Kennesaw State University

DigitalCommons@Kennesaw State University

Spring 5-8-2017

Mergers in Higher Education: A Case Study of Organizational Culture, Communication, and Conflict Management Strategies in the University System of Georgia

Jia Min
Kennesaw State University

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.kennesaw.edu/incmdoc_etd

🌀 Part of the International and Area Studies Commons, and the Peace and Conflict Studies Commons

A Dissertation

entitled

Mergers in Higher Education: A Case Study of Organizational Culture, Communication,

and Conflict Management Strategies in the University System of Georgia

by

Jia Min

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the

requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree in International Conflict Management

_____

Darina Lepadatu, PhD, Committee
Chair

_____

May H. Gao, PhD, Committee Member

_____

Douglas Moodie, PhD, Committee
Member

Kennesaw State University

March 2017

Kennesaw State UNIVERSITY
Graduate College

Thesis/Dissertation Defense Outcome

Name JIA MIN   KSU ID 000434433

Email jmin1@kennesaw.edu   Phone Number (706) 980-0238

Program INCM

Title Mergers in Higher Education: A Case Study of Organizational Culture, Communication and Conflict Management Strategies in the University System of Georgia

---

Thesis/Dissertation Defense: Date 03/29/2017

☐ Passed   ☐ Failed   ☑ Passed With Revisions (attach revisions)

Signatures

Thesis/Dissertation Chair	3/29/2017 Date
Committee Member	3/29/2017 Date
Committee Member — D.R. Moodie	29th March 2017 Date
Committee Member	Date
Committee Member	Date
Program Director	March 30, 2017 Date
Department Chair — Joseph Bock	04/05/17 Date
Graduate Dean	4-11-17 Date

Last Modified 05/26/16

Abstract

By 2018, the University System of Georgia will have 18 institutions merged with each other. This qualitative case study focuses on how organizational culture, communication strategies, and conflict management strategies affect a merger in higher education in the state of Georgia. This study attempts to answer the following questions: How is organizational culture preserved and/or changed in the process of consolidation? How was information about consolidation communicated to various group of people? How do various groups of people make sense of the information provided regarding consolidation? What aspects of consolidation generated the most conflicts? What conflict management strategies were adopted by administrators and faculty leaders in order to solve conflicts during consolidation? Based on 35 in-depth interviews with faculty, staff, and administrators, the study reveals how new organizational cultures emerge, how to manage different types of conflicts, and how to make sense of organizational changes during the complex situations of mergers in higher education. The results show how organizational culture, communication, and conflict management strategies are closely connected with each other, and can have a major impact on the merger process in higher education. The findings of this study may have policy implications, and provide guidance to future institutions and decision makers who are considering mergers in higher education.

Keywords: organizational culture; organizational communication; conflict management strategies; merger; higher education

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my beloved parents who taught me a love of education, instilled in me a passion for life-long learning, have supported and encouraged me throughout my life. They believed in me even when I did not. They kept saying that there was a light at the end of the tunnel and not to give up. They were my determination when mine seemed gone, and they held me in those final moments when my strength had all but given out. Without them, I would not be who I am or where I am today. Thank you, Mom and Dad for everything. I love you.

Acknowledgements

Upon completion of my dissertation, I would like to express my appreciation to those who have been extremely and exceptionally helpful during this extensive process.

I would first like to thank my advisor/chair Dr. Darina Lepadatu, for her guidance on this project. Thank you for all of your time, your wisdom, your mentorship, and your support through every stage of this process. Your high expectations, work ethic, and positive attitude have an impact through my whole dissertation. As committee chair, you were an effective guide through the often difficult and puzzling process of research. Without your prompt and efficient work, this dissertation would never have been completed.

I would also like to acknowledge and give gratitude to my committee members, Dr. May Gao, and Dr. Douglas Moodie. They encouraged me with their interest in my ideas and their enthusiasm for the unfolding story. Dr. May Gao, thank you for pointing out important lessons and arguments that I had overlooked; thank you for your constant guidance and push to think more critically, and to work harder than I ever knew I was capable of. Dr. Douglas Moodie, thank you for helping me to plan and organize this qualitative research in a coherent manner. Your insights, encouragement and continued support were instrumental in aiding me to complete this study on time. Both of you were self-sacrificing in your willingness to read and comment on draft after draft. Your confidence, empathy, and sense of humor saw me through some of the more difficult phases of the work. I am very grateful for all the contributions from my committee.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank the wonderful individuals who committed significant time and effort to participate in this study. Without their help, I

would never be able to finish this study and have such valuable data. I truly hope that

your merger stories will inspire and educate other faculty and administrators to navigate

the often-complex road to successful mergers.

.

Table of Contents

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

The University System of Georgia is preparing students for the 21st century economy and citizenship. Today the System must look internally to ensure that it has a 21st century structure, providing a network of institutions offering the proper range of degrees and opportunities in research and service to students and faculty. The purpose of campus consolidation is to increase the system's overall effectiveness in creating a more educated Georgia.

(University System of Georgia website, 2017[1])

One of the most shocking announcements in the University System of Georgia in 2012 was the decision to merge eight colleges into four. Each college/university had its own unique organizational culture, background, missions, values, school colors, mascots, students, administrators, faculty and staff members, and much more. These individual threads of character came together to create the cultural fabric of each institution, some of which took decades to develop. For these eight institutions, the process that took decades to create needed to be undone and recreated in one semester.

Mergers in the business field are very popular and often yield the desired result. Nowadays this practice is becoming more common in higher education as the field evolves. European countries were the first to start these mergers in higher education (see in Figure 1) with America following suit some time ago, but it wasn't until recently that we've seen a dramatic increase in its frequency here in the States. While we are still in the early stage of consolidation, we may want to examine other examples to see where this road will lead. In the late 1990s, China began mergers in higher education. According to Azziz (2013), one third of the universities in China were merged during that period of time.

---

1. www.usg.edu/docs/consolidations.pdf

Looking back at the American system of higher education, things have been constantly changing due to the social system and financial reasons. A number of changes include the curriculum, governance, students' enrollment rate, and financial reasons. According to Haynes (1999, p. 32), the U.S. Department of Education (1997) established four major strategies in higher education:

(a) Merger. This involves combining two or more institutions into one entity. The institutions may be joined by academic programs or campuses;

(b) Elimination of program duplication. This means that no two colleges will offer the same academic programs. It is believed that this idea will force students to follow these programs at any given institution;

(c) The creation of separate upper and lower division institutions. In order to create such a division, each institution is ranked according to certain standards. One institution is ranked the highest, and other institutions are ranked as lower levels;

(d) A combination of alternatives to achieve the desegregation objective. This is a combination of two or more of the above strategies used.

In the globalized world, mergers and acquisitions happen more often to help businesses grow, save money and be more competitive. According to Eastman & Lang (2001), mergers and acquisitions occur when strong companies buy or takeover weaker companies. Typically the weaker company is acquired as a result of financial distress. Companies are also acquired to eliminate competition. While the reasoning may differ in each case, the success of business mergers are always measured and based on the financial outcome. A consolidation in higher education should be different from business mergers and acquisitions. Usually a consolidation is between two or more colleges or universities being made into one with a new identity (Martin & Samuels, 1994). This

includes new missions, a new name, new school colors, and more. This outcome can only be achieved through a marriage of institutions, versus an acquisition.

Many people think that merging universities in higher education is a "magic bullet" which will solve all the problems and bring better opportunities for the future (Harman & Harman, 2003). Mergers are not as easy as 1+1 = 1. Merging involves the creation of a new organization with new identity, missions, values, culture, and policies. It needs to consider both pre- and post-merger identities (Azziz, 2013).

Each merger is a unique case. There are no certain rules or policies that can work for all the mergers. In some cases, employees may experience the merger more positively than others but in most cases people are finding great anxiety and stress in the fear of the unknown. In business, mergers often result in massive lay-offs (Van Knippenberg, 2002). Even without the fear of lay-offs, the organizational restructuring and culture changes can make employees feel very stressful both physically and emotionally (Jetten, O'Brien, & de Lima, 2002). The culmination of these events can negatively effect morale and develop into resentment and negativity, which ultimately trickles down to a negative educational experience for students.

Countries with University Mergers
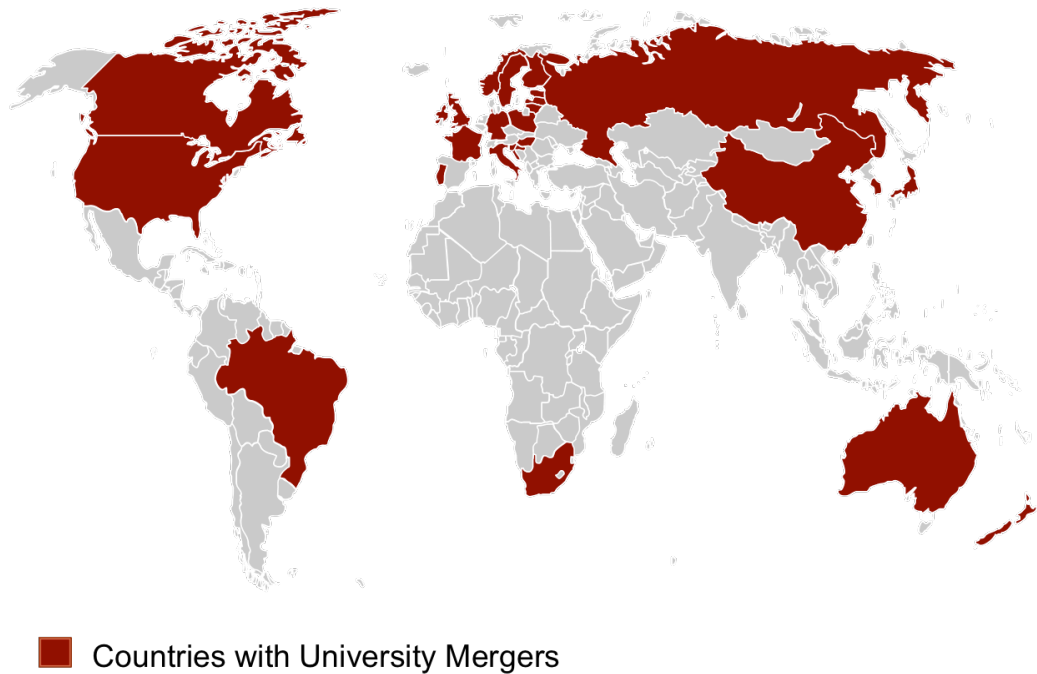
Figure 1: Countries with University Mergers

In higher education, the purpose of mergers has also been identified as a way to create a better future for students (Harman & Harman, 2003). Mergers are a great way to create strong academic programs for students and reduce duplicated majors. The merger is also an effective tool in helping the state government solve financial distress and save money (Harman & Harman, 2003). Moreover, the financial viability seems like one of the most important reasons behind all the mergers in higher education.

In the United States, a great number of mergers in higher education occurred in the 1970s. The report of National Commission on Financing of Postsecondary Education observed: "perhaps the only unequivocal proof of financial distress among educational institutions is their actual demise" (National Commission on the Financing of Postsecondary Education, 1973 p. 9). To look deeper in the situation, Harman (2003) did a complete case study of mergers in higher education by comparing ten colleges and

universities. In his study, Harman (2003) did interviews with employees (administrators, faculty, and stuff members) in those colleges and universities to find out their opinions and attitudes about the mergers. In the end of the study, Harman (2003) finds out that the government heavily influenced the mergers. None of the schools were volunteered to merge with each other. Also, most individuals during the interview considered the mergers were definitely a bad idea and they turned out poorly. Many employees were seeing mergers as a threat rather than an opportunity. To them, mergers were political decisions without much good effect coming from them.

The purpose of the merger in itself is not just to reorganize two institutions and create a new one. Organizational culture, communication strategies, and conflict management strategies are all important elements of the merger process (Chou, 2012; Stephenson, 2011). The merger process requires leadership and organizational culture change. The process affects the communication channels and the effectiveness of communication. It also increases conflicts between institutions, administrators, faculty, staff members, and students (Harman & Harman, 2003).

Nowadays, because of decreasing government funds in higher education, more and more colleges and universities are now facing the possibility of merging, or sometimes they have even been taken over. Study shows that most mergers in higher education in the United States are not voluntary (Harman & Harman, 2003). They can often be compared to an assigned marriage—married but never truly united.

Statement of Problem

In most business mergers, 75% did not meet the performance goals and ultimately failed (Epstein, 2005). One of the major reasons for the failure is the clash of culture and

ineffectiveness of communication (Badrtalei & Bates, 2007). In the United States during the 1970s, some colleges and universities tried to "borrow" the idea of merger and acquisitions from the business field and use them in higher education. Mergers in higher education are supposed to be different from business. First, college is intended to be shared governance. It is not a top down decision-making process like in business (Weber, 1958). In business mergers, the leadership who directly benefit from the mergers is often the people making the decisions. In higher education the decision making process should consider and benefit all parties, both students and employees, not just a few individual at the top. Second is the type of mergers. In the business world, mergers are most likely a takeover (Badrtalei & Bates, 2007). But for higher education, mergers should be consolidation, which requires a new name, new identity, new missions, and new values, etc. Last, mergers and acquisitions in business can be resolved by separating again if things do not work out. For higher education, once they are merged, they cannot easily be undone.

Between the mergers in business and in higher education there is one similar theme—the importance of organizational culture and communication. Regardless of a takeover or equal merge, clash of culture plays an important role. Without knowing the culture before a merger, it will be very difficult and challenging to create an effective new organizational culture. For acquisitions in business there is a dating phase where companies can shop around and find their best match. In other words, it is a free marriage. Consolidations in higher education are arranged marriages where institutions do not get to choose their merger partner. Most mergers happened without or with very limited communication between administrators, staff and faculties, even between two

institutions. There is a belief that as time goes by, schools will solve everything and figure it out in time. However, at the same time, clash of organizational cultures and lack of communication strategies are causing more problems and new conflict between the institutions and faculty members, which inevitably trickles down to the student experience.

Unfortunately, many governed officials believe mergers in higher education are the quickest and most efficient way to solve financial and budgetary problems; it has become more popular and common lately (see figure 2). Each merger requires a thorough process to understand the culture of pre-merger colleges and universities, which influences the post-merger organizational cultures. According to Harman & Harman (2003), the goals of mergers in higher education include offering more academic programs to students, easy and open access, and improved qualities. In many cases, when colleges and universities merge, the smaller institutions usually get taken over by the bigger institutions (Martin & Samels, 1994): for example, Kansas State University merged Kansas College of Technology.

Mergers in higher education are happening all over the nation. Like most of them, the University System of Georgia started their process in 2013. For Georgia, one of the major reasons was because of the limited funding from the government. Fewer institutions to divide the funding amongst meant that each dollar spent would theoretically have a greater impact on each student. The Chancellor Hank Huckaby (2011) states that, "Looking ahead, we must ensure that our System has the appropriate number of campuses around the state. We need to be organized in ways the truly foster service to our students in the most effective way and that ensure our faculty are properly

deployed and supported. Therefore, I believe it is time for the system to study if campus

consolidations are justified and will enhance our ability to serve the people of Georgia at

less cost." Since 2013, Georgia has fused eighteen institutions into nine. They are:

a) Gainesville State College & North Georgia College & State University (2013)

b) Waycross College & South Georgia College (2013)

c) Macon State College & Middle Georgia College (2013)

d) Augusta State University & Georgia Health Sciences University (2013)

e) Kennesaw State University & Southern Polytechnic State University (2015)

f) Georgia State University & Georgia Perimeter College (2016)

g) Albany State University & Darton State College (2017)

h) Georgia Southern & Armstrong State (2018)

i) ABAC & Bainbridge State (2018)

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

Mergers have become more and more popular in higher education (Harman &

Harman, 2003). While there is an abundance of research on mergers in higher education,

which typically focus on the reasons why the merger should occur, very little attention

has been focused on the changes that occur within the institution during the merger and

how this aspect can be improve upon. How colleges and universities prepare for a merger

from organizational culture, communication strategies, and conflict management

strategies, and use them effectively to help the merger process was missing as well. Many

researchers, in the field of mergers in higher education have acknowledged that this

theoretical framework is missing. (Lang, 2003, Ullrich, Christ, & Schluter, 2006).

Some scholars believe that in higher education in the United States today is facing some difficult times and that will result in more mergers happening (O'Neil & Barneet, 1980, & Marcus, 2013). However, without knowing the power of organizational culture, communication strategies, and conflict management strategies, those mergers may also increase the number of problems (Jaschik, 2008). According to Martin & Jaschki (2015), mergers usually are more complicated than most people think. This is mainly because after the merger, there are so many more potential problems and conflicts that may occur. One glaring example is the creation of duplicate positions. The merger not only creates one president and one provost, it eliminates many redundant positions across the entire educational and administrative spectrum. Martin & Samels (2015) state that "Most do not realize the significant, sometimes overwhelming, financial and goodwill costs in eliminating a college or university" (p. 24).

It is true that some research and articles may view the issue differently. For some administrators, they may look at merger as an opportunity and a better future for the college (Martin & Samels, 2005). However, they also admit that mergers take time, and it is a complicated process. The literature on mergers in higher education does not appear to show the importance of organizational culture; and it does not appear to show the relationship among communication strategies, conflict, and organizational cultures with merger, and how they can best be planned and managed to help the merger process. According to Martin & Samels (2015), many people in colleges and universities were wondering if the merger failed, like in business, could everything just go back to pre-merger? To fill this important gap in research, the purpose of this study is to find out how organizational culture, communication, and conflict management strategies would affect

consolidation and merger in higher education, and what we can advise to make process go smoother.

How does the warrant for a study of organizational culture, communication strategies, and conflict management relate to consolidation in higher education? To start, the merger can be seen as a new start for the colleges and universities, and also a new culture. This new culture requires effective communication strategies and effective conflict management strategies. The merger follows by a massive organizational change, which includes mission, values, colors, etc. The merger also represents a new organization, which may cause many conflicts due to the changes. A study of the merger in higher education can connect the importance of cultural changes, communication strategies and conflict management strategies. This study focuses on Georgia Peach University, one of the first few consolidations that happened in the state of Georgia. The research questions are:

RQ1: How are organizational cultures preserved and/or changed in the process of consolidation?

RQ2: How was information of consolidation communicated to various group of people?

RQ 3: How do they make sense of the information provided regarding consolidation?

RQ4: What aspects of consolidation generated the most conflicts?

RQ5: What conflict management strategies were adopted by administrators and faculty leaders in order to solve conflicts during consolidation?

Higher Education Consolidations in the State of Georgia

Because of technology and globalization, things around us are changing rapidly. It is the same situation for higher education. Online classes, distance learning for degrees,

etc., are a few examples of how these changes are affecting higher education. So now the question is what should we do and how do we keep up? How can colleges and universities respond to these changes and challenges and stay competitive? It appears that for some people, the merger process was the first major step to ensure the University System of Georgia could maintain its ability to provide a quality education (O' Neil, & Barnett, 1980).

According to Marcus (2013), many states had to cut their funding for higher education due to of financial reasons. But not for long, those cutting can only temporarily help the problem or may even not help that much. For many, the merger appears to be a more long-term fix (Mitchell, Palacios, & Leachman, 2014). According to Higher Education Publications, Inc. (2014), consolidations in higher education in the United States have been increasing each year since the 1980s (See Figure 2) (Higher Education Publications, Inc., 2014).

University Mergers in U.S.
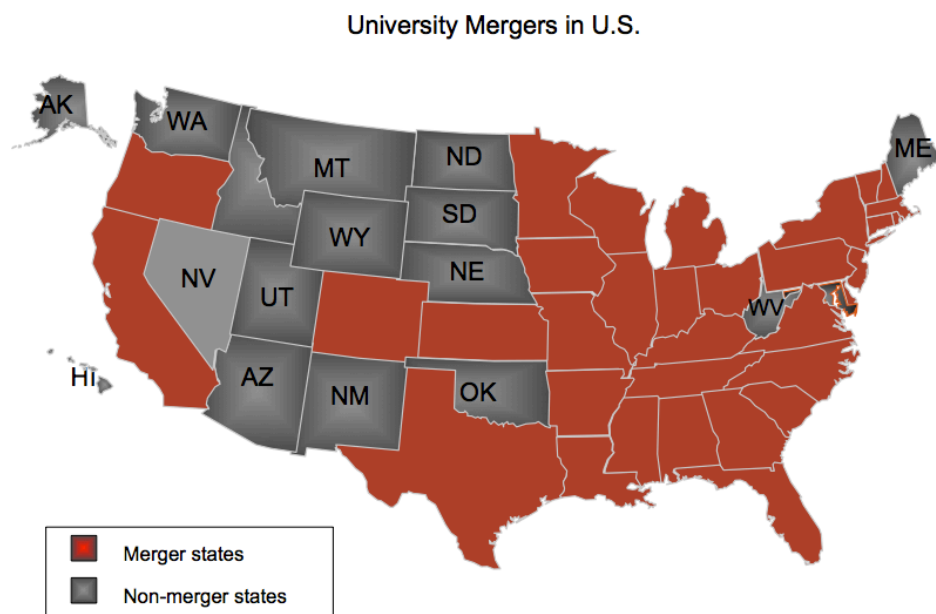
Figure 2 University Mergers in U.S.

