other reflective activity of your choosing to further explore ideas or themes brought up in interviews. Additionally, photos may be taken as a part of an interview technique called "photo elicitation" where the images are used to spark conversation around topics. Topics discussed will include your perceptions and personal experiences and how these relate to the meaning you make of the change process. All participants in the study will be current employees of the Department of Housing or possibly college students who are served by the department and will be at least 18 years of age. The topics are not intended to be embarrassing or upsetting.

The results of your participation will be strictly confidential. Your real name will not be used. Beyond the researcher, no one will be allowed to see or discuss any of the individual responses. Individual responses from this study will be combined with all other responses and reported in a paper and an interactive narrative CD. Photos will be used in the final representation only with your permission. In order to maximize confidentiality, I ask that you also keep confidential the information shared during the group meetings as well as the identity of the individuals participating in the study, if you are aware of individual identities.

Your responses in the interviews will be recorded and transcribed. I will email you with the transcripts from your interview and you will have an opportunity to review the transcriptions as well as edit any portion of the transcript. I will also provide you with preliminary study findings generated in ongoing analysis, so that you may provide me with your opinions and thoughts, if you desire. Audio files will be stored on CD in my locked office and will be destroyed when the study comes to a conclusion.

Your participation in this study will most likely not result in any direct benefits to you as an individual but it may help you to further understand your own meaning making of the ongoing change process you are a part of and who you are as a person. Your participation will contribute to the understanding of how individuals make meaning of their organizational experiences around transformational change. Risks to you are minimal.

Please feel free to phone me if you have any questions or concerns about this research and please retain one copy of this letter for your records. Thank you for assisting me with my research.

Sincerely,

Pamela Graglia

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study, and, if you begin to participate you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Sponsored Program and Academic Research Center, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; 970.351.1907.

Participant Signature

Date

Email address for transcription review

Researcher Signature

Date

APPENDIX B

Dissertation Format Approval Email

-----Original Message-----

From: Katrina.Rodriguez@unco.edu
 Subject: **FW: alternative dissertation format**
 Date: June 3, 2008 2:45:36 PM MDT
 To: pamela.graglia@gmail.com
 Cc: Maria.Lahman@unco.edu

Pamela,
 Great news! Your dissertation format has been approved by the graduate school!

=)k

Katrina Rodriguez, Ph.D.
 Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership
 University of Northern Colorado
 970.351.2495 (office)
 970.351.3334 (fax)

-----Original Message-----

From: Steward, Carol
 Sent: Tue 6/3/2008 2:42 PM
 To: Rodriguez, Katrina
 Cc: Lahman, Maria
 Subject: RE: alternative dissertation format

Robbyn and I will be fine with this format.

Carol

-----Original Message-----

From: Rodriguez, Katrina
 Sent: Thursday, May 29, 2008 9:07 AM
 To: Steward, Carol
 Cc: Lahman, Maria
 Subject: FW: alternative dissertation format

Hi Carol,

My co-chair, Maria Lahman and I, have been discussing this concern and would like to offer a simplistic answer to your question. We hope it makes sense.

This dissertation format and much more alternative ones, such as multimedia disks with video footage or poetry, are accepted at the national and international level for dissertations. Also, it is accepted in books by leading researchers in the field such as Patty Lather.

It is not as accepted in journals but this is not due to a dislike of the format (in fact new ways of representing data is highly encouraged) it is due to financial issues. For journals to be set up for alternative styles, in this case text boxes, requires extra set up costs. Any deviation costs extra money and sometimes the author is asked to bear the cost.

We are confident the student will be able to publish a version of this work due to the extensive ethnographic case design she has.

Let us know your thoughts,

Thanks,

Katrina and Maria

-----Original Message-----

From: Steward, Carol
Sent: Thu 5/29/2008 8:31 AM
To: Rodriguez, Katrina
Subject: RE: alternative dissertation format

Robbyn asked if this format would be acceptable for submission to a journal or peer-reviewed publication?

-----Original Message-----

From: Rodriguez, Katrina
Sent: Tuesday, May 27, 2008 4:01 PM
To: Steward, Carol; Hulse, Laura
Cc: Lahman, Maria
Subject: RE: alternative dissertation format

Thank you Carol.

Katrina

Katrina Rodriguez, Ph.D.
Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership
University of Northern Colorado
970.351.2495 (office)
970.351.3334 (fax)

-----Original Message-----

From: Steward, Carol
Sent: Tue 5/27/2008 3:51 PM
To: Rodriguez, Katrina; Hulse, Laura
Cc: Lahman, Maria
Subject: RE: alternative dissertation format

I will discuss this with Robbyn and get back with you.

Thanks,
Carol

-----Original Message-----

From: Rodriguez, Katrina
Sent: Tuesday, May 27, 2008 3:48 PM
To: Steward, Carol; Hulse, Laura
Cc: Lahman, Maria
Subject: alternative dissertation format

Hi Carol and Laura,

I wasn't sure who to contact regarding this inquiry. If neither of you are the appropriate person to speak with, please direct me accordingly.