For Georgia from 2013-2014, the budget for higher education dropped by 3.6%. (State Higher Education Executive Officers, 2013). At this point, the consolidations were launched to create a leaner university system for Georgia. It was presented as a solution to not only help the budget issues but also to provide a better education for students and benefit the local communities. (USG, 2012).

In 2012, the USG planned to consolidate eight colleges and universities into four by 2013. Since it was the first time for everyone to go through a merger, there were many questions and different voices. According to USG, saving money is not the primary goal for mergers. The number one reason is to create a "more educated Georgia" (USG, 2012). Doing this will help students to have better educational opportunities and a more diverse campus. It would also benefit those studying online through distance learning. Among

those eight schools, only two of them are in the same city; the remaining six are separated by commutes, which range from 20 miles to 187 miles. When the official statements from USG were announced, they presented considerable positive feedback and thoughts about the mergers. When I began conducting my own research I quickly discovered that not all of the feedback was positive. Lack of communication is one example of consistently negative feedback that I gathered.

During all those four mergers, the most common communication strategies used by the decision-makers were to inform all the colleges and universities that they were going to be the next merger partners. By that time, all the decisions were already made; the schools were simply just informed, and no opinions were asked. This poor communication strategy results in conflict. When officials from the Board of Regents went to one school to discuss the merger process, people from that school were extremely upset and presented their concerns and even anger. Like this example, most leaders of the eighteen colleges and universities did not obtain much information before the official news was announced. Not to mention the rest of the administrators, faculties, and staff members were completely left in the dark, and some of them even heard the news from leaks.

The College A and College B Merger

This study is focusing on the merger of Georgia Peach University. It was one of the first few that merged in the State of Georgia. Georgia Peach University was combined by College A and College B. To have a better understating of the case study, it is important to look at the background and organizational culture of College A and College B before the merger.

College A

College A was established as a community college. When the College first started, the enrollment of students' population was less than 500. It was formed as a two-year college in Georgia. According to Lorence (2013), it was a teaching based school, and has an open access to the community.

The mission of College A was focusing on being teaching-based, having open access, and offering broad liberal arts education programs (Lorence, 2013). Teaching was one of the most important elements in the organizational culture. Small size classes gave students great opportunities to receive as much assistance and attention as they needed. Besides teaching, the college also expanded its cultures in other areas, which including serving the community, and preparing students (Lorence, 2013). The Board of Regents allowed the college to offer some baccalaureate degrees.

College B

College B has a very different organizational culture than College A. College B was one of the oldest public universities in the State of Georgia. It was a four-year university, which also had some graduate programs. Compared to College A, College B was more of a research-based institution than a teaching-based college (Roberts, 2015).

There are some other major differences between these two institutions of higher education. Unlike College A, College B has more traditional students. The university has more than 45 well-developed undergraduate programs, a major focus on STEM programs (Roberts, 2015). Both institutions have a very active student life. However, only College B offers athletics programs.

Theoretical Framework

This section will present the theoretical framework. Chapter 2, 3, and 4 will discuss more specifically all of the theories that related to merger.

Mergers and acquisitions have been appearing in the business literature for a long time (Haleblian et al., 2009). Since mergers, especially international mergers and acquisitions have been growing in the past five years, more and more theories and researchers are studying this area (Gunter, 2008). At the same time, social identity (Tajefl, 1979) is important to consider. Many researchers found the importance of social identity, which includes self-identity and organizational identity (Halebian et al., 2009; Gunter, 2008). This study looks at Social Identity Theory, Framing Theory, and Conflict Management Theory.

Figure 3 is a display of the main elements of the study and relationships among each section. The study focuses mainly on organizational culture communication and conflict management strategies during the merger. It first looks at each of the sections individually to determine how they affect the merger. Then it considers the relationship between each section and how they connect with each other.
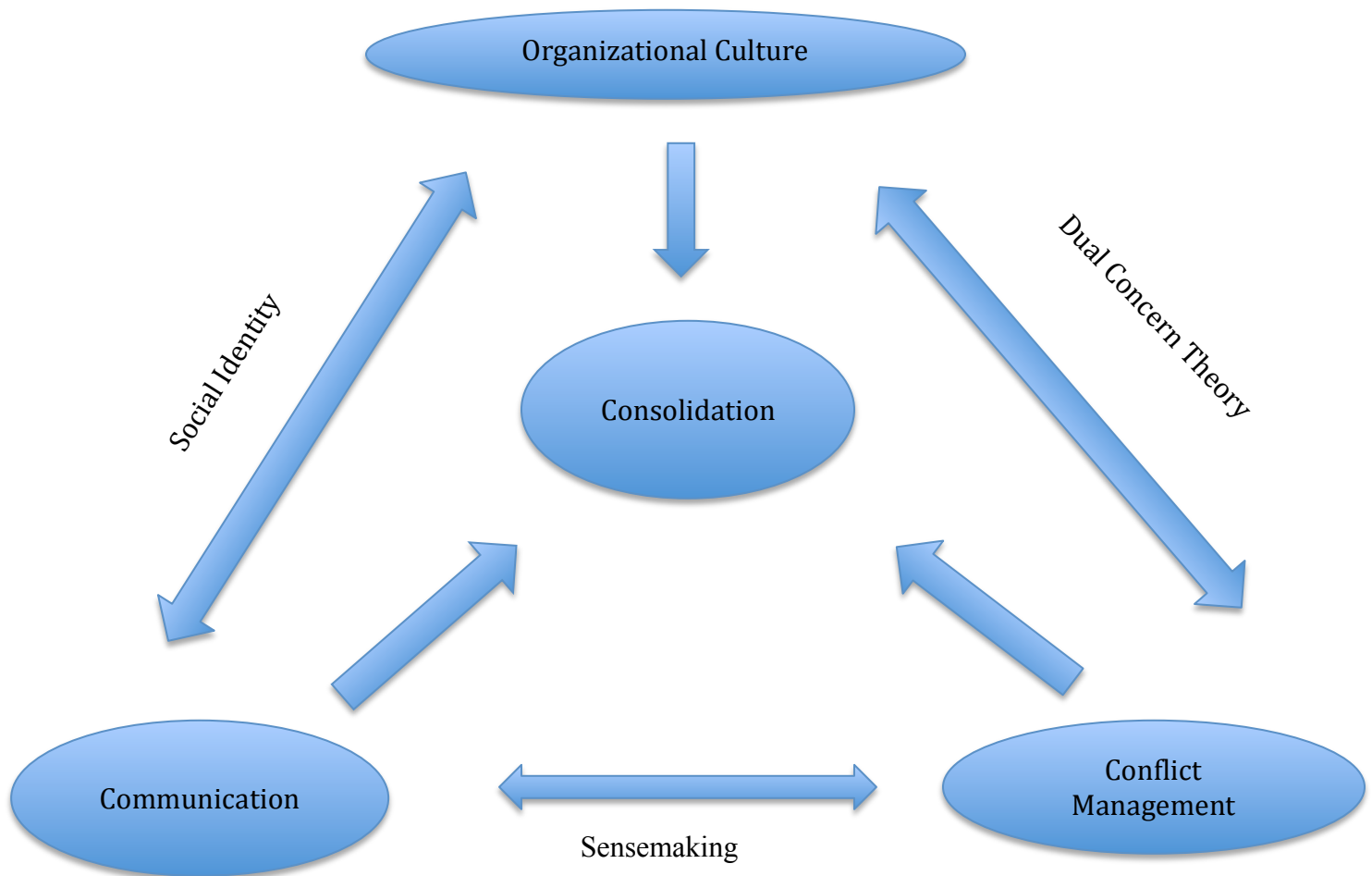
Figure 3 Theoretical Framework

Methodology

The analysis of organizational culture, communication strategies, and conflict

management strategies of the merger between College A and College B requires

qualitative methods. For this study, administrators, faculty, and staff from both schools

were interviewed about their perceptions of the organizational culture of their old and new organization. Qualitative research method studies issues from different areas. It believes in the importance of interactions and observations (Merriam, 1998).

This study uses a case study from the University System of Georgia to find out how organizational culture, communication and conflict management strategies affect mergers in higher education. To use the case study method will allow a very in-depth review of the subject and be able to collect the first hand data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The case study research method also allows researchers to have an in-depth understanding of the situations and learn the patterns to find out the reason why (Crewell & Plano Clark, 2007). The case study approach at the same time allows the researcher to collect data from different types of ways, which including interviews, on-site observations, and publications, etc. (Yin, 2009). To use the case study method is an effective way to understand the meaning of organizational culture and meanings behind the concepts (Yin, 2003).

For most research, especially qualitative research, it is very important for the researcher to collect the primary data. This is a case study adopting qualitative research methods to generate information rich in detail and embedded in context. Qualitative methods are highly contributive to this study because they aim at understanding the hidden meaning behind the outer layers.

Case Selection

The case of Georgia Peach University is selected for this study because both schools were very unique and different from each other in the pre-consolidation phase. Georgia Peach University is a pseudonym selected to protect the identity of the

university. This merger case involves two merger partners where one partner is more dominant than the other College A was originally a two-year teaching college. On the other hand, College B was a four-year university. After the consolidation, the newly created institution, Georgia Peach University, became a regional, multi-campus college. Therefore, this case study is based on a merger that involves two institutions that are perceived as unequal.

An important consideration in the selection of this case is the duration of time that had elapsed since the initiation of each merger. It is without doubt that the performances of institutions can very well be interpreted differently if they are examined at a different periods of time. Lang (2001) notes that agreement is lacking among scholars on when a merger should be deemed complete.

Data Collection

For the study, the data collection process was using different types of data, which gives an insight of the merger. Initial site approval for this study was granted by Kennesaw State University and Georgia Peach University. The Kennesaw State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Proposal # 15-501) and Georgia Peach University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Protocol Code # 201538) granted review and approval of the study's methodologies.

The research method includes semi-structured interviews. Interviewing is an effective data collecting method, which allows us to observe participates' verbal and physical responses at the same time (Patton, 1980). Therefore, interviewing was selected for this study. The study participants were administrators, faculty, and staff. Interviewees are both male and female working pre and post-merger at Georgia Peach University.

The reason to choose a case study and use interview data collection was to learn the deep meaning behind the pattern and behaviors of each individual (Yin, 2009). To use semi-structured interview allows the researcher to control the big situation, and at the same time to give enough freedom for the participants to share their opinions (Merriam, 1998). All the interviewees were asked to sign a consent form before the interview. For the phone interviews, the interviewees were asked to give an oral consent. The time of each interview was approximately 30-50 minutes. All of them were recorded. This ensures that everything is preserved for the analysis. The researcher also travelled to all of the different campuses to conduct the interviews and gather additional information.

Besides collecting data from the interviews, the researcher also observed the study sites. This step is very necessary and allows the researcher to find more valuable insight information about the working environment in the organization (Yin, 2003). It also helps the research understand the overall culture. Documents such as internal newsletters, local newspapers, and other public documents such as GPU official announcements and web sites, are also included in this data collection process. Those documents present some different views of the issue from other parties who do not work in the college.

Pilot Study

Prior to the beginning of this study, a pilot study was conducted three months before the official interview took place that included four interviews to determine the feasibility of the study. The pilot interviews each lasted about 40-60 minutes and were designed to test the use of certain questions and determine if relevant data could be collected from the interview guide for this study. Each subject was presented with a consent agreement and was informed of the purpose of the study prior to the interview.

All the pilot interviews were reordered for data analysis. The digital recordings were transcribed afterwards. The audio recordings were erased and the transcriptions were modified to remove any identifiers to each of the participants in attempt to protect their identity and reduce any risk to them. The content of the pilot study interviews was not included within the findings of this study.

Data Management and Analysis

Because qualitative inquiry requires in-depth data collected through various methods, data management is very important. Bogdan and Biklen (1992) suggest that a large amount of data is secured by qualitative inquiry. Following their suggestions, each interview session was recorded and descriptive notes compiled. After each data collection session, each recording is transcribed and field notes are recorded. As the data are transcribed, codes are used for the purpose of organizing the data into certain categories. The categories or patterns are found in the data.

As the data are being transcribed, they are fitted together by considering emerging patterns. Coding of the data occurred at the end of each data collection day to ensure that no data are lost. In this way, observations and field notes that emerged from the content of the interview session are recorded. Thick descriptions and observations noted during the collection of data are used to clarify or explain what the data meant. As a means of filing the various transcripts, Contact Summary Sheets and Document Summary Sheets are used to keep data organized and identified.

Sampling

In qualitative inquiry, purposeful sampling is the dominant sampling strategy. The researcher deliberately selects the times, settings, and individuals that can provide the

information the researcher needs in order to answer the research questions (Patton, 1990).

Before the interviews, participants were provided a written Consent Agreement. They

were instructed to read and sign the form. For several phone interviews, the participants

accepted a verbal Consent Agreement. There was no perceived risk to the subject from

their participation beyond that of everyday life.

In the initial design of this study, the researcher completed 35 interviews with

participants from the Georgia Peach University split equally between both universities

(College A and College B). Specifically, see table 1 and 2 below.

Participant	Name	Title	Campus
1	Mary	Administrator	B
2	Lily	Staff	A
3	Lucy	Staff	A
4	Joe	Faculty	B
5	Alice	Faculty	A
6	Ali	Staff	B
7	Sherry	Administrator	A
8	Jack	Staff	B
9	Blake	Staff	A
10	Zoe	Administrator	A
11	Todd	Student	B
12	Leah	Faculty	A
13	J T	Staff	A
14	Donna	Administrator	A
15	Bob	Staff	A
16	Joyce	Faculty	B
17	Sophia	Faculty	B
18	Emma	Administrator	B
19	Aidan	Faculty	B
20	Lucas	Faculty	B
21	Noah	Staff	B

22	Olivia	Faculty	B
23	Mason	Faculty	A
24	Ava	Faculty	B
25	Mia	Faculty	B
26	Ethan	Alumni	A
27	Isabella	Staff	A
28	Elijah	Staff	B
29	Charlotte	Faculty	B
30	Holly	Administrator	B
31	Benjamin	Faculty	A
32	Harper	Staff	A
33	Jackson	Staff	B
34	Amelia	Administrator	B
35	Lori	Administrator	B

Table 1: Population Table

Types	Total Number	Campus
Administrators	8	A 4; B 4
Faculty	13	A 6; B 7
Staff	10	A 5; B 5
Students/Alumni	2	A 1; B 1
Male	14	A 8; B 6
Female	21	A 11; B 10

Table 2: Demographics Table

My sample included participants from each college, and as many different departments as possible. Through networking, I had connected with some administrators (vice president, deans, and department chairs), and then I continued with other faculty and staff members. After 35 interviews I reached the theoretical saturation, and began to

see repeated data. Because College A was mainly a two-year college, most students have already graduated and left the campus. With time limitations, it was difficult to find students who had experienced the merger and were familiar with pre-merger organizational cultures. Therefore, this study has been focusing mainly on employees from both colleges.

Ethics

This research project followed all the guidelines and polices from the Institutional Review Board of the Kennesaw State University and Georgia Peach University. At the same time, it was approved by the Georgia Peach University Institutional Review Board office as well. Before each interview, all the participants had time to read all the documents, which included the purpose of the study and the outlines. The participants were all interviewed on a voluntary base. Each of them was notified of the right to interrupt or stop the interviews at any time. All participants' personal identities were confidential, and the study is using pseudonym names for both personal identities and institutions identities. To make sure the study is not bias, multiple data have been collected, including interviews, observations, documents, and local news articles. All interviewees signed a consent form and were informed that their participation in the study was voluntary. The interviews were tape recorded for research purposes.

All interviews and transcriptions were stored safely in a confidential manner. No third party has access to the data. After the research is completed, all the interview recordings will be erased from the recorder. Even for direct quotations, the researcher uses pseudonyms to replace the real personal identity. Only the researcher has access to all the data and other documents.

Validity and Reliability

Like other research, qualitative researchers use different strategies to make sure their studies are credible (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Credibility for this study includes using a variety of data collection methods, travel to site, and first-hand data collection. Thus, validity must be assessed in terms of interpreting the investigators and their experiences rather than reality itself. Therefore, there is no universal way of guaranteeing validity (Bryman, 2011). The literature gives several strategies that can be used to ensure internal validity. For the purpose of this research, triangulation is used – the use of multiple sources, member check, and peer examination.

Limitations

This study has some shortcomings that the researcher wants to acknowledge. First of all, the study analyzes a consolidation process from just one set of schools from the University System of Georgia. In the future, the study can be extended to include other universities and colleges as well. Moreover, because of the time limit, the research is conducted only in the state of Georgia. Given the fact that this research is of an exploratory nature, there is remaining space for future research under the area of higher education mergers.

Future research might benefit from efforts to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches, such as perhaps sending a survey to all the Georgia universities involved in a merger. In the analysis of the comparative advantages of qualitative versus quantitative methods in a specific research project on organizational culture, Yin (2009) concludes that the two approaches yielded similar results about the primary substantive elements of the culture. The quantitative survey results, however, were more limited by the prescribed

definitions of the instrument and produced a cultural picture that was somewhat flat and unclear as to its meaning. At the same, the qualitative case study offered a richer profile of culture. This conclusion has relevance to the findings of this study. A qualitative study could broaden the description of organizational cultures and the elements that comprise them and make them unique.

Significance of the Study

This study fills a gap in research that presently exists since there is limited research on how mergers in higher education work in terms of organizational culture, communication strategies, and conflict management. Furthermore, by focusing on of the very first several mergers that happened in the state of Georgia, from the pre-implementation phase to the completion of the merger, this research reveals the process and the dynamics of a merger at different stages. The findings collected through a series of data collection will contribute and assist other higher education institutions that may be going through mergers in the future. Recommendations can be developed to help avoid culture clashes, communication gaps, and ineffective conflict management strategies and to ensure a smoother and successful merging of the institutions. This research may inform and provide guidance to future institutions and decision makers who are considering mergers in higher education. This research will reveal the link between organizational culture, communication strategies, and conflict management strategies in a merger context. It may also be of interest to leaders in higher education and state and regional policy makers as well as researchers in higher education and conflict management.

CHAPTER TWO: THE IMPORTANCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IN

HIGHER EDUCATION MERGERS

It is difficult to ask people to give up one identity and culture for another. At GPU, you can still hear some people identify each other by 'us' and 'them'. This clearly tells you based on the campus; your identity may fit or not fit in there.

Lucy, Staff, GPU

According to Martin and Samels (1993-94), mergers in higher education are "more frequent in university history than most people realize" (p. 31). Some people may think to consolidate two universities/colleges together simply means 1+1=1. There are numerous aspects that may affect the merger process that cannot be ignored, such as the importance of the organizational culture. Each university/college has its own unique organizational culture. From the school's name, logo, colors, mission, mascot, history, to the location, architecture, the way the business runs, alumni, and community, those are all a part of the organizational culture. The merger process in higher education in Georgia displayed many of the effects typical of such organizational changes. Administrators, faculty and staff members have experienced the professional and psychological ambiguity and trauma associated with change and loss. As Chaffee and Tierney (1988) note, significant organizational change can bring the normally invisible aspects of culture to the surface. This chapter reveals the role and impact of organizational culture of the merging institutions as they move to a new single organization. It is important to identify what the organizational culture and different types of mergers are, and then discuss the impact of mergers on both organizational culture and identity.

Organizational Culture

Organizational culture is very important for both business and institutions, therefore it is essential to understand what organizational culture is and how it affects an organization. Organizational culture is deceptively to define. Therefore, to understand organizational culture we must understand culture. From sociology, to communication in business, culture takes on many different forms. From the macro to the micro level, it all depends on whom we are speaking to and how are we looking at it. Organizational literature helps us develop an understanding of how organizations construct themselves, how they function, and why some organizations change and adapt while others decline and disappear.

Research in the area of higher education organizational culture has a relatively short history. Kuh and Whitt (1988) note that many scholars were prompted to study "corporate cultures" after the success of the big Japanese industries in the 1970s, and that shortly after, the idea of "culture" relative to higher education began to appear more frequently in the literature. For the corporate sector, organizational culture was seen as a critical factor in improving managerial and organizational effectiveness (Peters & Waterman, 1982). Tsai (2011) contended, "The culture within an organization is very important, playing a large role in whether it is a happy and healthy environment in which to work. In communicating and promoting the organizational ethos to employees, their acknowledgement and acceptance of it can influence their work behavior and attitudes" (p. 8).

Organizational culture allows people to have a better understanding and perception of an organization (Kuh and Whitt, 1988); it includes the value of the

organization, the missions, and history (Peters & Waterman, 1982); it also holds the

people in the organization all together (Hardy, 1990). Common among these definitions

is the notion of shared meanings and values explicit and implicit to the organization's

members.

As mentioned earlier, there are many different definitions for organizational

culture. Pettigrew (1979) studies organizational culture as "…beliefs, language, mission

statements, values, stories, and history" (p. 574). He also sees organizational culture as a

socializing mechanism by which behaviors are controlled, commitment and order are

achieved, social cohesion and meaning are provided, and expectations explained. Geertz

(1973), on the other hand, sees organizational culture through identity. He believes the

social identity or personal identity plays an important effect in organizational culture.

Organization theorists frequently use metaphors to describe culture. Sawyer &

Woodlock (1995) employ an often-cited metaphor characterizing "culture as the magic

bullet to connect everyone in the organization together" (p. 439). Machine and organism

are two others commonly used to shed light on the complexities of organizations

(Harman & Harman, 2003). According to Shahzad, et. al. (1989), "the concept of

organizational culture also makes available a base for determination the differentiation

that may survive in-between the organizations that are doing business in the same

national culture" (p. 976).

With large numbers of the definitions for organizational culture, Ott (1989, p. 52)

gleans five assumptions that are fundamental to the definition of organizational culture:

(a) Organizational culture plays a significant part in any organization.
(b) Each organization has its own unique organizational culture.
(c) Organizational culture also affects employees' attitudes and behaviors.
(d) Organizational culture provides outriders with a way to understand the

organization how it operates.

    (e) Organizational culture comes from symbols, language, behavior patterns, and more.

According to Ott (1989), there are three strong determinants of organizational culture: "the broader societal culture in which the organization exists; the nature of the business of the organization and the business environment; and the basic beliefs and assumptions of the organization's founder and/or early dominant leaders" (p. 75). These three factors are not independent of each other.

Hofstede (1984) in his extensive study of organizational values in the subsidiaries of a major multi-national corporation operating in forty countries concluded that, while a common organizational culture existed across the corporation, each country imposed some distinct elements on the subsidiary subculture. Hofstede determined correlations between the basic elements of the subcultures and the dominant values of their broader, national cultures.

Still, a clear and comprehensive exploitation of organizational culture was not provided until 1990. Rousseau (1990) provides a clear and comprehensive explanation of organizational culture. Rousseau argues that organizational culture makes sense of organizational performance. It is a useful means for understanding how, and more importantly why organizations respond to environmental change. Rousseau offers a schema of five concentric circles as a means to understand the deepest elements of organizational culture. According to Rousseau, the organization's members need this range of levels to make sense of their performance and organizational outcomes (see Figure 4).
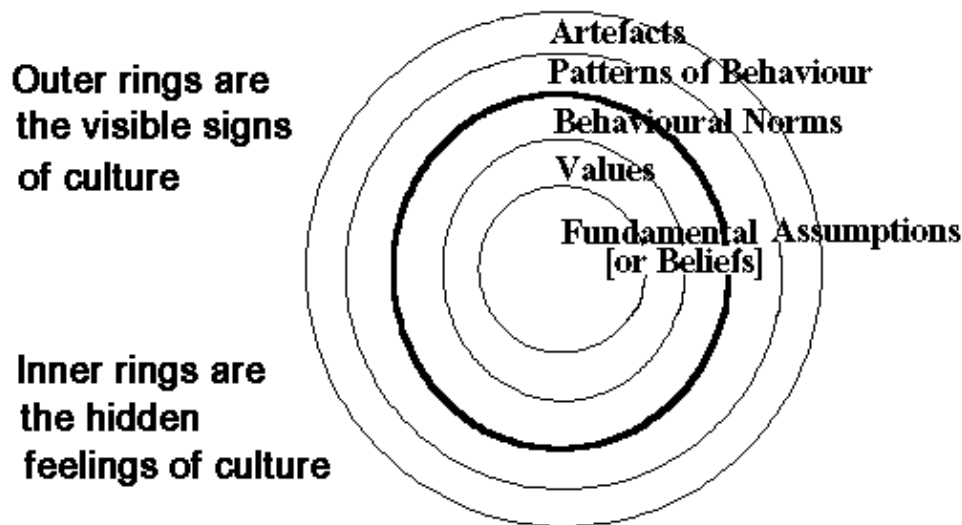
Figure. 4 Layers of culture

To Rousseau, organizational culture comprises the a) artifacts, b) patterns of behavior, c) behavioral norms, d) values, and e) fundamental assumptions found in an organization (Rousseau, 1990). Working from the outermost concentric circle to the center, artifacts are visible physical manifestations and products of cultural activity, such as school names, logos, and symbols. Patterns of behavior are functions that solve organizational problems like decision-making, coordination, and communication mechanisms. Some examples are organizational charts and operating procedures. Behavioral norms are organizational members' beliefs regarding acceptable behavior.

Organizational culture seems to also influence another two aspects-attitudes and behaviors. Depending on which way we are looking at, we can either say organizational culture affects the individuals who work there; or we can say the employees in the organization frame the organizational culture.

Research indicates that more than 50% of business mergers fail because of financial reasons and many researchers attribute the failure rate of business mergers to

organizational culture differences (Mitchell & Leachman, 2004). Consolidations in higher education are continuing to occur more than ever. These consolidations are great examples of the organizational change. Therefore, it is very necessary and important for us to consider organizational cultures in higher education mergers.

Organizational Culture in Higher Education

From business to higher education, organizational culture plays an important role. Unlike businesses, universities are not run by one person (like a business CEO); they are composed of a community of faculty, staff members and administrators. First, I will examine key research investigating higher education culture. Second, I will discuss the importance of organizational culture in merger situations.

Tierney (1988) states the organizational culture in higher education "can influence from individuals to the whole organizations; it may affect the organizations at different levels" (p. 5). Shahzad et. al. (2012) suggest "organizational culture converse to a range of ideas that can be imitate by two or more variables" (p. 979).

To find out how organizational culture affects a school's decision-making, Smart, Kuh, and Tierney (1997) describe four culture types. First is the clan culture. In this type, employees are encouraged to contribute and participate in the decision-making process. Second is the adhocracy culture. In this type the importance of changes can happen in the organization, and it is very important to address those changes as soon as possible. Third is the bureaucratic culture. This type of culture is looking for a balance between different rules and polices in different departments. Last is the market culture. This type shows the importance of understanding the history of the organization, and how to effectively make decisions (Smart, Kuh, & Tierney, 1997). It can have implications in a higher education

merger situation as incompatibilities in the culture between merging partners could influence how the merger plays out.

Every higher education institution has its own institutional culture and array of subcultures. The institutional culture is evolved from an institution's history; it is the shared sense of the institution (Haslam, 2001). Each institution has its own goals, visions, beliefs, loyalties, customs and traditions that are deeply embedded in the institution and are difficult to adjust in a merger process. In addition to institutional culture, within an institution subcultures generally exist among administrators, faculty, staff, and students. An institution seldom possesses just one culture, and sometimes the subcultures can be in conflict or paradoxical (Dill, 2000). Institutional culture and subculture complicate the process and outcomes of any higher education merger. The potential for conflict of cultures may spring from clashes of institutional cultures among merging institutions, or from clashes of subcultures among the individuals within the institutions (Haslam, 2001). Incompatible cultures, be it at the institutional level or individual level, could present a strong opposing force working against a successful merger (Kitchen & Daly, 2002).

Organizational culture can influence the outcome of a merger. According to Habib, et. al. (2014), "organizational culture can help employees to understand the functioning of the organizations by sharing its norms, values, and rules and regulation of organization " (p. 215). Harman and Harman (2003) indicate, "sensitivity to human and cultural factors and effective leadership are of utmost importance in achieving success in merger processes" (p. 419). Mergers fail when management does not take into consideration organizational culture (Grossman, 1999). Pick (2003) later on also provides

some additional insight of the influence of organizational culture on a merger of higher

education institutions with the following statement:

> Differences in organizational culture and staff attitudes leading to conflict and
> controversy are also characteristic of higher education mergers…Such differences
> between institutions are not always adequately recognized and taken into account
> leading to an intensification of these differences…they can also create conflict
> with the new institution between factions who stay loyal to the identity and
> culture of the old institutions (p. 303).

Thus, leadership actions become inexorably intertwined with the determinants of culture

in an organization.

To the extent that a greater understanding of the role and impact of institutional

cultures in a merger situation can be developed, it can inform leaders in their

relationships, planning, and decision-making. Sergiovanni & Corbally (1986) provide

further rationale when they state: "The object of leadership is the stirring of human

consciousness, the interpretation and enhancement of meanings, the articulation of key

cultural stands, and the linking of organizational members to them" (p. 8). The merger in

higher education systems is a leadership challenge, which could benefit from a clearer

picture of the social identity and the organizational culture dynamics affecting those

identities.

Kuh and Whitt (1988) suggest that there are some implications for administrators

and scholars that also are useful in understanding cultural features of higher education

entities. First is to "understand and appreciate the distinctive aspect of a college or

university, examine its culture" (p. 96). Kuh and Whitt (1988) indicate how the

importance of an institution's culture shows from different aspects of a college. Second,

they pointed out that since each individual and group in a college has different beliefs and

assumptions, it is important to understand the meaning behind everything, including

institutional stories. Third, leaders have different responsibilities, which include

managing conflicts and helping employees to go through the challenging time together.

Next, institutional polices and practices are culture driven and culture bound.

In addition to the practical usefulness, researchers can extend the theory base for

organizational culture in higher education, particularly for institutions in the midst of

change. Tierney (1988) speaks to the organizational culture being different from college

to college:

> Each college/university are unique and different from each other. Therefore,
> their organizational culture, which includes missions, values, students, employees,
> mascot, etc., are all different as well. (p. 9)

Types of Higher Education Mergers

According to Martin & Samels, (1994), there are three types of mergers that occur

between higher education institutions: a) voluntary or involuntary, b) consolidations or

takeovers, c) single and different academic profiles.

Voluntary or Involuntary

Martin and Samels (1994) state that an involuntary merger occurs when external

forces, such as through governmental intervention place pressure on joining two or more

institutions together. Very often, involuntary merger faces more challenges than

voluntary mergers. In contrast, a voluntary merger is one in which the institutions decide

of their own accord to consider a merger (Mangan, 2007). Generally speaking, most

mergers of institutions of higher education are involuntary, and are directed by

governmental decisions (Ole-Jacob, 1999). Especially in the U.S., mergers of public

institutions tend to be involuntary as a reaction to addressing capacity efficiency and

responsibility. And the voluntary mergers usually happen because of financial concerns (Ole-Jacob, 1999).

Consolidations or Takeovers

Many institutions in higher education prefer the word *consolidation* rather then merger, because consolidation is not a takeover. In a consolidation, two or more institutions combine into a single organization and the resulting entity is a new institution—usually with a new identity and a new name (Martin & Samels, 1994). Takeovers, or acquisitions, happen when a larger institution simply absorb a smaller entity (Harman, 1983; Martin & Samels, 1994).

Horizontal or Vertical Mergers

When mergers in higher education occur, no one can guarantee it will always be between two STEM school, or a four year research institutions. When a merger occurs between schools, which offer similar academic profiles, the merger can be called horizontal, widening the depth of the institution (Gaughan, 1996). A vertical merger occurs from the joining of two or more entities offering different programs. The surviving institution is one with a greater breath of offerings than each entity on their own (Gaughan, 1996).

Theoretical Framework: Social Identity Theory (SIT)

In organizational behavior literature, various determinants have been related to organizational identity. Research on organizational identity suggests a certain degree of stability in the extent to which employees identify with their organization. In merger contexts, pre-merger identification is found to strongly contribute to employees' post-merger identification (Moreland & Levine, 2001).

Self-Concept and Identity

The term "identity" is widely used in contemporary social science, including anthropology, psychoanalysis, psychology, political science, sociology, history, and management. However, there is considerable variability in the meaning of this term. For example, in anthropology or history, identity refers essentially to the culture of a people (Howard, 2000). Social psychology, especially Social Identity Theory, uses the term "identity" to refer to a common identification within a social category (Tajfel, 1978). For some sociologists, identity means internalized role expectations, i.e. a categorization of self as an occupant of roles, and finds meaning associated with that role (Stets & Burke, 2000). The dominant model of self-concept assumes the uniqueness and relative stability of a person's behavior (Turner & Onorato, 1999). This perspective of self-concept emphasizes the individual's uniqueness that distinguishes oneself from others, and is called "personal identity."

Social Identity Theory

The concept of "social identity" adds another aspect of self that was neglected in personal identity dominant perspective. It extracts the relationship between individual and the big social group. The meaning of self is pursued from group membership or role expectations from the social group. In addition to ask, "Who am I," social identity adds the question of "who are we." (Turner, 1982).

According to Tajfel and Turner, (1986) Social Identity Theory (SIT) is based on three principal ideas: categorization, identification and comparison. Categorization is a label that puts employees into different groups. In this way, employees belong to different groups rather than an individual. When they describe themselves, they will use

group identities rather than individual names or identities. Next is identification. In this element, employees see themselves as a part of the group, and they notice the importance of their individual identities in the group. Last is social comparison. In this one, employees can understand their identities by comparing other groups.

Organizational identity is the base of Social Identity Theory. This theory helps employees to identify, and understand their identities and relationships with the organization. During a merger, the organization needs to learn the old identities for each department, and employees, and use that to help them to form the new identities. This dissertation is grounded on organizational culture theories and Social Identity Theory. It presents a theoretical framework of organizational culture.

Creating New Identities in Mergers

According to Andre (2008), it is important to create a collective identity in the organization. Considering employees' old identities and applying them in the newly formed organization will definitely help the merger process. Furthermore, to understand the performance of employees in an organization is also critical (Moreland & Levine, 2001). Both employees and organizations can shape each other (Alvesson 2011).

A complicating factor is that a merger brings employees' previously held identifications with the old environment to the forefront. Instead of weakening the old identity, a merger seems to emphasize pre-merger group membership. Group members develop their self-esteem by trying to distinguish their in-group from different out-groups, and stressing differences in status and dominance of the merging partners accordingly (Harman, 2000). Consequently, these personally stressful issues are very

likely to influence the organization. The tendency towards in-group favoritism

complicates the development of a new post-merger identity (Hollants & Feys, 2005).

Organizational Identity

The concept of organizational identity has been studied in two different, although

somewhat related, research traditions. One stream of research focuses on the "identity of

organization," while the other underscores individuals' "identification with organization"

(Albert et al., 2000). Identity of organization explains the history of an organization, why

and how do things work in the organizations, and why it is different from the past (Pratt

et al., 2000). Identification with organization is an individual level entity, describing how

much meaning of self and self-attachment is derived from the organization. In the

perspective of the latter, organizational identification is one type of social identity that

individuals possess as a part of self-concept. In this study, I use the concept of

organizational identity in the latter sense because one of the main focuses of this study is

investigating how individuals react to changes in their social context.

As such, organizational identification is composed with specific individual

identities and broad organizational identity. Applying Tajfel's definition of social

identity, organizational identity is defined, "as that part of an individual's self-concept

which derives from his knowledge of his membership of an organization (or groups)

together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel,

1978, p. 63).

Forging a New Organizational Culture at the Georgia Peach University

Mergers can be complex processes, with significant impact on those who work in

the affected institutions. At the same time, the success of a merger can be directly

affected by the attitudes of the participants. Therefore one of this study's goals is to understand administrators, faculty, and staff members' perspectives of their university-merged culture.

This part of Chapter two summarizes the findings for all research questions that are presented in this dissertation. This section includes the research question, the findings with the supporting evidence; and the analysis of the findings.

Universities have similar goals in the sense that they are communities that work together to teach and educate the students. Yet, they differ greatly form one another in a large part due to their identities and the cultures, and subcultures that exist within. In order to identify points of congruence as well as dissonance between the universities, administrators, faculty, and staff members at GPU were interviewed, and asked to describe the their own university's culture and the importance of it, before and after the merger. The research question addressed was:

RQ1: How are organizational cultures preserved and/or changed in the process of consolidation?

Almost all of the interviews gave a detailed description of changes that have taken place in their respective units, as well as in the organization overall. The most common responses referred to changes in culture, importance of culture, organizational structure, length of time, and organizational structure. Almost everyone agreed that organizational culture plays an important part during the merger. Many responses to this question had negative connotations, such as extreme culture clash, lack of instructional leadership, excessive bureaucracy, not creating a new culture but a culture taken over, low loyalty of employees and distrust. One faculty member indicated that, "we did have extreme culture clash when we went through the consolidation, because the two institutions had

completely different cultures. One is small, family oriented, more student focused, and the other one is more top-down structured and research based" (Mason, Faculty, College A). Another respondent stated, "before the consolidation, I knew my boss, my peers, and loved my career, but now, I mean, I am only here doing my work. And my boss, who had never met me before, only evaluates me once a year" (Lucy, Staff College A). To support this perception, one more interviewee interjected, "during the consolidation, many of us lost our bosses, and we didn't even know who to report to, and where the decisions come from" (Sherly, Administrator, College A).

The positive aspects of the merger, based on the interviews, were more program offerings for students and increased opportunities of training and professional development available for faculty and staff. One administrator described a positive change as "more academic programs are currently available to students at both undergraduate and graduate levels than previously existed and faculty welcomed the opportunity to teach more advanced courses" (Joe, Faculty, College B).

Changes in Organizational Culture

Within the theme of changes in culture, there were four categories: changes in mission, creating new culture, culture taken over and distrust. According to the literature on organizational culture, we can see there are different layers of culture and organizational mission (Figurer 4). There were 19 comments made by respondents that indicated that the university mission has been changed in a way that is not beneficial for both universities. For example, one respondent described the mission change as follows:

> We were such different two colleges to start with, different missions, different types of students, different teaching focus, and so much more. Now, the new mission is more based on old College B. For example, we've always had a strong foreign language program here, and which is an important requirement for

many majors. But that was out of the picture because of the poor requirement of foreign language at College B, now we have to give up the required courses on our campus. (Lucy, Staff, College A)

Another interviewee pointed out the change in organizational culture:

The missions were entirely different. We were an access institution, and we were very proud of the fact that we were accessible, which meant to us generous admission standards and very affordable. (Sherly, Administrator, College A)

Besides changes in mission, there were 24 comments made by respondents on creating new culture, and 25 comments on culture taken over. According to the Board of Regents (2013), the merger between College A and College B is A+ B = C which means a new name, new mission, new value, and a new culture. Therefore, this merger should not be an acquisition, or a takeover. One administrators' perception of creating new culture was described thusly:

We were two very different colleges with very different organizational cultures. You may hear other people saying this as well. They were more open access, and students, teaching centered, and we were more traditional students, who live on campus, but they don't. Some of them were almost extremely opposite from each other. How can you create a new culture that is a "perfect fit" for the new university? It didn't (Joe, Faculty, College B)

Other participants felt that having a "new" culture meant loosing their old identity, which included the following: "each wanted to uphold their own identities, their own traditions that their had grown up with, but it didn't work that way" (Lucy, Staff, College A); "every time you change a culture, you feel like you lose a little bit of your old one and I think that continues to happen" (Aiden, Faculty, College B).

However, not all of the participants disliked the "new" organizational culture. Among all 35 participants, 20% of them liked the newly created culture, and think it works great. They believe both institutions have met somewhere in the middle: "there are things that are valuable and good about both of those cultures and that we've been able to

preserve those and sort of meet in the middle" (Alice, Faculty, College A). A few of these

20% did not initially consider the merger or the creation of a new culture to be a good

idea, but they eventually accepted the change and are now in agreement:

> "I think a new culture has been created since the merger happened, especially now. I think that gradually over the second year, that there were things that were going better, and they've moved more administrators to this campus. So I think there are things that are coming back around." (Jack, Staff, College B)

> "One of the positive changes is that there are more people that are more talented and well educated in staff and faculty that we can work with and bounce ideas off. We can team up, we can collaborate, and we can work together. The merger gives us a change to grow. So I think, you know, also the blending of two totally different cultures, it's been remarkably successful. (Aiden, Faculty, College B)

> Of course, some participants felt that this merger between College A and College

B was a cultural takeover where the new organizational culture of Georgia Peach

University retained the name, mission, colors, and mascot of the largest institution in the

merger, but also identity, communication, and ways to solve problems:

> It was presented in one way but the reality of how it played out was a whole other, because it was presented to us as a consolidation, which means bringing together two organizations to form a new one. But ultimately, it was not true. I mean, it was: College A is being absorbed by College B. (Lily, Staff, College A)

> Other participants provided many other examples of cultural takeover during the

merger which included: "much of the culture of the new university is modeled on the

hierarchy of College B" (Lucas, Faculty, College A); "look at the new organizational

chart now, from the president to deans, they are all from College B; look at our teaching

and research requirements, they are all matched to meet the College B way; everything is

top-down culture, which is the old College B way, and you tell me if this is a takeover or

not" (Todd, Student, College B); "I can't count the number of times somebody said 'we

had the College A way, we had the College B way'. I mean we all felt it was a takeover" (Lucy, Staff, College A).