Attached is Chapter 4 of a student's dissertation that is written in an alternative format. I am co-chairing this student's research and both co-chairs agree this format is congruent with the student's postmodern epistemological and methodological approach for this study. Chapter 5 will be written in a similar format. The student is attentive to ensuring the margins (and other format requirements) will meet the dissertation format criteria. If permissible, the student would also like to consider submitting color copies of Chapters 4 & 5 for bound copies. I wasn't sure if this would be allowable.

Can you let me know the process for having an alternative format approved and if there is someone else with whom I ought to speak.

Thank you for your assistance,

Katrina

Katrina Rodriguez, Ph.D.
Higher Education and Student Affairs Leadership
University of Northern Colorado
970.351.2495 (office)
970.351.3334 (fax)

APPENDIX C

Lizabeth's Notes on Chapter Four

Topics Explored

- Values-based change
- Process of leading change and creating sustained change
- Meaning, values, and how we think about creating change
- Organizational transformation
- “Managing whitewater” (Susan Komives)
 - o The environment is changing, students are changing, and we have to adapt constantly
- Fostering space where the best of what everyone brings can emerge in a process of co-creation
- New campus leadership
- Advancing the vision
- Building human capacity through teaching, listening, and conversation
- How do you honor both the people who want structure and direction and the ones who want spirit and inspiration in a vision? Space so that everyone has room to create...
- Failure to think about ourselves and the context of our work
- How decisions are made
- People feeling like their voice isn’t valued
- Individuals grappling with questions about establishing their place and purpose in the organization
- Decision making, communication, and information flow
- Who receives access to information, how, and when
- Feeling supported: “getting what we need in a timely manner, acknowledging us, acknowledging our concerns, our issues, our accomplishments”
- Dynamic of the leadership team
- Connections within the department...trust
- Stability vs. constant change (perceptions differ)
- External pressures
- Fear of failure
- The magical innovation that comes from moments of uncertainty and risk
- Culture shift
- Altering the culture of our organizations by changing the assumptions and processes that lay beneath the surface of what we do
- Ripple effect
- Meaning making
- Operation excellence vs. less concrete, developmental approach (precision and task management were emphasized over true student development, engaged communities, and engaged professionals (“engaged, organic, empowered, trusting”))
- After professional development workshops, we go on thinking much as we always have...daily demands usurp the best of intentions
- What you can give and what you must give up in order to contribute to the whole
- Protecting what’s really essential for students and getting rid of the stuff that’s in the way
- Helping students find their voices
- Use of metaphor to introduce dialogue about vision and direction as a group

- Being given an outcome, but how you accomplish it is up to you
 - We won't proscribe the method, so there's freedom
 - Real clear outcomes and room for emergence – intentionally create
- Relating a practical proposal to theory
 - e.g. How does it affect racial identity development?
 - e.g. If you don't understand why you're doing what you're doing or why you need to change it, you're always going to be reactive.
- "It is a story of a good people who face daily organizational challenges daring to ask larger questions about purpose and what's possible, and the meaning they make, separately and together, as they engage in the messy process of creating change." (p. 108)
- A call to possibility...focusing on meaning...a call to our greatest values
- "When change is viewed as a values-based leadership process, a willingness to be vulnerable and be seen may also allow us to see opportunities we haven't considered before." (p. 108)
- "For our attempts at creating change to be truly transformational, they must alter the culture of our organizations by changing the assumptions and processes that lay beneath the surface of what we do. To be transformed, we must both act and think differently." (p. 108)
- The Vision for Residence Life:
 - We build human capacity by putting students first and leading with the heart and mind.
 - We work to create a premiere university experience that accelerates the academic and character development of the student in residence.
 - We strive to establish an inspiring and motivating living-learning environment in which students, faculty, and staff work together to develop deep understanding of shared disciplines, shared goals, and shared responsibilities within the University community.

Mac

- Helping others grow spiritually (i.e. learning the positive behaviors and values in life)
- Learning how to express and taking them to the farthest level
- His vision is an ongoing, additive, and emerging process of listening to the people around him, coupled with his own values and beliefs
- Not a static vision, but a living document under constant construction
- Common language is necessary to be able to discuss the vision
- Structure should create some clarity but it still has to have an explosive energy
- Accountability
- Supporting others who are new...human kindness...social justice...social care
- Start with the practical, then bring in the deeper stuff as it relates

My thoughts about how this relates to my new job:

- What is the job? What am I doing here? What are we trying to accomplish?
- What are our pre-existing assumptions, values, and life/professional experiences that frame how we think about change?
- How can those elements be limiting if we are not collaborating with students and each other to create change?
- What is our song? Our way of knowing and speaking truth?
- Identify our culture as a group and whether or not we want to change it...What does everyone think the culture is? Do we need to change any part of it?
- Developmental matrices – how each program reaches 5 developmental outcomes from 5 different developmental theories, for example (show the impact; assess qualitatively and quantitatively)