The last theme presented in the interviews related to organizational culture is with an emphasis on distrust. The comments from the interviewees had undertones of the employees feeling helpless, having no voice, fearful of the administration, and with blatant fear for their jobs. Many interviewees indicated that there was a sense of community and teamwork at the merged university; however, the dominant descriptors used by the majority of the interviewees were rampant distrust and low loyalty. To support this claim, one respondent stated, "not much trust in the administration" (Lily, Staff, College A). Another attributed the distrust to the distance between the locations, "because of the size and distance of different campuses, there is distrust between the campuses. I mean, I'm wasting several hours each time" (Bob, Staff, College A). Others stated, "People do what they need to do to be accepted. There is suspicion and mistrust—people lie. The culture is worse than before the merger, I mean we lost our identity" (Lily, Staff, College A); "people, staff coming and going, too much transition" (Joe, Faculty, College B); "lack of recognition for employees and lack of caring by administration" (Lucas, Faculty, College A); "no close sense of unity, lack of trust" (Charlotte, Faculty, College A).

Importance of Organizational Culture

All the 35 participants agreed that culture plays a significant part during their university merger: "culture is so important, it is our value, mission, color, mascot, and specifically, each campus, each department has its own unique ways to do things, and that's our culture" (Lucy, Staff, College A); "culture is not just one specific item, it is

everywhere; department/school's culture defines who we are, and our individual culture influences the department's culture" (Todd, Student, College B). The importance of culture not only affects the merger, but also relates to self identity:

> We have so many different campuses now, and from the sizes and the types of students, they are very different from each other. Each campus has its unique own culture. I have worked at two different campuses now, the same job responsibilities, but my identity was different. I had to adapt to the culture and the ways done on each campus, and try to blend in with every one else. (Charlott, Faculty, College A)

Another participant continued to describe how the aspect of organizational culture played in this merger: "on the one hand we heard the message that we were going to be one university, and that we would have a fully unified identity—GPU; on the other hand, right in the strategic plan, it says that the campus identities would be respected" (Blake, Staff, College A). The following quote reveals the difference between the teaching cultures of the two institutions:

> Culture plays an important role during the merger. We did have extreme culture clash when we went through the consolidation, because the two institutions had completely different cultures. College A was more family-mentors and was willing to spend extraordinary amounts of time helping a student to learn the concepts. At the College B campus, faculty members were more standoff from their students. Because of the merger, I got transferred to the B campus. When I was first meeting with students for office hours with the students who were struggling in class, my immediate supervisor came to me and said 'You don't have to do that. It's not your job to make sure they succeed; it's their problem.' From that moment, I realized my role has changed. (Leah, Faculty, College A)

Many of the participants also indicated increased bureaucracy and a top-down leadership style as some of the organizational changes generated by the merger:

> College B has a strong top down culture, and this heavily influenced how we communicate. Everything is top down. Unless you are one of the top leaders, by the time you hear any announcement, the decision has been already made. For College A, we used to be able to walk to the president's office say hi or ask a question. But now, before you can meet with the president, you have to go through all different levels. (Joe, Faculty, College A)

44

One participant specifically mentioned that he/she did not realize the importance of culture until the merger happened: "we were two completely different institutions. One college's mission was open access and lower tuition rate; the other with more research-based background. You may not notice how important the culture means until that moment" (Mia, Faculty, College B).

Organizational culture is also important to alumni. To them, a new organizational culture is like erasing all the memories, identities, and history. One participant mentioned this:

> When I talked to some other alumnus, most of us did not take the news (merger) well. Yes, the school can have a new identity and move on, then how about us? We are alumni of which school now? I even heard some people when they donate now, they will make the check to either College A or College B. (Ethan, Alumnus, College A)

The Significance of Time in the Merger Process

Next, I will discuss how long does it take for the merger to be complete or if it is even at all completed. According to the University of Georgia System Board of Regents, the consolidation between College A and College B was supposed to be completed in one year. However, during the interviews, most participants disagreed with the timeline: "ten years; we were technically, officially consolidated, but it will be continuously changing" (Lily, Staff, College A); "five years, and we're not there yet, especially with all the personnel changes that take place" (Zoe, Administrator, College A); "I am not sure how long it still needs, but we are not there yet. To really be a unified as one university, it will take a LONG time" (JT, Staff, College A).

Many participants pointed out the reason the merger is still occurring is because of the consolidation:

Optimistically, I would hope in maybe five or six years. It's so hard since we started with two very different colleges. It needs time for both of the former institutions just to be able to really begin to heal. We don't really interact as much as one unified university. It's still us vs. them, and the culture is different from campus to campus. (Bob, Staff, College A)

When the organizational culture is completely unified as one new GPU culture, will the merger be completed? Most participants believe so. But there are some different and interesting opinions, they believe on one condition—when many people retired, and more new people are hired after the merger: "of course when people who have their values and identity rooted in the past die or retire, then yes" (Lily, Staff, College A). At an extreme, one participant thinks the merger will never be complete:

It won't be in my lifetime. It will become more like one as time goes by, but it will never become one because institutions have memory. People retire, but institutions have memory. Those memories are passed down; those stories are passed down from generation to generation of faculty. (Jackson, Staff, College B)

On the other hand, other participants believe the merger is almost done: "I think 90% of the process is done. Everything is all unified, and we just need to let some people change their attitudes" (Mary, Administrator, College A). "In the big picture, we are one GPU now. Maybe you will hear some people are still complaining about certain things, but those people will always do. No matter what you do, you can't please every one" (Jack, Staff, College B).

Organizational Structure

The interviews also indicated a need for changes to the organizational design. For example, one respondent described how the new organizational chart was adjusted:

Reorganization has added more layers of people to the college. The organizational chart is difficult to understand. The chain of command has become more structured, which in some ways has increased our efficiency, but in some ways it has added additional levels of bureaucracy. (Lily, Staff, College A)

46

Some respondents pointed out that the merger affected the two campuses unequally with the smaller campus taking the biggest adjustment hit:

> Under the new organizational structure, most of us from the College A have been affected by it. We had to make some changes to adapt to the new structure. Some of us may get relocated, have new duties, or at least to report to a new boss who we have never met before. Suddenly we have to become someone new to blend in with other members. (Sherry, Administrator, College A)

Other interviewees emphasized the merger had a huge impact to the newly formed Georgia Peach University: "lack of staffing in some programs and departments" (Blake, Staff, College A); "too much transition in organizational structure" (Leach, Faculty, College A); "one organizational chart which streamlined operations to produce more efficiency and effectiveness" (Lucas, Faculty, College A); "lots of turnover in the dean of each school and instability in other administrative positions" (Mia, Faculty, College B); "reorganization; constantly being reorganized, which is taxing on staff" (Donna, Administrator, College A).

Among the positive consequences to the organizational structure of the merged university, the interviewees mentioned: "weeding out of non-productive employees" (Jack, Staff, College B); "committees are more diverse" (Mary, Administrator, College A); "two colleges of student personnel came together as one to serve the students" (Lori, Administrator, College B); and "elimination of duplicate positions" (Olivia, Faculty, College B).

Conclusion

Using faculty, staff, and administrators' perceptions, the qualitative data analysis revealed how organizational cultures and identities evolved at the new consolidated

Georgia Peach University. This data has helped to building a benchmark in understanding the cultures and identities for the new institution.

The findings from faculty and staff members are also supported by the Social Identity Theory (Tajfel, 1978). Strong identification of the individual affects the group identification, and the group identification is an important component of the institution's identity. Individuals who have established strong lines of identification with other members of the same group will tend to respond to dramatic organizational change in ways that benefit the small group rather than the organization as a whole.

The Social Identity Theory further describes the employee's perception of the organization and the effects on the individual when the organization changes. Changes on the scale of mergers require individuals to shift their self-concept to maintain identity with the changing organization. The success of a merger often depends on the employee's ability to make this shift in organization identification (Alvesson 2011). The data also supports that employees with a shorter history of employment with the original schools are more receptive to organizational change and consider change a form of opportunity rather than a loss of identity. The more closely the employee identifies with an organization, the harder for the employee to adopt the new identity for mainly two reasons. First, when merger occur, it will usually eliminate some positions and people have to go. Second, many staff members do not have advance degrees, and therefore face a higher probability of losing their positions than those who do hold advance degrees.

The interview data shows that there are five stages for most employees to transfer from pre-merger identity to post-merger identity (see figure 5). As advanced by Hollants & Feys (2005), individuals who have developed a high degree of personal identification

with an organization are more resistant to change in that organization particularly

changes with such far-reaching effects as organizational merger. This concept appears to

be confirmed by this study for most employees from College A and at mid-career (6 to 10

years and 11 to 15 years) levels of affiliation with institutions. Those employees may

perceive the expectation on the part of organizational leadership that they are required to

adopt the other group's identity as a negative factor (Ravasi & Schultz, 2006). The

individuals with shorter terms of affiliation with the institution and with a Ph.D. degree

are less immersed in organizational culture and less resistant to changes in the status quo.

These employees are likely to be receptive to organizational change and perceive it as an

opportunity for professional advancement.

Based on data collected during the interviews, several themes emerged for

organizational culture as a response to Research Question 1: *changes in culture*,

importance of culture, *length of time*, and *organizational structure*. Research Question 1

specifically asked about how organizational culture is changed or preserved during the

consolidation. Many respondents described that there were so many changes during the

merger, which resulted in changes in mission, creating new culture, culture takeover and

distrust. Another dominant theme was the importance of culture, where the respondents

identified the importance of organizational culture and how it relates to social identity.

Length of time was another theme derived from Research Question 1. From the

respondents' answers, most of them believed the merger is still happening and it's due to

the different organizational culture. A few participants think the merger is almost all

completed. The final theme discussed in Research Question 1 was organizational

structure. This theme discussed repeated restructuring of the organization at the merged college, much turnover in critical positions, and committees that are more diverse.
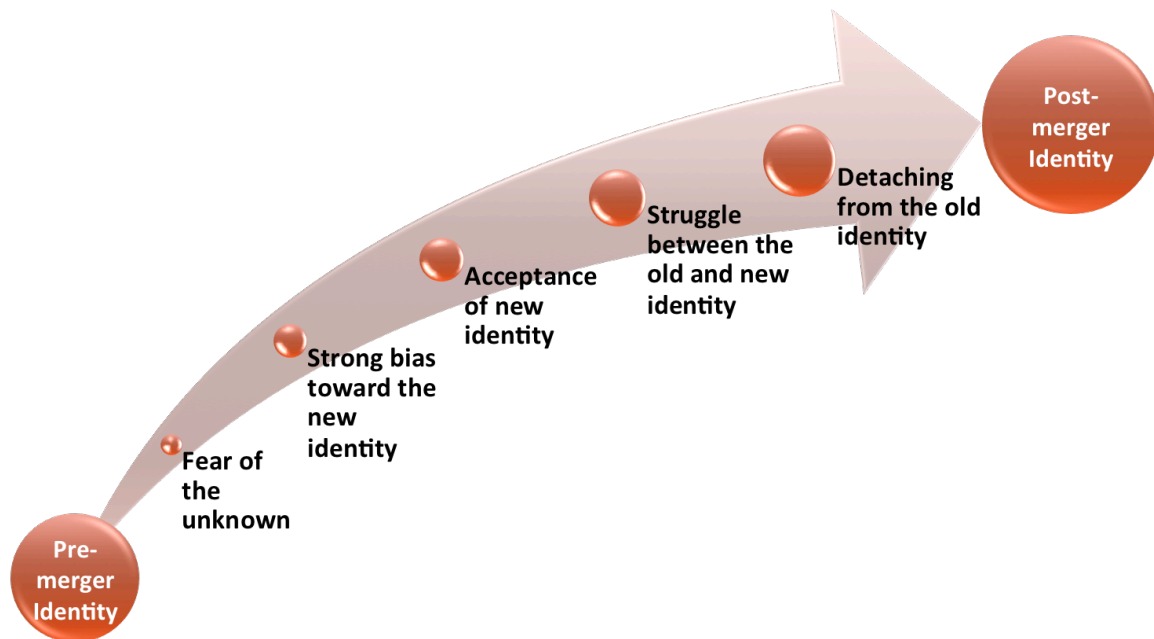
Figure 5: Stages in the Development of a New Post-Merger Identity

The findings show that there are five stages for employees to create a new identity. The first step is the fear of the unknown. This is where when people first hear about the merger, they are extremely worried and concerned. The second step is strong bias toward the new identity. This is after employees have some information about the merger, but are still very uncertain about it. The third step is the acceptance of the new identity. During this step, employees are accepting the new identity "willing" or "unwilling." The fourth step is struggle between the old and new identity. In this case study, the merger had been completed in two years, but many people in the interviews are

still struggling between pre- and post-merger. The last step is detaching from the old identity. Finally, some people are willing to accept the new identity and put the old one behind. The findings of the study show that some people are still holding on their old identities.

The findings also show that there are three different types of identities that happen during the merger: self, group, and organizational. They are all related with each other. The self is an individual identity, which is an important element in whole organization. The group identity is composed by the self-identity, and affects the organizational identity as well. The organizational identity directs the group and individual; while at the same time is influenced by them as well (Tajfel, 1979). Therefore, the "us" versus "them" culture and how employees feel about their pre-merger organization is very important during the merger.

CHAPTER THREE:
ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES
DURING HIGHER EDUCATION CONSOLIDATIONS

When I first heard about the merger news, it was a rumor. As soon as it was passed out through school, it became everyone's first priority. People were very eager to know why and what's going to happen next. Yes, there were news and updates through emails and online to keep everyone posted. But after you read them, you realized they didn't answer anything you wanted to know. All we wanted was someone to communicate with us.

Leah, Faculty, GPU

Consolidations in higher education definitely require a massive change. Logically, like other mergers in business, changes should make the organizations become bigger and stronger. Also, those changes ideally would show some successful outcomes that can benefit both employees and the students (Lewis, 2000). As mentioned earlier in the study, more than 75% of business mergers were failures, so how about consolidations in higher education? What would be some changes colleges and universities must make, and what are the areas that institutions need to be more careful with? Therefore, it is important to study the role of organizational culture and communication, and find out the most effective methods for making the changes.

Communication is the most important activity an organization engages in towards its employees in change management (Quirke, 1995), and internal communication is an important strategy in managing an organization's survival and growth (Kitchen & Daly, 2002). From the top to bottom, among departments and employees, communication is the key element in the merger process. It is also the most efficient way for everyone to understand the new organizational structures. The way and channels that the organizations are using to communication between the institutions and the employees is the most important key for an organization to succeed. During a merger all of the

important aspects of the organization (i.e., culture, power, environment, and organizational structure) all changed. Without effective communication, the organization would not be able to smoothly complete the merger. For any organizations, changes are necessary at some point. It is an effective way for the organization to grow and survive. Everything has two sides, so does communication. It can either help or block the change process of an organization.

This chapter focuses on the impact of organizational communication strategies in mergers. First it is important to define what is organizational communication. Then it will show the importance of communication and sense making in a merger. Lastly, the findings will be discussed.

Defining Organizational Communication

Like culture, communication is another different concept to define. Jablin and Putnam (2000) state that "communication activities and organizational forms are elaborated not as utilitarian responses to the challenges of a volatile global environment but rather a s a form of knowledge and action that comprises a culture's pattern of sensibility to and appreciation of the value and beauty of forms (p. 345). According to Conrad and Poole (2005), "it is through communication that employees obtain information, make sense of the situations they encounter, and decide how to act in order for organizations to survive and prosper " (p. 3). In essence, organizations are created through communication. Organizational communication allows employees to express their feelings and thoughts during the merger. And it is the most important way for leaders and employees to work together during this difficult time.

Speight and Goodman (1998) define organizational communication as all communication activities conducted by an organization towards both external and internal audiences. In fact, communication is the most important activity an organization engages in towards its employees in change management (Speight & Goodman, 1998) and internal communication is an important strategy in managing an organization's survival and growth (Kitchen & Daly, 2002). Kitchen and Daly (2002) also note that employees are the most important part of an organization, therefore the quality of the communication between the organization and the employees is of utmost importance. Internal communication regarding culture, power, environment, and organizational structure is so important in an organization that without communication, the organization would not exist (Speight & Goodman, 1998).

At the same time, to make the definition more completed, Kaufmann and Kaufmann (1998) discussed four major functions that communication serves in an organization: control, motivation, teamwork, and feedback. First is control, management will be able to control the employees and coordinate tasks through the formal communication channels. Second is motivation, which can be created by clarifying messages, performance assessment, etc. The third one is teamwork, which Kaufmann and Kaufmann (1998) indicate is the most important communication process within an organization is to strengthen interaction and teamwork between the employees and the leaders. Finally, feedback, communication serves as a tool for individuals to receive feedback on their own performance. This can also reduce uncertainty and meet the need of social interaction.

A critical communication theorist, Deets (1992) presents a critique on how communication is used in an organization, and thus how it shapes organizational culture. His theory of critical communication in organizations aims to reveal the truth behind organizational communication and culture, emphasizing the impact of communication on culture and the need for increased participation and democratic decision-making.

Effective Organizational Communication

The topic of effective organizational communication seems like a gray area that is open to interpretation and debate. At the foundation of effective communication is an organizations willingness to clarify the meaning of how they define effective communication. According to Robertson (2005), "for each organization to have an effective communication during changes, first they need to learn and understand the concept of communication, and know the way communication works in the organization" (p. 35). The subject of organizational communication is very broad, and most organizations are unaware of what constitutes effective communication and should seek clarity (Criddle, 2004).

According to multiple authors (Robertson, 2005; Criddle, 2004, & Kaufmann & Kaufmann 1998), open and supportive communication is very important to an organization's communication effectiveness. Robertson (2005) explained that open information flow and supportive communication are fundamental to effective communication. Robertson also articulated that a positive communication environment would make employees willing to communicate more effectively during the organizational change. Criddle (2004) believes that an effective communication can bring

employees together and a lack of genuine or authentic communication creates a very negative organizational environment driven by employee resentment.

Although it is important to have open and supportive communication in an organization, it is also important that organizational communications are relevant and timely. According to Parsons and Groh (2006), employees desire simple, quick, and relevant information. Web blogs and instant messages facilitate fast and honest online discussions and conversations that result in immediate action and change (Parsons, & Groh, 2006). Robertson (2005) specified "employees need to receive the right amount of communication on relevant topics to be effective" (p. 6) while Criddle (2004) contended messages are not understood by an audience unless they are heard repeatedly.

Information flow through an organization was also discovered as important to effective communication. Parsons and Groh (2006) stated that organizations can not expect employees to change unless they comprehend how information reaches employees and what is done with that information. Robertson (2005) explained that organizations should make sure that the communication channels are effective and clear for employees to freely exchange their ideas and opinions on issues. If the culture of the organization promotes employees to keep grievances to themselves, then issues will be left unresolved.

Communication During Consolidations

According to Watzlawick (1972, p. 2), "one cannot not communicate". He emphasizes the importance of communication, and every verbal and non-verbal behavior is a form of communication. The effectiveness of communication can affect employees' attitudes and behaviors in the organization, which also can make the merger process easier or harder depending on the situation. Organizational change challenges the status

quo, and most people are uncomfortable or even opposed to change. It is very important to include employees in the organizational change process by informing and communicating with them (Kitchen, 1997). According to Speight and Goodman (1998), internal communication should address as much information possible on the objectives of the merger and the timescale of the process. During the merger, communication is an essential element because it prepares the employees on the potential positive and negative effects the change may have and may thus reduce uncertainty (Kitchen & Daly, 2002). Merger involves two organizations, the same with communication, which is a two-way channel. Therefore, Speight and Goodman (1998) argued that both organizations in the merger must use established communication channels so that uncertainty is effectively managed.

Intranet is one of the best information channels during mergers. Organizations that used the organizational intranet or internal channels to communicate during a merger had employees who were more confident about the process in contrast to organizations that used traditional media channels (Cowley, 2001). At the same time, when two institutions are in a process of integrating into one, the communication should then be clear and not derive from any of the former institutions (Speight & Goodman, 1998). The organizational culture, from the identity, vision, values, and many other aspects of the new institution need to be clearly stated and communicated to the employees as soon as possible. It can reduce so many rumors, which causes fear and uncertainty. Speight and Goodman (1998) also suggested a news channel for the employees be developed that would provide individuals important information regarding the merger.

If the channels that are used to communicate with the employees are important, so are the messages delivered. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, depends how we use communication; it can affect organization in both positive and negative ways. Schweiger and Denisi (1991) suggest that administrators should focus on answering questions many employees have on issues that are important to them. Even if the answers to some questions are unknown or cannot be fully explained; it is still preferable to not providing and information at all. This may reduce uncertainty among the employees and increase their performance and morale. There are other important ways of communicating with employees to create positive attitudes and commitment. Therefore, effective communication with the employees is key to a successful merger.

Effective communication can contribute to reducing anxiety and improving the flexibility of the organization. Schweigher and Denisi (1991) found that an organization can help its employees through the merger process by providing them with realistic information, and can reduce anxiety by giving information as soon as possible. The information given must be relevant concerning the employee's questions, the organization's goals and intentions, and expected effects regarding the change. By doing so, the organizations can help employees to go through this challenging time together; and in return, the employees' perception will be that their organization is honest, trustworthy, and caring. Speight and Goodman (1998) explained that information given to employees from the senior administrators should be altered within the department and be consistent. When employees gain an understanding of the process thorough communication, those employees who may be unhappy with the outcome of the process would show more satisfaction and less dysfunction than they would without this

understanding (Conrad & Poole, 2005). It is also noted that if an organization can express care and concern to its employees, it increases the commitment among its employees. Furthermore, Cornard and Poole (2005) explain that commitment may be important during a merger, and that commitment from the employees allows the management to be more flexible during the process.

Communication Channels

Often organizations must use several communication channels to be successful in reaching out to their employees. This chapter will now discuss communication channels that are important during organizational change and mergers. Communication channels used in organizations include written, oral, and electronic communications (Erlien 2006). First, oral channels include department meetings, general meetings, brainstorming, seminars, interviews, informal talk, courses, and kick-off meetings. Using oral communication ensures that the recipients understand the message (Erlien, 2006).

Second, internal written channels include organization newspapers, annual reports, brochures, bulletin boards, posters, personnel manuals, and letters. Written communication has the advantage of being documented. Third, electronic channels include email, online chats, blogs, videoconferencing, video newspapers, telephone, audio conferencing, SMS, internal radio, podcasts, and faces. Electronic media can reach many individuals in a short time (Erlien, 2006).

People may have different preferences when it comes to communication channels. However, a study conducted by Goodman and Truss (2004) revealed that employees had a strong preference for oral communication in groups rather than in writing or even individual communication such as phone or e-mail. Daft and Lengel (1984) found that

oral communication is emerging as more convincing than e-mails to all employees. The reason oral communication is preferable is because it is an effective and dynamic channel suitable to deal with employees' opinions. Lewis (1999) argued that general info meetings and small informal discussions are the most common communication channel to distribute information related to the processes of change.

Based on Daft and Lengel's (1984) opinion, Miller (2009) pointed out that organizational communication has different levels of ambiguity and that this was an important part of understanding the role of organizational media or channels. Miller (2009) explained: "miscommunication and untruthful messages can bring conflicts to the organization" (p. 242).

The available internal organizational communication channels differ on how capable they are to deliver information (Miller, 2009). According to Miller (2009) four criteria have been used to evaluate how well these channels deliver information, "(a) the availability of instant feedback, (b) the use of multiple cues, (c) the use of natural language, and (d) the personal focus of the medium" (Miller, 2009, p. 243). There are two categories of media in relations to these characteristics. The first is rich media, which include face-to-face communication. Rich media is characterized by fulfilling all four criteria. When media only fulfills one or two of the criteria, they are called lean media, such as memos or flyers.

Informal Communication

In addition to the types of channels, the person in charge with delivering the communication has also a strong impact on the merger. A number of studies have concluded that it is most efficient to use middle administrators to communicate

information to employees (Barons & Louis, 1988; Miller, 2009). These researchers suggested that middle administrators have a significant role in influencing the attitudes of the employees in terms of change because they are in the middle of the organizational pyramid mediating between lower level employees and top executives. They are also best suited to restate information about changes, so that it is adapted to the employees' everyday lives.

Informal communication in an organization is more spontaneous and is often called "the grapevine" (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 1998). When communication is personal, based on friendship or common interests, it is called informal communication (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2002). This kind of communication can have a major impact on the total communication process (Kaufmann & Kaufmann, 1998). Jacobsen & Thorsvik (2002) argued that informal communication crosses units in the organizational structure, and it can in fact reflect the formal structures of the company. By studying informal communication in an organization, one can gain important information about the social life of the company that would not come out if one only focused on the formal information flow. The informal communication in an organization is continuous (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2002). Informal communication spreads information faster than formal communication. This is because informal communication is mostly based on faster channels such as oral face-to-face communication, and formal communication is mostly based on channels using written tools. Also, employees have more trust in information that is delivered informally rather than formally from management (Jacobsen & Thorsvik, 2002).

Informal communication has both advantages and disadvantages. It is well known that informal communication contributes to spreading rumors and gossip, which can have either a negative or positive impact on the organization. Jacobsen and Thorsvik (2002) noted that informal communication often is a communication tool that spreads rumors, which in turn can weaken morale and teamwork between the employees or even weaken the efficiency of the organization. Furthermore, Jacobsen and Thorsvik (2002) argue that by communicating ideologies, arguments, and the facts of a situation, managers may be able to prevent rumors from developing and harming the organization. However, Jacobsen and Thorsvik (2002) also cited Robbins (1993) when they argued that rumors may also have a positive effect by reducing anxiety and creating meaning when the information delivered to the employees is fragmented or insufficient.

Communicative Process and Transition

An organization is composed of more than formal structures with official flows of communication; it also has a culture developed through informal relationships and communication among members. It deals with the interactive process that has been shaped by the activities of its members (Taylor, 1999). Organizational members interact with each other in the work environment each day. This interaction through communication basically shapes the organization's culture. Stohl (1999) agrees and states that one of the explicit definitions of the organization is that it is an "it identifiable the social system and help people to pursue multiple purpose at the same time" (p. 23). In Stohl (1997), argues that people are joined through communicative relationships in multiple contexts. In these ways, members communicate through a variety of ways, relative to their relationships with other people.

Even though some participants may not be directly linked within the informal communication network, some indirect connections may be more significant than direct connections. Although all the connections give relevance to the organization, the most important thing for leaders is to keep people communicating. Weick (1979) describes this concept of communication as the organizations' communicative process that help with "consists of plans, recipes, rules, instructions, and programs for generating, interpreting, and governing behavior that are jointly managed by two or more people" (p. 235). In other words, organization members are carrying out the process of communicative relationships within the organization, which is an important part of the life and health of the organization.

This communicative process establishes the apparatus for interpretation and shared meaning. In addition, it adds some complexity to the process. Members of the organization bring with them values, experiences, feelings, and their individual interpretations (Littlejohn, 2002). When change or transition occurs, there is an interruption of this communicative process within the organization. Unless proper communication channels facilitate change, a breakdown in the organization's communication process could lead to misinterpretations and ambiguity will increase within the organization. As a result of communication breakdown, the members will begin to form cliques and this process could inhibit the organization's primary function, which is production.

According to Littlejohn (2002), there should be certain prerequisites laid down before and after a transition through a merger, and leadership should make sure that the following commitments are in place. For example, four areas should be carefully taken

into consideration by the leadership. These are: "(a) build context and clearly communicate to members of the organization where it is headed, (b) communicate, communicate, communicate-you can never over communicate, and it's always the opposite way, (c) deliver consistent and clear messages that to make sure the communication process is transparency, (d) make sure all the channels for communication are clear and effective" (Littlejohn, 2002, p. 32).

Communication and Change Process

The Change Process

Change is very common in daily life, and the world around us; however, that does not mean most people will like it. Changes in organizations happen more often than ever (Conner, 1992; Kotter, 1999; Anderson & Anderson-Ackerman, 2001; Bridges, 2003). Therefore, it is important for organizations to communicate effectively to their employees and let them understand the importance and necessary of certain changes. According to Bridges (2003), and Conner (1992), changes can affect employees' attitudes, work performance, and perceptions toward the organization. The first phase looks at where the individual is today—"the present state" (Conner, 1992, p. 87); and the need to experience closure on a phase of their life, personally and professional, that is coming to an end (Bridges, 2003). After noticed the news of changes, followed by anxiety and resistance of changes (Conner, 1992; Bridges, 2003). It may take some time for all the employees to accept and start "a new beginning" (Bridges, 2003, p. 5). Every individual will go through and have different experiences during the change period.

The first step to help the situation is to let employees understand the reason behind the changes and give them assistances during the difficulty time. Anderson &

Ackerman-Anderson's (2001) states that at different phases of change process, communication is still the important key to help employees. First, organizations need to make sure all the leaders are prepared to guide and lead the change process. Second, make sure the new missions and values, and other fundamental guidelines of the new organization are ready (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2001). Those steps will ensure that effective communication to occur which definitely helps with changing process.

Communicating Change

Communication is the essential piece when it comes to prepare and planning for changes in the organization (Jones, Wilson, Gardner & Gallois, 2004). During the communication, information is key and critical to determine the quality of the communication. If the messages were wrong and not true, which will only lead mistrust, rumors, and even conflict occur (Goodman & Truss, 2004). Several aspects are extremely significant when communicating change:

Internal communication. This is the most of used communication strategies within an organization (Holtz, 2004; Leonardi & Jackson, 2004; Roach, 2004; Szpekman, 2004) From the decision to merger, announce it to the public, to merger occurs, internal communication channel happens everywhere (Leonardi & Jackson, 2004). Employees get all the information and exchange their thoughts and opinions through internal communication (Leonardi & Jackson, 2004). According to Ahn, Adamson and Dornbusch (2004), it "may help induce anxiety and stress levels" (p. 217). Since internal communication is the most important communication channel during the merger, failure to effectively communicate internally may cause more conflicts and unnecessary problem for the organization (Roach, 2004). Schweiger and Denisi (1991) also agree about the

importance of internal communication to the organization, "internal communication is the first step for an organization to use to let the words out and communicate with employees, it has both long-term and short-term impact" (p. 110). Schweiger and Dnisi (1991) also state "transparency in communication with honesty can help organization to gain support from employees about the changes" (p. 127). This shows the not just the importance of internal communication but also the information that pass around in the channel. Goodman and Truss (2004) add their views on internal communication. They believe another aspect of the communication is to make sure always communicate to the employees. From the change begins to complete, always keep everyone in the organization update on the latest news.

The role of leadership. Through the merger and change process, no doubt leadership becomes more important than ever. Besides the regular job duties, leaders play the communication bridge between the organization and employees. Grensing-Pophal (2004) argues that during the change time period, all the employees come to their leaders/boss first for help, information, news, and answers. Communication connect the administrators and employees together; it is essential to make sure that the administrators are been informed all the information and can answer questions from employees during the merger. This becomes increasingly important in the organization's transition over time. Due to the confidential nature of mergers, as the circle of individuals who were aware of the transition grows, closer and closer to the announcement date, it is important that the news is not communicated to staff by a third party. Gorman (2004) states "it is absolutely essential that employees know that they can trust their leaders and organizations, there's transparency in the communication" (p. 5), and it is never more

essential than during times of change. Employees are looking for safety and confidence—administrators need to be confident and prepared to share the information with employees. This will help employees to make sense of the changes and understand it. Since the employees are already not the ones making decisions, they at least need to be informed and well communicated throughout the entire process (Gorman, 2004). According to Holtz (2004), administrators must have updated information, well trained skills to communicate and make everything as much transparency as possible.

Communication channels. The importance of communication channels has already been mentioned earlier in the chapter. There has no doubt that different channels may affect the communication process and results very differently. In different environments, employees may or may not consider certain communication channels as an effective way. Organizations need to learn and find out which channels are the most effective way to use and which ones are not, or at least should not be used during the changes. The communication should answer the questions, "is the communication designed to make people aware, to understand and take some kind of action, or to accept and own?" (Hitchmough, 2004, p. 27). Szpekman (2004), Moorcroft (2004), and Hitchmough (2004) agree on one key element in change communication—listening and "to keep 'listening' to employees" (Moorcroft, 2004, p. 17). Communication needs to happen more often than ever during the merger, and administrators need to make sure to use appropriate channels to communicate with employees.

Timing. An effective channel with clear information to communicate is not enough—timing of the communication is also very important (Goodman & Truss, 2004). There is a timeline for everything, including communication effectiveness during the

merger. Timing allows administrators to pass along the messages before and leaking or rumors start (Grensing-Pophal, 2004). Especially when it comes to respond employees' concerns and questions. It helps employees to stay strong and together, and also have faith and believe in their administrators and organizations. Administrators need to answer all the concerns and questions as soon as possible; even without knowing the answers, should let them know they are working on it (Szpekman, 2004). Administrators must also take into consideration the way they communicate the messages with employees (Field, 2005). If not, it may cause more miscommunication, misunderstanding, and even more conflicts.

Theoretical Framework: Sensemaking Theory

For most employees during the merger one important reason for them to talk to each other was to make sense of everything. Communication and sensemaking influence and reinforce each other during the merger. Karl Weick (1995) suggests, "both sense-making and change in an organization goes together" (p. 82). Organizations are sensemaking systems because they are structures in which coordinated action and interpretations are connected through communication (Weick, 1995).

Sensemaking Theory

In order to better understand and investigate "how" does communication affect the merger, it is important to explore the sensemaking process in communication. The first two theoretical perspectives focus on sensemaking are specifically Dervin's sense-making methodology (1983; 1986; 1992; 1996; 1999; 2003; 2005; 2008) and Weick's sensemaking theory (1995; 2003; 2005).

Dervin (2008) articulates sensemaking as a construct relative to the individual: sensemaking is the way each employee in the organization tries to make sense of certain things, desired outcomes and gaps and/or bridges of time and space perceived by the individual to exist between the two. Weick (2008) on the other hand defines sensemaking as "a way people trying to understand and figure out the meaning behind all the actions and decisions" (p. 635). Weick's (2008) approach infuses the importance of retrospection and organizational cultural influence on the individual's sensemaking process; we make sense of events as we look back in time and process what has occurred. Dervin's (2005) conceptualization of sensemaking is a non-linear process that occurs as the individual ponders forward in time. If the individual can conceptualize where they are, where they are going, and how they might get there, Sense-Making occurs (Dervin, 2008). If the individual has difficulty clarifying an and /or all three of these dimensions, then the individual is during a sense unmaking process.

Dervin's sensemaking framework (2008) is at once a paradigm, a theory, and a methodology all in one. Under Dervin's (2008) sensemaking paradigm reality is constructed by an individual who seeks to make sense of data—the observations of others as well as their own observations. The theory originated in the discipline of library sciences, and informs much of the information-seeking and information use behavior literature. According to Dervin (2008), the individual's sensemaking process occurs when the individual processes their situation in time/space (the context and the role of power within that context); their desired outcomes; the bridge of beliefs/values/thoughts between the two; the context in which this scenario occurs and its perceived importance and relevance for the individual's lived experience. Gaps occur in this process that either

creates sense (sensemaking) or change/alter/shift sense (sense-unmaking). The entire

endeavor is a communication process that challenges prior communication literature that

describes communication as a transmission-based process between sender and receiver.

Instead, Dervin (2008) posits that information is co-created by the individual in the gap-

bridging process between situation, context and outcome (Dervin, 2008); as sense is

made, information is co-created.

While Dervin's work focuses especially on the individual's sensemaking process,

Weick notes seven primary components that are integral to the ongoing process of

sensemaking, which can take place within an individual, or an organization. Weick's

model for sensemaking has been offered as a valuable way to recognize the equivocal and

complex nature of communication (Kreps, 2009). Weick's socialization-based approach

to sensemaking is constructivist (like Dervin's). However, because the theory specifically

notes a particular dependence on social interaction, Weick's conceptualization of

sensemaking especially recognizes the importance of organization via the rules and

cycles of communication. According to Weick's approach, social influence is part of the

chaos that begins sensemaking, and can also be part of the process of systemically

organizing reality into a plausible story that leads to decision-making and enactment. As

noted by Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005):

> To focus on sensemaking is to portray organizing as the experience of being
> thrown into an ongoing, unknowable, unpredictable streaming of experience in
> search of answers to the questions, "what's the story?" (p. 410).

While there are obvious similarities between Dervin's (2008) sensemaking

methodology and Weick's (2005) sensemaking theory it is interesting to note that the two

scholars did not collaborate in their theories' development. Although they were

developing their theories at approximately the same time and they do refer to each other's

work, they developed their theories independently. Both Dervin's and Weick's

approaches to sensemaking offer productive implications for this discussion of

communication as a sensemaking process. As discussed here, both theoretical approaches

offer the possibility that communication can impact a sensemaking process. This process

may be constructed by the individual within a given context (Dervin, 2008) and/or may

be influenced by a sense of social engagement and retrospective ordering of data (Weick,

2005).

Retrospective sensemaking. The assumption behind sensemaking is that "people

attempt to retrospectively understand or cognitively process their environment"

(Henningsen, Henningsen, & Eden, 2006, p. 42). According to Weick (1993), "the basic

idea of sensemaking is that reality is an ongoing accomplishment that emerges from

efforts to create order and make retrospective sense of what occurs" (p. 635).

Retrospective sensemaking is an extension of the Sensemaking Theory. Individuals give

meaning to events according to their memories of experiences. Most people may think

they usually plan first, then act according to their plan; however, Weick (1979)

emphasizes that organizational action often occurs first and is then interpreted or given

meaning. He presents the relationship between action and planning:

> Our view of planning is that it can best be understood as thinking in the future
> perfect tense. It isn't the plan that gives coherence to actions…It is the reflective
> glance, not the plan per se, that permits the act to the accomplished in an orderly
> way. As plan works because it can be referred back to analogous actions in the
> past, not because it accurately anticipates future contingencies…Actions never
> performed can hardly be made meaningful, since one has no idea what they are.
> They simply are performed and then made sensible; they then appear to be under
> the control of the plan. (Weick, 1979, p. 102)

Sensemaking and Communication

With the link between organizational culture and sensemaking established, the question remains: What role does communication play in the sensemaking process in organizations? The literature responds to this question with assumptions and explanations describing communication's role in organizing and sensemaking. We can study the process of sensemaking by observing communication behavior because that shows us what do people do in their daily which helps us to make sense to their behavior and why (Weick, 2005). In this way, actions (including communication), rather than shared beliefs, are integral to sensemaking in organizations.

Interpretive approaches to organizational sensemaking state that organizing and sensemaking are created through communication. People organize by communicating; communication helps to evolve some level of shared understanding around common issues. In this way, the communication process helps people to understand the organizational culture (Schall, 1983).

The role of communication in organizational culture and sensemaking is described in literature as communication artifacts and clues to the sensemaking process within organizations (Weick, 2003). The culture approach to organizations is about "coming to understand how organizational life is accomplished communicatively" (Schall, 1983, p. 562). In this way, tangible, visible artifacts such as stories and rituals are shared symbols that communicate an organization's way of making sense of its reality.

In addition to Weick's analysis of the connection between communication and sensemaking, Edgar Schein (1998) also proposes the concept of visible artifacts in organizational culture as relevant to this discussion of communication and sensemaking.

Schein (1983) proposes that visible artifacts constitute one of three "levels" of culture; these artifacts are the constructed environments of the organization and include dress codes, organizational charts, office layout and anything externally visible. Schein (1984) suggests that the organization's culture, which includes its new structure, mission, and values, are the first step for employees to make sense of the merger. And those artifacts affect the way employees communicate with each other.

Summary of the Findings

This study sought to determine the impact of communication during the merger. The purpose was to see if the findings present organizational communication as an important element in the merger process and it affects the way employees' performance. This section of Chapter three summarizes the findings under research questions two and three presented in this dissertation that relate with communication strategies

Interview questions were structured to solicit answers to the research questions. More specifically, the interview questions for this section delved into the participants' perceptions of how the communication influences the merger process and how does people try to make sense of everything in the newly merged college. Data collected from the interviews were coded with attention to emergent themes based on the responses from the interview participants. This chapter is focusing on research questions two and three:

RQ 2: How was information of consolidation communicated to various group of people?

RQ3: How do employees make sense of the information provided regarding consolidation?

Three key themes emerged in the data: *effectiveness of communication and information channels*, *sensemaking*, and *communication gaps*. Sub-themes also emerged within these key themes.

Effectiveness of Communication and Information Channels

Several respondents described the organizational culture of the newly merged college as one with open communication. Their comments were "more open communication and teamwork" (Joe, Faculty, College B); "all on the same team, good communication, and good interaction" (Donna, Administrator, College A); and "we are better aware and organized to what is happening in the college, thanks to the Internet, electronic newsletter, and President's Cabinet meeting minutes being placed on the college's website (Holly, Administrator, College B). However, most faculty and staff members were not very pleased with the communication strategies during the merger.

The ineffective of communication start with "how did people first hear about the merger news". Both presidents of the two schools hold an official face-to-face employee meeting in January 2013. After that, official emails have been sending out. Unfortunately, among all 35 participants, 25 of them mentioned they first heard the news from either a leaking on the local news/radio, or rumor from other people. Two of them because of the state and did not know until they returned after the official announcement. People were shocked, frustrated and lost during the announcement from both sides. No one knew why it happened, and why them. To some participants, the official announcement was "too late." "I wish for a big decision like this, we can hear it from the school first, and we should be the first one to know, not the last to find out" (Aidan, Faculty, College B). One staff member shared her experience:

> The funny thing about this was… there was like a newspaper article announcing it before the merger was announced on campus. I don't know if there was one common channel that everyone used. There were rumors everywhere before the official announcement from the President of the college. (Lily, Staff, College A)

Some participants mentioned there was a lack of communication during the time of the announcement, "we didn't have to communicate about this because … there was a leak before it became official" (Jack, Staff, College B).

Officially, besides the rumors and news leaking, most faculty, staff members and students were informed the news in a face-to-face meeting with the President and their Dean/Chair:

> Because I was a department head, and had to officially inform them… so I held a meeting. I informed them what was going to happen and how, what I knew of how it would impact them and what I didn't know that would be revealed as time passed. (Sherry, Administrator, College A)

The comments made by the interviewees were peppered with instances of intercampus rivalry and a lack of trust. One faculty member who has worked on both campuses, although the majority of her time was spent on the College A, disclosed:

> Faculty and staff are not cohesive. We do not trust each other. We do not interact enough; when we do, it does not appear that we truly embrace each other. At assemblies, the employees are still departmentalized at a social setting. No trust. Most people are having certain ways to communicate with their groups. (Mia, Faculty, College B)

Administrators, faculty and staff members all shared their concern that at certain times throughout the consolidation, there was ineffective communication through the whole merger process. It is very clear that the manner in which the faculty and staff have received the news has affected their attitudes toward the consolidation. For instance, Benjamin mentioned that:

75

I heard about consolidation sometimes in the middle of 2012 and it actually was leaked to the news media. One of the professors at our school found out about it, and the entire faculty knew it before the president could announce it. This made most of us so worried and we started asking questions about what's going on in our careers and there obviously was a lot of concern. (Benjamin, Faculty, College A)

It was very interesting to find out that there were six different channels used to communicate about the merger news: email, face-to-face, newspaper, phone call, radio, and rumors. Most participants preferred the face-to-face channel; however, some of them wished the face-to-face meeting happened before the rumors came out. Depending the communication channel used to receive the merger news, the faculty and staff had different opinions on the effectiveness of communication. Participants who heard the rumor first were most likely to be very terrified and confused, "it was a rumor first, I heard it from someone else in the same department. I didn't know if it was true, and was extremely worried and terrified" (Isabella, Staff, College A). Participants who heard the news from radio before the official announcement were also worried and confused, "it was on the radio, and in the newspaper. I mean there was a leak news, and some of us heard it before the president had a chance to announce it. I was so lost, I knew it must be true, but I couldn't believe it is true" (Mason, Faculty, College A). Consequently, when the merger news broke on non-university media channels, the employees were more likely to be more distrustful and less committed and engaged in the mission of the merger. The lack of faculty and staff buy-in had affected the merger success in an institution based on shared governance.

Sensemaking

The question "why do we need to have this merger?" and the need for an answer to that question has become a recurring theme throughout the merger process. It arose in

all interviews as a key element in people's transition process. Participants felt that there is "a group in the back room with the master plan" (Joe, faculty, College B) and no one understands how or why they are making decisions. Participants felt that the need for confidentiality constrained the process and was used too often as a reason for not sharing more information. In other words, the secrecy and confidentiality behind the merger decision had affected the employees' ability to understand its justification and legitimacy.

In many merger literatures, saving money is one of the most important reasons to merge. However, from the findings, many participants disagree with this. Most of them mentioned that there is no documentation to prove mergers save money. Even the president of GPU mentions this: "saving money was one of the main reasons for merger. But, we can't prove it. Later on in the process, we were informed by the Board of Regents that this is no longer a reason" (Lori, Administrator, College B). Another participant added this: "yes we have been told the merger will save money, but no one has seen documents to prove it" (Sophia, Faculty, College B).

How do participants make sense of the merger? The GPU employees are trying to make sense of the merger in various ways: "I am not sure honestly. I realized that in many ways it was probably a political decision" (Alice, Faculty, College A); "It didn't make sense to me till now in 2015" (Emma, Administrator, College A); "I wish I can tell you how to make sense of it. I guess we just have to figure it out by ourselves" (Sophia, Faculty, College B); "It didn't make sense to me" (JT, Staff, College A). On the other hand, a few participants did see the needs and reason for the merger to take place: "Airlines do it, phone companies do it, even grocery stores do it. Mergers are nothing new, and now that trend has made its way to Georgia's University System (Aidan,

Faculty, College B); "I wasn't excited about the idea at first, but after being a part of the consolidation implementation committee, I started to accept the idea and like the new opportunity" (Olivia, Faculty, College B). This means that the employees who were directly involved in the decision-making process and implementation were more likely to be on board with the consolidation.

Concern was also expressed that decisions were being made and communicated based on a purely corporate perspective focused on the bottom line and putting the organization before the individuals. The focus was predominantly on what the change meant to the organization as opposed to how this change might affect the individuals. In many ways, it was forgotten that the organization is the sum of its members and that the merger in fact affected the many constituents in different ways. The communication messages should have reflected the impact of the merger on its many types of constituents: faculty, staff, students, and administrators.

Responses varied on how frequently individual administrators communicated with their departments. Whenever the Chair or Dean had ongoing communication with the faculty, participants felt very informed and more confident and hopeful about the transition: "I think that is kind of the national trend in state colleges. It's an exciting news and opportunity for us" (Mary, Administrator, College A). Again, framing the merger in the national context of higher education helped to facilitate the sensemaking process of the merger.

Others felt that they were not getting the information they needed from their administrators, and when they went looking for it, the answer was not always available. Administrators were perceived as available to answer questions, if they could; but as one

participant stated, "availability and trusting them are two different things" (Lily Staff, College A). In this case, appointing a Chief Operation Officer or Unit who is in charge with the merger seems to be a suggested strategy. Based on the interviews, a person or unit should have been available to coordinate not only the entire process, but also to answer the many inquiries and provide answers to concerned employees on the merger process.

In the initial phases of the merger and the communication process, there was concern that not enough attention was directed at the impact on individuals in the organization. Employees within both institutions had concerns about job security; how it impacted the way they did their jobs; and how this change would affect organizational culture. There was a clear tone of fear and uncertainty and the question of "what does this mean for me personally" (Joyce, Faculty, College B). Despite the many assurances from administrators, the faculty most affected by the organizational change (the ones working under new chairs, new deans, in new departments etc.) felt that management was glossing over their concerns.

Communication Gaps

The final sub-theme that emerged was related to gaps in the timing of the communication. There were times in the transition process when there were periods of silence and absence of communication. The literature shows time and again that communication during times of change needs to be ongoing and consistent—whether new information is available or not—and that in the absence of communication, people will seek out what they need or infer, often incorrectly, what the absence of information means (Holtz, 2004; Szpekman, 2004).

For staff, the new organizational chart was a significant milestone in the change process. People did not know if they could still keep their positions, and they had nobody to ask, because most of them did not know whom they should report to. All staff experienced some kind of "ending" or a "wake up call" (Alderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2001). Then the formal communication appeared to come to an end for staff. Staff members were left with the feeling that, in the words of a participant, "unless I go out and find out what is happening, I won't know" (Lucy, Staff, College A). There were still questions that people wanted and needed answers to and their mechanism for finding them was not through the organizational structure, but from their peers. Rumors and speculation filled the void of formal communication and fear and uncertainty was the predominant response. Participant Bob stated:

> I think the lack of communication and what was going to happen made me so worried. I heard so many people complained that we didn't receive enough information back then, or if the tops ever heard our concerns. The whole idea doesn't make sense to me at all. (Bob, Staff, College A)

Most of them felt that their voices have not been heard, because there were no effective policies and answers for staff members. During my interviews, 85% participants felt that staff members were affected the most by the merger: "their positions were more likely to be identified as redundant" (Joyce, Faculty, College B); "after the merger, we have more students, and need more professors to teach, so we are safe; but we do not need two HR departments, and two HR directors, and assistant directors, and someone has to leave or do something different" (Bob, Staff, College A).

During the merger, the university organized a special unit-consolidation work group. Employees who were serving on the work groups were from different departments, and different campuses. The school tried to have diversity in the work group

and be fair to all campuses. Each work group has its own purposes. They assigned on different issues during the merger, and contribute ideas, and feedbacks to the upper administrators. Participants felt that there had been a great deal of effort in communication with everyone leading up during the work groups' period, but that communication has abated. There were different merger committee groups during the consolidation. Many people liked the idea and volunteered to participate in the groups; however, they felt their hard work in the group did not matter, that their feedback and concerns have never gone to the top of the organization, and somehow got lost in the communication. As of 2016, there are still ongoing transition issues, program issues, and particularly where units have merged, participants felt that the flow of information and updates has stopped: "we worked so hard in the work group to put everything together, but they never listened to us" (Blake, Staff, College A); "I felt there was a communication gap between us and the senior administrators. They didn't hear what we wanted to say, and when they decided, they didn't ask our opinions" (Lucas, Faculty, College A). Formal communication left a gap in the organization where people feel that they are still in the dark about the future and that there were more surprises to come. Although the working groups were in charge with the horizontal planning and implementation of the consolidation, the general impression was that this was a false-shared governance and that their recommendations did not have any impact on the merger.

Analysis of the Findings

Research questions 2 and 3 produced the following emergent themes: *effectiveness of communication and information channels*, *sensemaking* and

communication gaps. Regarding effectiveness of communication and information channels, few respondents described GPU as a merged institution with open communication where information is shared among employees. Most participants felt the opposite way-that there was insufficient communication or even no communication at all.

Another emergent theme was *sensemaking*, and many respondents did not make sense of the merger and some still cannot make sense of it. The findings show the purpose and benefits of the merger were never clearly given. No documentation can prove merger saves money. Few respondents supported the merger and were excited for the new opportunity for the school. Those are the ones who already have a Ph.D. degree, and were not affected by the promotion polices and had a strong research/publishing backgrounds and abilities. The final theme associated with research questions 2 and 3 is *communication gap*, which was described by the respondents as a big gap between the senior administrators and faculty and staff members. Respondents felt they were being deprived of the privilege of being full participants in the decision-making process at the merged institution. They felt that their voices were not heard.

Many members of the study population were left with feelings of confusion and marginalization rather than perceptions of being part of a cohesive and inclusive college with sound information channels. It was obvious that the participants believed that the communication was better before the merger than after the merger.

The findings showed how much university employees value information communicated to them about change. Communication, or its absence, has a definite impact on the reaction of individuals to change and change initiatives. It was obvious that most respondents believed that the communication was better before the merger than

after the merger. The respondents did agree that the merger has given more opportunities to students and the communities post-consolidation; however, it did have an impact on the organization's culture and communication. The more people are informed, the more they are able to translate and give personal meaning to the merger and to deal their transitional issues. Based on the findings, organizational communication was not as effective as before, and employees had a difficult time to make sense of new rules, policies, and environments around them. Internal communication mechanisms help facilitate the flow of information to employees. For College B, formal internal communication mechanisms were a known entity. It was visible and they knew where to turn to if they had questions or wanted to raise issues. That same model was not commonplace for the College A.

There were times in the transition process where there were periods of silence and an absence of communication. The literature shows time and again that communication during times of change needs to be ongoing and consistent—whether new information is available or not—and that in the absence of communication, people will seek out what they need or infer, often incorrectly, what the absence of information means (Holtz, 2004; Szpekman, 2004). There were still questions that people wanted and needed answers to and their mechanism for finding them was not through the school officials, but from their peers. Rumor and speculation filled the void of formal communication, and fear and uncertainty was the predominant response.

The findings also have shown that the historical context of an organization and where the organization is in its present evolution have an impact on how people receive and perceive communication. Many participants in the interviews indicated that the

organization and the people were still coping with the impact of the merger changes. The state of uncertainty that people were feeling was exacerbated by the addition of another significant change effort. To most of the participants, even after the merger was officially completed, there were still some unknowns about the certain things.

Periods of silence in the change process create anxiety and speculation by employees. As one participant stated, "no communication is communication" (Blake, Staff, College A). In an organization where openness and transparency in communication is valued, the change process clouded that perspective. The communication related to the change did not leave them with that sense. Employees relied on their administrators as their primary source of information and they valued that relationship. Employees need to have confidence in the leadership of the organization and to be able to trust the information received from them.

The findings and the concerns raised by study participants support the conclusion that during a major change initiative, communication should be a primary focus for the organization: "communication is the key element for organization to ensure the merger goes well" (Jones et al., 2004, p. 735). In this respect, resources, including people, must be dedicated to the change communication effort. A professional or department who is not being distracted by day-to-day demands of the ongoing operations of the business should centrally coordinate communication. Communication plays a fundamental strategic role in change planning and should occur repeatedly in multiple mediums to ensure as much exposure to employees as possible. This professional or department needs to make sure communication effectively is going both ways—from top down, and vice versa. It can be concluded that the team approach to communication did not meet the

needs to employees who felt that they were not getting enough information in a timely manner.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed several concepts, theory, and processes in regards to organizational communication and mergers. The final part of the chapter presents the findings for research questions 2 and 3, and analysis of the findings.

The first finding theme is *effectiveness of communication and information channels*. Most participants agreed that the university did try to communicate the news and other information about merger on a regular basis. However, the channel and timing of communication were very ineffective. From the news first been announced, to their concerns and questions have been answered, many participants were not satisfied or happy about the communication process. In the second theme *sensemaking,* this is the first time that employees from both sides of schools were agreed on the same thing—the merger did not make sense. Last theme is *communication gaps*. As mentioned earlier, the work group supposed to be a great communication channel between senior administrators and other employees. However, somewhere the link broke down. The senior administrators felt they did their best to communicate with employees by using different channels. On the other hand, the faculty and staff members felt their voices haven't been heard, or they never had a clear answer on their concerns and questions. For the people who volunteered in the work groups think they did a good job to work together as a team to give feedbacks to the decision makers. But, some of them felt schools only asked for their opinions, never intended to make any changes.

Organizational communication serves four important functions: as a controlling tool, as a motivating tool, as a tool to strengthen interaction and teamwork, and as a feedback tool. And through the findings, the university only met the last function through the work group. From the findings, communication during the merger in GPU achieved the last function: as a feedback tool. Employees who volunteered in the consolidation working groups were supposed to give feedbacks on different issues to the upper level administrators. The findings show communication during merger can build positive attitudes with the employees by including them in the change process by informing and communicating with them. Internal communication should address as much information about the objectives and timeframe of the merger. Communication also prepares employees of any positive or negative effects the change may have on them and reduces uncertainty. It is important to use established channels during change.

Communication during mergers must to be clear and should not derive from either of the two former institutions. Identity, vision, and values must be clearly stated, and organizations should create news channels that will inform employees of the most important information about the merger. Administrators must answer question employees may have, and should explain why some questions cannot be answered rather then not saying anything at all. Information must be given as soon as possible, to be realistic, relevant, and consistent. Employees communicate with others trying to "make sense" of everything during and after the merger. Depending on the channel they use, they may receive different information, which affects the way they interpret and make sense of everything.

CHAPTER FOUR: CONFLICT MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES
DURING MERGERS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

When attempting synergies, conflict is inevitable, but the key to success is how conflict is managed or resolved during the merger.

Lucas, Faculty, GPU

Conflict is an inherent part of any organization. Conflict exists for a variety of reasons and, depending on how it is managed, can result in productive or destructive outcomes. Reducing the destructive effects requires individuals within organizations to learn how to manage conflict effectively. In higher education, conflict will occur at all levels and in a variety of ways. The more consequential conflicts will involve multiple constituencies (Cohen & March, 1979; Mortimer & McConnell, 1978; Shapiro, 1998; Walker, 1979). Conflict can be a productive element of interactions within the university, but it will interfere with work toward organizational goals unless handled in a constructive manner (Walker, 1979; Gmelch & Miskin, 1993; Lucas, 1994). Therefore, educational leaders must develop the capacity to deal effectively with conflict and to teach these skills to others in the organization. Academic administrators are individuals within higher education institutions who are often called upon to manage a variety of conflicts.

> The academic administrators (director, chair, dean, provost, or president) are typically faced with a vast array of conflict situations, both within a given institution and between that institution and its various external publics (Darling & Brownlee, 1984, p. 243).

During the merger, conflicts occur even more often in organizations because of the change in culture, structure, communication, etc. In particular, academic leaders benefit from a better understanding of how conflicts connect with organizational culture and communication and how to respond to faculty and staff members effectively.

Academic leaders must approach conflict in a manner that will manage or resolve the conflict while supporting the educational mission of their institution. However, conflict resolution skills have not received much attention in the literature on leadership in higher education nor has the leaders' role in building the conflict management capacities of others on their campus (Ramsden, 1998; Walker, 1979). As university campuses are often the scenes of conflict, the importance of managing and channeling conflict constructively is essential during mergers.

Universities are large and complex human organizations; therefore, it should be no surprise that the people within them experience conflict during their work together. However, with few exceptions, research on higher education leadership has not emphasized the challenges posed by institutional conflict. Furthermore, authors have not addressed the ultimate conflict management test for college and university executives, the merger of academic institutions.

Organizational Conflict

Conflict is a natural occurrence in society as well as organizations. As a result, various definitions have been generated for the term, and depending on the scope of these studies they range from very broad to very narrow. Communication studies are primarily concerned with the elements of interdependence and interaction in defining conflict (Hocker, & Wilmot, 2007; Kassing, 2011). According to De Dreu and Gelfand (2008), "conflict is one of the grand challenges of our time. It occurs because there are deep divisions in our society that carry over into our interpersonal relationships" (p. 2). Adding to that, Pondy (1967) believes conflict is a more complicated issue than most people would think. It may have two sides—positive and negative.

Over the last several decades, scholars have found different ways to study and define conflicts. Some of them are presenting from an interpersonal level while others may present from the bigger and broader perspective, for example, between different countries. According to Guetzkow and Gyr (1954), conflicts in interpersonal communication level could sometimes help the persons to understand each other better, and work in a much healthier relationship. Similarly, Wall and Nolan (1986) studied the conflict between managers and employees. They found that the way managers and individuals handle conflict would affect the outcomes of conflicts very differently. Priem and Price (1991) state that the "conflict results the outcomes of employees' performances; the importance of conflict and how to handle conflicts are the keys" (p. 210). They believed that occurrence of conflict can yield positive outcomes. Finally, Pinkley (1990) proposed the relationship between conflict and conflict management strategies. Later on, scholars become more aware of the importance of using effective conflict management strategies (Montana, 2008).

Types of Organizational Conflict

During mergers, different kinds of conflict occur. Based on De Wit et al., (2012) research, there are three categories: individual level conflicts, group level conflicts and organizational level conflicts. Individual level conflicts involve relationship building (Condit, 2006; Lewis, Isbell, & Koschmann, 2010). "Individuals have disagreements with other group members in the group on certain issues" (De Wit et al., 2012, p. 360). These types of conflicts usually revolve around interpersonal issues especially when group members have different beliefs and values. Martins (2013) found that when people experience individual conflict in the organization, they are usually very emotional, upset,

89

and stressed out. De Wit et al. (2012) found the most individual conflicts in this type have more negative than positive effects on interpersonal relationships and organizations. According to De Wit et al. (2012), "these conflicts are strongly affected by the personal egos" (p. 360). Therefore, individual level conflicts can have negative affect on employees and create tension and anxiety and can inhibit effective teamwork.

Compared to individual level conflicts, group level conflicts occur when group members disagree on a group project or issue. Group level conflicts focus more on the outcomes of a task rather than individuals' feelings (De Wit et al., 2012). De Wit et al. (2012) found that group level conflicts may or may not benefit the organizations depending on how these conflicts are managed. For example, the conflict can help group members to focus on the real issue of the project, communicate with each other and try to find the best way to solve it. After this step, group members may have a better understanding of each other and a stronger team working spirit. At the same time, group level conflicts can also lead to creative thinking, freedom to express each other's opinions and enhance the quality of the work. On the other hand, group level conflict may slow down productivity and create more individual level conflict between group members (De Wit, Jen, & Scheepers, 2013). For example, if the conflict is not solved appropriately, group members may feel their skills were challenged and become more competitive.

The third type of organizational conflict is organizational level conflict. This level of conflict occurs at a higher organizational level compared to individual or group level conflicts. Besides interpersonal relationships and task outcomes, this level of conflict involves how to distribute work equally, how to handle workflow, how to work on schedule, and how to address group members' concerns (Behfar et al., 2011). Behfar et

al. (2011) also add that organizational level conflicts are complicated because they include individual and group level conflicts. Failing to manage the conflicts effectively can cause more disputes and negative attitudes among group members. Compared to the other two levels of conflicts, organizational level conflict has more negative than positive impact on the organization. De Wit et al. (2012) argue this is because most organizations do not have effective direct communication with employees because communication is diffused through chains of command. Besides De Wit et al. (2012), there are other scholars who report the same findings that organizational level conflicts can foster "more anger and anxieties… among team members" (Behafar et al., 2011, p. 39).

While the characteristics of conflicts are exhaustive, the most commonly investigated types are task and relational conflicts (Behafar, et al., 2011). These types of conflict in organization can bring both positive and negative impacts to the organization depending on the way they are managed.

Constructive and Destructive Conflict

Regardless of the types of conflict employees' experiences, conflicts can be constructive or destructive. Constructive outcomes of conflict have been found to stimulate innovation, creativity, knowledge and change. In addition, constructive conflict contributes to problem awareness, alternative solutions, improved decision-making, higher productivity, increased performance and personal development while it guards against groupthink (Amason & Schweiger, 2000; Putnam, 2006; Rahim, 2011). In contrast, destructive conflict causes job stress, lower job performance, burnout and dissatisfaction, which can lead to higher turnover. Moreover, destructive conflict can reduce communication between individuals and groups, damage to relationships,

increased resistance to change and lower organizational commitment (Amason &

Schweiger, 2000; Rahim, 2011).

In order for conflict to be constructive, employees need to manage it together.

Tjosvold (2000) uses the term co-operative conflict and urges employees to speak openly

and directly and to align their goals so that each employee can solve problems together

and win. Most importantly, employees need to believe that they are working with one

another. In doing so, employees are able to learn and "collectively engage in the process

of diagnosis of and intervention in problems" (Rahim, 2011, p. 34). Organizations that

manage conflict well are those that address it constructively. According to Tjosvold

(2000), conflict itself does not disappear. One can use different ways to handle it, but it is

always there until it is resolved. In short, the absence of conflict is not a desirable goal for

organizations. Conflict is needed for learning, adaptation and advancement of individuals

and organizations. Therefore, conflict needs to be managed constructively in order to

yield the desired positive outcomes (Putnam, 2006).

Conflict Management in Higher Education

Organizational structure changes increasing conflicts. From legal department to

faculty senate, they may have different ways to manage conflict. One engaged higher

education leader, University of California President Clark Kerr, summarized his view of

conflict management:

> The management of conflict requires anticipation of points of conflict, dispersal
> of conflicts over time and place so they do not inflame each other, agreement in
> advance on the rules of the game, incorporation of all important groups into the
> political processes so each may have a stake in a peaceful solution, creation of
> mediatory and adjudicative agencies, and long-run constructive solutions.
> Conflicts, if allowed to accumulate, can become much more intense. Eternal
> vigilance is necessary to identify points of tension early; extra courage is
> necessary to confront them as they arise. (Kerr, 1991, p. 221)

A close professional relationship with the individuals involved in conflict will encourage the administrator to assume the role of mediator and intervene to help achieve a resolution (Cohen & March, 1974). In that regard, administrators at the departmental level are closest to the front lines of conflict in higher education. The interactions that occur between and among individual faculty members, staff, and students often begin as minor disagreements; but the clashes can quickly escalate to the point that other people are drawn into the conflict, and the ongoing acrimony erodes overall morale and productivity. In a worst-case scenario, what began as a one-on-one conflict can spiral out of the department and draw the attention of others on campus and beyond, thus damaging the reputation of the department and diminishing the credibility of the institutions as a whole (Cohen & March, 1974).

Gmelch and Miskin (1993) and Lucas (1994) acknowledged the various types of conflict that can occur within the communities of scholars known as departments. According to Gmelch and Miskin (1993), "in U.S. higher education, how to handle conflict management during academic changes is very import" (p. 23). In response, Lucas (1994) discussed the strategies that department chairs may use to prevent dysfunctional conflict and the third-party role the department chair may play in mediating disputes between faculty members. However, department chairs, like university presidents, must know when to intervene and when to share responsibility for handling disputes. In Gmelch and Miskin's (1993) framework, chairs are encouraged to use specific conflict management in analyzing problems in their departments and in applying various antidotes from a menu of options.

Those seeking to understand the role of departmental administrators are appropriately concerned with what might be termed micro-conflicts between academic colleagues or between a faculty member and a student (Gmelch & Miskin, 1993; Lucas, 1994). Larger scale, macro-conflicts in higher education may involve any or all of the institution's multiple internal and external constituencies. One type of large-scale conflict is the student protest.

Institutional Conflict Management Capacity

Once leaders recognize that conflict is an inevitable and potentially constructive phenomenon, they will likely work to build the capacity of their organization to identify and respond to disputes (Fullan, 1993). A powerful way of institutionalizing effective conflict management is through the establishment of dispute resolution systems that will provide multiple means for facilitating negotiation and communication between those in conflict within the organization (Warters, 2000). The first step is usually direct communication between the disputants themselves; however, if the disputants are unable to negotiate a resolution on their own, the system must provide opportunities for them to receive assistance from a mediator. When department heads are confronted with conflicts that neither the disputants nor the chairpersons as mediators are able to resolve, a campus dispute resolution system can be the way to prevent further escalation of conflicts.

Warters (2000) provided a detailed roadmap for the creation and oversight of campus dispute resolution systems. Participation in such systems will yield important educational outcomes, particularly when coupled with instruction that uses case-based exercises and simulations (Pearce, 2002). Just as students learn how to improve the handling of their own conflicts through the guided problem solving of dispute resolution

systems, so will faculty and staff improve their conflict management skills (Warters, 2000). Developing the conflict management capacities of those who work within the university is a key element of organizational success (Pearce, 2002).

Although they share the view that conflict or a perceived divergence of interest is a natural aspect of human interaction, Pruitt and Rubin (1986) cautioned that groups must balance the competing needs for debate and reform with the need for stability. Unquestionably, organizations can move too far toward extremes in dealing with conflict. Suppression of conflict can hide concerns, often forcing conflict into other, inappropriate channels that allow ongoing friction to become worse and erupt in unexpected ways. However, too much dialogue within an organization can slow progress (Pearce, 2002). In that regard, the democratic leadership style of consulting broadly within the organization to gain a wide range of opinions and build consensus is not always the most constructive. People within the organization may come to perceive their work as endless meetings without tangible results or decisions (Goleman, 2000).

In a pluralistic society, leaderships and conflict are inseparable (Warters, 2000). Indeed, when change and its attendant conflict are lacking, an organization can be viewed as dying (Goleman, 2000). This concept of leadership emphasizes the importance of conflict management processes such as communication and mediation. Effective leaders will understand how to identify situations of conflict, and they will be able to draw on various methods for resolving their own and others' disputes.

Leadership and Conflict

Any time that people work together, or even come together briefly to attempt consensus building, conflict is likely to emerge in a variety of ways. Burns (1978)

defined leadership as a relationship between leaders and followers over time in which their interactions motivate group effort to achieve goals. Leadership entails an implicit educational function; leaders may also help the individuals to get motived in teaching (Burns, 1978). Burns (1978) considered conflict to be a positive phenomenon and felt that true leadership could not occur without it. From this perspective, conflict serves as a catalyst to deeper understanding and commitment as well as a mean for engaging people within the organization and soliciting their ideas.

According to Gardner (1990), the gathering of multiple, conflicting points of view is critical to effective leadership. The leader's role is to make sense out of a seemingly confused tangle of interests in order to build consensus for a solution that was not originally apparent (Gardner, 1990). Gardner (1990) also discussed the role of conflict in what he termed the adaptive work of leadership where leaders strive to educate themselves and their followers so their organizations can evolve and grow through open discussion of competing views.

According to O'Toole (1995), "Rushmorean" leaders open their organizations to cross-communication as well as learning and support this openness through "adherence to the moral principle of respect for people" (p. 70). Resistance to change is the major conflict faced by leaders; as leaders attempt to implement change within their organizations, people naturally resist these initiatives (O'Toole ,1995). Leaders themselves can fall into the trap of self-righteousness and, thereby, become part of the resistance to change.

The leader's symbolic actions regarding conflict can leverage significant and positive outcomes in terms of the organization's culture. When people sense that conflict

is healthy and feel hopeful about their ability to resolve disputes, the work environment is

usually a place of collaboration, learning, and productivity. When people are weighed

down by the sense that conflict is dysfunctional, and then problems seem unsolvable,

colleagues act defensively toward each other and the organization moves into a

downward spiral (Perce, 2002).

Communication and Conflict

Effective communication skills can be some of the most useful tools in dealing

with organizational and personal conflict (Clough, 1987). The communication process

primarily involves the use of listening and speaking skills.

> When conveying information, you can learn ways of expressing yourself
> effectively and testing to be sure that your information is understood. When
> receiving information, you can learn ways of listening effectively to be sure you
> understand the other. (Katz & Lawyer, 1994, p. 5)

Effective communicators know what they want and/or have a specific outcome in

mind, and attempt to determine what the other person wants or also expects to gain from

the communication. Successful communication occurs as a result of both individuals

achieving their desired outcomes. "This process is one of fitting together outcomes so

that both parties in the communication experience understanding and meaning" (Clough,

1987, p. 7).

Listening and speaking skills, at both the verbal and nonverbal levels, are

important in order for the desired outcomes to be heard and understood. Listening

involves attaching meaning to the information being presented from another person's

perspective. Speaking requires expressing one's thoughts and feelings and conveying

information clearly and accurately through words and behavior to ensure understanding.

Both skills are considered especially beneficial in conflict situations. "Listening helps

reduce pressure in dealing with people, since many problems are the result, in part, of someone's failure to listen" (Goleman, 2000, p. 79). The administrator can obtain more and better information on which to base decisions from improving his/her skills in listening. In addition, listening is the fundamental means for recognizing and acknowledging others. "When someone engages in the act of listening, having chosen to listen to a particular person, that person's existence is affirmed, as is his importance as a speaker" (Goleman, 2000, p. 79).

According to Sanford (1973), in-depth listening encompasses sensitive perception and selective reflection. Sensitive perception involves listening to the facts, ideas and feeling in what is being said, in addition to the non-verbal behavior or what is not being said. "The administrator must be able to tell the difference between the medium and the message, between what is being said and the way in which it is being said" (Katz & Lawyer, 1994, p. 25). The administrator utilizes selective reflection when deciding what level of communication will be most constructive when responding.

Communication Channels and Conflict Management

In chapter two, the findings have already shown that communication affect the conflict management during the merger in higher education. Especially the channels that leaders and organizations chose to use may increase the conflict (Purdy, Nye, & Balakrishnan, 2000). According to Olaniran, (2010), and Geiger & Parlamis (2014), media plays an important communication channels. For most colleges and universities, the merger news was not first heard from face-to-face official announcement, but through other media which most of them are leaking. These scholars try to point it out that the importance of management conflict affects the employees working outcomes. In most

organizations nowadays, the media channels of communication include emails, video

conferencing, and computer-mediated communication.

To better understand the role media communication channels play in conflict

researchers tested the same news among different channels (Condit, 2006, Loh & Granka,

2005). In their study, researchers find out that employees are more open and hope to learn

the changing through official channels especially face-to-face. Because the importance of

the messages, employees this time do not want to find out the news through media

communication channels such as emails, and videoconferencing calls (Isbell, &

Koschmann, 2010).

Theoretical Framework: Conflict Management Theory

In organizational conflict, there are two major types of conflicts occurs the most

often: constructive and destructive conflict. Both of the styles are tendencies of

individuals' natural preferences to use certain conflict handling styles more frequently

than others and are influenced by "individual, dyadic, and organizational factors"

(Olekalns et al., 2008, p. 85). The literature on conflict management styles is substantial

and has received significant attention since the introduction of Blake and Mouton's

(1964) *managerial grid*. Serving as a category system for behavioral description of five

conflict management styles, the managerial grid is a two-dimensional framework that

differentiates between concern for production and concern for people. Blake and Mouton

(1964) categorized conflict management styles into confronting, smoothing, avoiding,

forcing, and compromising. Most subsequent research and theory on conflict

management styles is based on this model. For instance, Putnam and Wilson's (1982)

Organizational Communication Conflict Instrument (OCCI), Pruitt's (1983) *dual concern*

model, Thomas and Kilmann's (1974) *Conflict Instrument (TKI),* and lastly, Rahim and Bonoma's (1979) *styles of handling interpersonal conflict model* can all be traced back to Blake and Mouton's (1964) conflict management styles.

Several scales have been developed to identify conflict management styles and strategies. Putnam and Wilson (1982) developed the OCCI to assess choices about strategies in the management of conflict across situational, structural, environmental, and organizational contexts. They introduce three conflict-handling strategies: (a) non-confrontation, an indirect involve strategy which include avoid conflict or to be in part of the conflict as much as possible. (b) use effect strategies to solve conflict when it is impossible to avoid; and (c) control strategies move against the opposition and are portrayed by individuals arguing persistently for their positions and demands.

Thomas and Kilmann (1974) reinterpreted Blake and Mouton's (1964) managerial grid model by describing how individuals' behavior changes with the grid: (a) when individuals try to only meet his or her own needs or concerns, and (b) when individuals are willing to work with other people in the group/organization and solve the conflict together. The TKI is a forced-choice paired comparison, which has been popular among practitioners for a variety of training programs (Shell, 2007). The TKI measures behaviors and intentions of a person's preferred method of managing conflict, but it does not allow making inferences about a person's intentions directly (Womack, 1988).

Rahim's Dual Concern Theory

Understanding conflict management style preferences helps improve conflict management and conflict resolution. Many literatures on conflict management styles agree that each conflict occurs under certain situation, and they are all different from each

other; therefore, there is no one best strategy to manage all conflicts (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Rahim developed the dual concern theory in 1983. This theory is a differentiated version of the Blake and Mouton (1964) theory and that of the TKI (1976). According to TKI theory, conflict management styles can be categorized in two dimensions: concern about people's feeling who are involved in the conflict, and concern for the result of the conflicts (Rahim, 2011). Blending the two groups creates five conflict management styles for resolving conflicts. As shown in figure 6, Rahim (1983) developed the Organizational Conflict Inventory which measures conflict at the interpersonal, intergroup, and intragroup level on five conflict handling styles: (a) integrating (or collaborating), (b) avoiding, (c) compromising, (d) dominating (or competing), and (e) obliging (or accommodating). Moreover, it allows the measurement of conflict handling styles of different targets, i.e., subordinates, peers, and superiors.
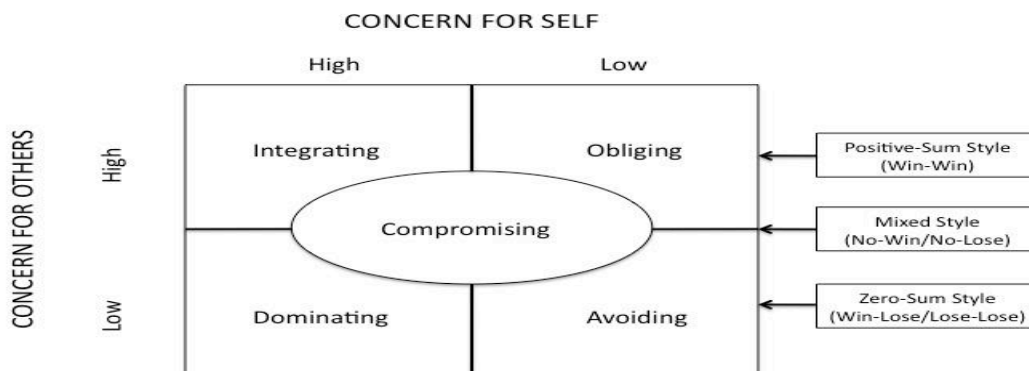

Figure 6. The Dual Concern Model of the Styles of Handling Interpersonal Conflict.

Integrating. Employees who engage in an integrating conflict management style show a high concern for themselves and others. The integrating conflict handling style is

more of a mutual than an individual orientation because two or more individuals come together to find a satisfying solution for both parties. Employees who choose this conflict management style are willing to communicate and understand the other part's needs and reasons; they are also willing to put themselves in the other party's shoes and try to look at the conflict from a different perspective (Rahim, 2011; Amason & Schweiger, 2000). Using a collaborative approach is helpful if one person cannot solve the problem alone, enough time is provided to tackle the issue, and when both parties are willing to communicate, concern not just for themselves but also the others; not just care for the result of the conflict, and how to solve it (Rahim, 2011). A collaborative conflict management style was commonly known as a "win-win" situation. (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). Moreover, Rahim (2011) fond that integrating produces less conflict-laden environment. Green (2008) found out that employees often see their leaders as more fair and effective when integrating conflict management style was chosen.

Compromising. A compromising conflict handling style is when both parties are willing to give in some and meet in the middle (Rahim, 2011). The compromising conflict management style is used when an impasse in negotiation has been reached (Rahim, 2011). Compromisers do not want to put the relationship in harm and want to be able to work together after the conflict has been resolved (Hocker & Wilmot, 2007). Hocker and Wilmot (2007) in their study stated that this particular conflict management style usually needs a mediator to keep the order; since both parties have to give up something; it may seem fairer than the other strategies. One important part of compromising includes the amount of information that disputants exchange with each other and the amount of time that is available to them to solve the conflict.

Compromising is a quickly executed style that uses less information (Kassing, 2011). Rahim (2011) stated the compromising style may seem effective immediately, but it is still leave the potential problem in there. In Thomas, Thomas and Schaubhut (2008) research, they found out that among all the organizations they studied, compromising was the most common one that leaders are like to use to manage conflicts. They also found sometimes the previous conflict came back again since it was too complicate to use compromising at the first time (Thomas, Thomas, & Schaubhut, 2008). Lastly, Green (2008) indicates that employees do not see their leaders as fair, and trustworthiness when comprising were used.

  Obliging. Employees use an obliging conflict management style when they care about the personal relationship with the disputing party; realize that they are wrong, have little power. They feel it is not worth to win the conflict; rather the relationship is more important (Rahim, 2011). This style is appropriate when individuals are not very familiar with the problems or not worth to spend all the sources to fight for the conflict. The obliging conflict management style can signal weakness and strengthen the other party (Gross & Guerrero, 2000). According to Shell (2007), this conflict management style may temperately solve the conflict. Moreover, in many cases people who are choosing this style is because of the outside pressure, and they have no other ways (Shell, 2007). They have to settle it with their own sacrifices. This may cause low self-confidence, and negative attitudes toward the conflict. A study by Gross and Guerrero (2000) on the effectiveness of conflict management styles pointed   that obliging can be both positive and negative effects on the conflict depends on the reasons.

Dominating. This is where individuals in the conflict are only concern for the results and themselves, but not others' feeling and needs. This particular style is the most aggressive, and is described as "win-lose" situations (Rahim, 2011). It usually requires both parties to make all the moves quickly, and only believe they were the right ones on the issue, and do not care about other people or the relationship. Supervisors may use this conflict style to deal with assertive subordinates and the implementation of "unpopular courses of action" (Rahim, 2011, p. 52). The competitive approach might be effective if a repeated encounter with the other party is not anticipated or if the relationship is short lived. It can also be appropriate in environments in which a dominating conflict strategy the cultural right thing to do (Hocker & Wilmot, 2007). Researchers conclude that competing conflict handling styles usually costs more than the original conflict itself (Hocker & Wilmot, 2007). According to Gross and Guerrero (2000) some people may win by using this conflict style in the end, but what costs them to win were way out of their expectations. Rahim (2011) found that when administrators' use of dominating conflict management style in organizations, other problems and issues were happening at the same time. Therefore, leaders should be very cautious when before they decide to use the dominating conflict management style.

Avoiding. The avoiding conflict handling style is used when one party believes that the disagreement is not important enough to be discussed, is afraid of the other party, does not care enough about the relationship with the other party, believes someone else can solve the issue, or that the issue is part of a bigger or related problem (Rahim, 2011). There are situations that using avoiding conflict handling style is a better choice. For example, when individuals are only minor involved in the conflict, or the conflict itself is

minor, or when a pause button needs to be pushed. Putnam (2006) found that an avoiding conflict approach affects work performance negatively and is connected to higher levels of task conflict. Kassing (2011) assertes, "avoiding is the least effective and least agreeable manner of solving conflict" (p. 28). Pruitt (1985) found that by using avoiding style, at least the individuals are satisfied at that period and the conflict was gone as well. Rahim (2011) found that employees with lower ranks reported greater use of avoiding conflict management styles. Institutional tenure played an important role in Green's (2008) investigation, discovering that those followers who had tenure with the institution viewed their leaders as more avoiding than collaborative or compromising.

Summary of the Findings

This chapter is focusing on conflict management during the merger and how do different strategies influence the merger process. The purpose was to see if, in addition to organizational culture and communication, conflict management is another key factor that impacts and influences the merger process. This section of chapter four summarizes the findings under research questions four and five presented in this dissertation. This section will look at the results of the study that relates to conflict management strategies, and organized by emerging themes.

Interview questions were structured to solicit answers to the research questions. More specifically, the interview questions for this section develop into the participants' perceptions of how do different conflict management strategies affect the merger process, and what conflict management strategies administrators and leaders adopted during the merger. Data collected from the interviews were coded with attention to emergent themes

based on responses of the interview participants. This chapter is focusing on research questions four and five:

> **RQ 4:** What aspects of consolidation generated the most conflicts?

> **RQ 5:** What conflict management strategies were adopted by administrators and faculty leaders in order to solve conflicts during consolidation?

Four key themes emerged in the data: *areas that caused the most conflict*, *feelings of unequal treatment*, *conflict management strategies*, and *consequences of conflict*.

Aspects that Caused the Most Conflict

Rigid or loose organizational structures. The interview questions for this section were aimed at finding out what aspects of merger generated the most conflicts. The majority of participants reported that the loss of organizational culture and new organizational structure was the most important cause of conflicts. By comparing the organizational chat pre-and post-merger, it is not hard to see that there is a significant organizational structure change. Almost all of the decisions makers, senior administrators, deans, and chairs are assigned from College B.

Because of the new organizational structures, there were a lot of new rules and policies for faculty and staff members. Faculty and staff members had different aspects to worry about. For example, the most important one for faculty is tenure and promotion. Not just faculty members, but also the staff members had noticed the conflict created by new guidelines for tenure and promotion:

> I don't live in that world, so the stressors and the impact that they were feeling with the tenure and promotion things were changing. Still, in our department, everyone heard about the tenure and promotion policies that impacted almost everyone on this campus. I felt bad for some of the faculty members, because they might never be able to go up any more (Mary, Administrator, College A).

Most faculty members who were upset with the new tenure and promotion guidelines were from the College A. Since College A was mainly a teaching-based college, academic research was not required. However, College B was more focusing on research and publication. The major difference in the tenure and promotion policy is the requirement of publication and research. One participant shared a specific example involving a T&P conflict. Professor A was on a tenure track at College A before the merger; after the merger Professor A was denied tenure promotion based on Georgia Peach University tenure promotion requirements. Professor A attempted to negotiate and plead his case with administrators, but the answer was still the same, a firm no. In a bold move, Professor A hired an attorney to help plead his case.

> I still remembered that day when the professor and his layer had a meeting with the school officials and a lawyer from Board of Region together. Of course I do not know what did they say in the meeting, but the professor got his tenure. (Lucas, Faculty, College A)

Another critical aspect was faculty members' terminal degree. For a teaching based college, many faculty members at College A only had a Master degree in their academic fields. College B on the other hand required a Ph.D. degree for every faculty member on campus. This raised the bar for many College A faculty members, and some of them would not be able to get tenure any more. Some participants were very frustrated and upset about this new policy: "basically no matter how hard I am working, or how good I am, I can't get promotion unless I have a Ph.D." (Alice, Faculty, College A). "They tell us either doing whatever you are doing and won't get a promotion, or find another job somewhere else" (Lucas, Faculty, College A). "Well, when I was interviewed for this position, teaching was my primary goal. Now I have to give up what I love to do,

and to do research in order to survive" (Mason, Faculty, College A). One participant

pointed out during the merger, policies on tenure and potions were very unclear:

> Most conflict would be how the tenure process was going to be run and probably how salaries are going to be handled. The new tenure policy is so different from the old one, and what should happen to those who were going up for tenure in that year? They didn't have time to do any research or meet any of those new requirements. Then, how about the people going the year after that? They won't have enough time to publish and research within one year. (Charlotte, Faculty, College A)

Although most faculty members who were upset and stressed about the tenure and

promotion were from College A, it also raised some concern among the faculty members

at College B. One administrator from College B has also expressed her concern:

> I heard the big conflict happened over there (College A). I am sure it was not easy for them to adjust. However, we are one college now, and we are a research-based institution, if everyone here has to follow the policy and get promotion, why shouldn't they do that? We have even lowered the teaching load for them, so they should have more time to do research and publish. (Holly, Administrator, College B)

Different from faculty, staff members were most concerned or worried about job

security and whom should they report to. Under the new uncompleted organizational

structure, it was very confusing to know what is going on. Things were changing on a

daily basis. One participant said, "for me, where I was at, having to communicate two

different sets of admissions requirements to families, having to communicate the fact that

there were two different tuition rates according to those admissions requirements; that

was hard" (Lucy, Staff, College A). Another participant mentioned in her interview, "we

only need one president, one dean/director/chair for each department and school, so

who's that going to be? Who will make those decisions? What about the ones who lose

their positions?" (Isabella, Staff, College A).

Feelings of unequal treatment. Most participants from College A still feel it is "us" vs. "them" even three years after the merger. And this is one of the most significant sources of conflict. One participant stated that there was an event that happened on campus that she would never forget because of the feelings hurting:

> I still cannot believe this happened one year ago. It was during one of our summer program, we had some visitors from other university here on campus for a short visit. During the welcome speech, one of the administrators from College B said that "I am sorry you have a busy schedule this time, and won't be able to spend time on campus B, to experience what is the real university like…" I mean that moment, I just cannot believe what I just heard, and I was shocked, and of course upset. I mean, if this whole "us" vs. "them", who is better than who is still going on, we will never be united as one. (Donna, Administrator, College A)

This unequal and not treated the same way affected the relationships between College A and College B, which will hurt the new university the most. Another participant explained where her feeling of unequal was coming from:

> Of course I still feel it that way, and I bet you I am not the only one. For example, College B always thinks they are a better institution than us. Better employees, and better students group. However, they may forget that we were two very different institutions with unique organizational cultures, missions and values. There is no way to compare the two schools. Many of our students who have transferred to other bigger name schools are all doing very well in academics. You cannot judge us simply by how many publications each professor have. There are so many other criteria that matter. (Lily, Staff, College A)

The findings also show that the not all the participants agreed with this. One faculty from College B had some different opinions:

> You may hear other people from College A complained about we do not treat them equally or it is a takeover. I disagree with that. This merger is not our idea either, and we did not ask for it. So we are almost as stressful and worried as they do. Luckily we did not have to change as much as they had to, which I will give you that. But through the merger, we respect them and have always treated them as our colleagues. They need to stop saying we use "us" vs. "them" thing; if not, this will be a problem and yes, then it will be us vs. them. (Lucas, Faculty, College A)

Lucas also admitted that the conflict was mainly appears in College A. And it is true, the

new organizational structures and many new polices are more similar to the old College

B cases.

The "us" vs. "them" also happened in cultural adjustment. One participant

mentioned this in his interview:

> For me the hardest time is to adjust the new culture. Where shall I fit in the new department, and what shall I wear to work now each time; what can I do that to help myself bled in the new environment quickly and smoothly without cause any attentions? I mean those are just some questions, and it seems everyday there is something new that I am not sure what to do. If I do it the old way I know I will be judged. I am just tired to ask questions about everything. (Bob, Staff, College A)

This response strengthened my analysis that both organizational culture and conflict were

intertwined and affected the merger together.

Conflict Management Strategies

When it comes to conflict management strategies, administrators, faculty and staff

members are having some very different opinions. Most administrators and leaders

indicated during the interviews that conflict management was about creating a culture

that promoted congeniality and cooperation where people could work together in positive

ways. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, according to the dual concern model, there are

five ways to manage conflict: (a) integrating (or collaborating), (b) avoiding, (c)

compromising, (d) dominating (or competing), and (e) obliging (or accommodating).

Each of the administrators and leaders, based on a description of their personal style of

conflict management, seemed to prefer one of these responses.

Integrating/collaborating. Based on the interviews, most administrators seemed

to prefer the integrating/collaborating style when managing conflict. This requires

working with all individuals involved, exploring the underlying concerns surrounding

conflict, and then trying to find some resolutions. With integrating/collaborating,

according to one participant, "individuals were brought together to discuss the good

points of each side of the conflict, and maybe make something stronger than either had

alone" (Emma, Administrator, College A). Another administrator tried to meet with the

"disaffected individuals and others connected with the circumstance" to get a sense for

the origin of the conflict, and then suggest some strategies" (Amelia, Administrator,

College B). "I had as my goal to create a 'win-win situation,' where I tried to find ways

to resolve the conflict that was mutually satisfying to all parties involved, and then tried

to move parties toward a more common understanding of what the issues are" (Emma,

Administrator, College A). A senior administrator said:

> My personal style of conflict management included trying to minimize or reduce
> conflict beforehand rather than waiting for things to develop after the fact. I
> believe that College reducing conflict means sharing information to let people
> know where you're coming from, give them a chance to look at things in a
> formative stage. I also believe that people were more accepting of decisions that
> were made if they had the ability to influence, in any way, the decision making
> process. Essentially, associated conflict management with decision making
> processes and assuming responsibility for informing and educating others about
> how decisions are made is very important. (Lori, Administrator, College B)

This seemed to be very consistent with one of the principles of conflict management

established by Mortimer (1978), who suggested that administrators and leaders must

anticipate and prepare for conflict, as well as become active in managing conflict. This

requires creating, predicting, orchestrating, and instructing, in addition to clearly

articulating what guides their decisions and actions (Mortimer, 1978).

Not only administrators from College B, but also those from College A seem to

favor this type of conflict management. One participant stated this, "my style of conflict

management involved meeting with individuals and trying to reason through a situation, and see what's reasonable" (Zoe, Administrator, College A).

Besides those administrators, a few faculty and staff members also agreed that integrating/collaborating was the strategy that administrators have been using to solve conflict. One participant stated, "I am very pleased with the way they handled the conflict. They were willing to hear what we need to say, and tried to help us" (Jackson, Staff, College B). "I am not sure about other people, but at least I had good experience. My boss was very easy to communicate, and always considered our opinions" (Olivia, Faculty, College B).

Avoiding. Surprisingly, there were a few administrators who preferred to avoid involvement in the merger-generated conflict if at all possible. One participant stated that, "I tried first to manage the conflict from the point where it began; therefore, keeping it at the lowest level possible, and only intervened when necessary" (Mary, Administrator, College A). This participant later one explained the reason, "I did intervene. I consulted others for guidance or referred the individuals to resources that might also assist with managing the conflict. As long as people are doing a good job, I let them do their own thing" (Mary, Administrator, College A). One more administrator from a different campus also chose this conflict management strategy:

> I tried to solve the conflicts by helping them in all the possible ways I can. But, some people are just so stubborn. No matter how many times I tried to help or explain, they won't get it, and still say "that's not the way we did things before…" Therefore, there's no need to waste my time on this. They are resistance to change. (Holly, Administrator, College B)

As noted in Chapter 2, participants who evidenced "resistance to change" were the ones who could not make sense of the merger: "I do not understand the purpose of the merger,

still do not. I do not see the benefits, and there is no documentation to show

we have saved money" (Alice, Faculty, College A).

Many faculty and staff members believed that avoiding was the strategy used by

their leaders. Some participants specifically emphasized that, "seriously, we did

everything as instructed to report the issue, but never heard anything back" (J T, Staff,

College A). "If they (the administrators) have already decided what to do, and would

never change it, why did they bother to ask for our opinion, and cause more attention on

the issue?" (Alice, Faculty, College A).

Dominating/competing. None of the administrators during the interview

considered themselves or other leaders using this conflict management strategy. On the

other hand, some faculty and staff members believed that a common strategy that they

see the administrators use is "administrative decision making". According to some

participants, "how to solve conflict? Of course it's the leaders who make decisions and

then just inform us" (Blake, Staff, College A). "It has always been like that (from top

down). By the time we know it, it's already been decided. Then how come you don't ask

us before you make the final decision?" (Lucy, Staff, College A). So, in this case, the

faculty and staff condemn that the more contentious issue of the decision to initiate the

merger was based on a top down approach, not according to the principles of shared

governance.

Consequences of Conflict

Participants have very different opinions on this theme. Some participants from

the College A campus mentioned some of the negative consequences of conflict:

"programs are less effective, and issues just seem to hang on and have a negative impact

on the day to day interactions of faculty and staff" (Leah, Faculty, College A). "Basically, either you accept the way the new university runs or leave" (Mason, Faculty, College A). Another reasons those participants see the consequences as negative is because many of their issues remain unresolved. One participant gave an example:

> For many of us (faculty) from the College A side, one big issue is salary. We were a teaching based college, were encouraged to teach over-loads, and summer classes. However, now after merger, teaching over-loads are no longer an option, and no summer classes either. My income was cut 1/3 short, and I have to try to find some other ways to fix this. I mean, why am I not allowed to teach over loads or summer classes, if I am capable too? Just because you don't have summer school in College B, now we can't have it here either. Yes, some people may get paid better, especially they have a Ph.D., but not for most of us. This doesn't make any sense. (Alice, Faculty, College A)

Poor communication between faculty/staff members and administrators/leaders was another major source of conflict. From the interview, it seems like the administrators thought they did a good job on communicating with everyone, but people on the receiving end did not feel that they were informed in a fair and transparent manner: "we updated all the news about consolidation on the school's website, sending out emails with all the important announcements. But if you don't read your email, or pay attention to the news, what shall I do?" (Jack, Staff, College B). Faculty and staff members especially from College A had different opinions on this:

> From the president to deans, chairs, and directors, I mean, look at it. All the administrators are located at College B. If I need to talk to my department chair, I have to wait on that certain day of each week/month when she is here for half day. Or, I can send her an email and try to write a long message and wait for the answers. They always say everything is online, but no, it's not. (Leah, Faculty, College A)

Most people from College B think that conflict could be beneficial: "it has raised some issues to my attention that I might not know about" (Aidan, Faculty, College B). Another participant also mentioned:

It brings about change, and in some ways, it strengthens the organization in ways that are helpful. It strengthens relationships among people. It forces us to work to bring resolution to some issues that we've tried to reach a consensus around, but we've not been able to for a long time. It provides opportunities for different perspectives to be laid on the table and perhaps some different people to intervene (Holly, Administrator, College B).

According to most administrators, interpersonal conflicts tended to surface more frequently than others. In addition, when resources are tight, more conflicts surface as well: "people are feeling pressure, wondering whether their program is going to be cut, or whether it will be phased out" (Donna, Administrator, College A). Also, some participants believe conflict happens when changes occur. Rather than be so negative about everything, why not focus on managing it effectively: "I was first very upset with many changes. But during the merger, I started to learn that the school is really trying to help and once after all the changes are made, there will be more opportunities for us" (Lucas, Faculty, College A).

Analysis of the Findings

For the research question four, three major aspects of consolidation that generated the most conflicts were identified: *feelings of unequal treatment*, *tenure promotion* and *rigid or loose organizational structures*. The new structure causes some major conflicts to different groups of people: tenure and promotion, mixed hierarchical and top-down decision-making structures, and cultural clashing. Many participants from College A only have a Master degree. They are not as marketable as the others who have a Ph.D. degree. Loose organizational structures leave these people only two opinions: get a Ph.D. degree or never be promoted.

Previously, Buono and Bowditch (2003) highlighted that mergers are often a difficult and challenge time for an organization. They usually cause clash of culture,

major organizational structure change, conflicts, and employees attitudes and behaviors change. Many participant administrators, faculty, and staff members mentioned those areas in the study. It is true that mergers affect both institutions, however, as long as it is not a merger between equal patterns, most of them will turn into a takeover. And one college or university will affect by the merger more.

For research question five, what conflict management strategies were adopted by administrators and faculty leaders in order to solve conflicts during consolidation, findings show that administrators' perspectives and faculty and staff members' perspectives were very different. The conflict management strategies employed by the administrators when faced with the various types of conflicts are indicated in Table 3. In describing their personal style of conflict management, the majority of the administrators provided descriptions, which were consistent with Rahim (1983). Four of the administrators described an integrating/collaborating style. This style was considered appropriate when issues were complex, and the parties genuinely had the time and willingness to work together to find a more permanent solution. For an administrator, it may be difficult to initially find the time to assume a collaborative style but in the end, it may lead to a more satisfactory resolution. One administrator explained this style involved informing and educating employees about how decisions are made. The administrator viewed this as necessary in order to be better prepared when conflicts arise. Those administrators employed the strategies of informal discussion and problem solving, mediation and negotiation, in addition to administrative decision making for managing the conflicts they encountered.

Name	Title/Campus	Conflict Management Strategy
Emma	Administrator, College A	Integrating/collaborating
Amelia	Administrator, College B	Integrating/collaborating
Lori	Administrator, College B	Integrating/collaborating
Zoe	Administrator, College A	Integrating/collaborating
Jackson	Staff, College B	Integrating/collaborating
Olivia	Faculty, College B	Integrating/collaborating
Mary	Administrator, College A	Avoiding
Holly	Administrator, College A	Avoiding
J T	Staff, College A	Avoiding
Alice	Faculty, College A	Avoiding
Blake	Staff, College A	Dominating/competing
Lucy	Staff, College B	Dominating/competing
Sherry	Administrator College B	Dominating/competing

Table 3: Conflict Management Strategies Employed by Administrators

Two of the administrators described an avoiding style. Conflict avoidance is appropriate if the issue seems trivial, if confronting the problem may create greater difficulties, if there is time needed for individuals to cool down, and if others might be able to resolve the conflict more effectively.

Based on the interviews, administrators, faculty and staff members had different views on conflict management strategies. The findings show that most administrators considered themselves to have done a good job to solve conflicts during the merger. For example, most of the administrators described themselves as using an integrating/collaborating style, which is supposed to be a win-win solution. Only one

administrator admitted that she used a dominating/competing style. This administrator

also mentioned she was retiring at the end of the year. On the other hand, faculty and

staff members disagreed with the administrators' opinions. Five staff members described

their administrators as using a dominating/competing style. This is where individuals are

only concerned for the results and themselves rather than others in the conflict. The

reason these staff members felt that way was because either their voices did not make a

difference or their opinions were not considered. Six faculty members mentioned their

administrators used avoiding strategy. This strategy hopes that conflicts and problems

will disappear by themselves. Overall, most faculty and staff members did not consider

that merger related conflicts were effectively and successfully solved.

Administrative decision-making was also affected by how faculty and staff

members feel about conflict resolution. Rahim (2011) noted that negotiation was

effective for managing interpersonal, intergroup, and intragroup conflicts. As a result,

solutions are then focused more on the interests of the individuals. As mentioned earlier

in the chapter, the interests and needs of individuals are at the root of many conflicts. If

the administrator primarily employs administrative decision making as a strategy for

managing conflicts, the interests and needs of individuals may or may not be taken into

full consideration. This again may speak to the need of administrators to understand the

various strategies employed for managing conflicts.

Most participants agree that the use of many different management strategies will

be useful in managing the conflicts. They also agree that communication is the key when

solving conflicts. Yet, it is important to note that participants did indicate listening, which

is associated with communication, as a necessary skill for conflict management. Some of

the recommendations that were suggested for administrators were to be: honest, trustworthy, sensitive, compassionate, helpful, open, flexible, and maintain a sense of calm.

Conclusion

Conflict is a common occurrence affecting both personal and working life (Brockman et al., 2010), and results from differing interpretations of facts in relation to the available resources affects well-being, health, and job satisfaction (De Dreu & Gelfard, 2008). As issues related to administration are the main sources of conflict in the workplace, administrators should devote efforts to address possible sources of conflict (Hocker & Wilmot, 2007).

Each individual involved in a conflict uses a conflict management style/ approach. The conflict resolution process involves costs for the organization. Therefore, selecting an appropriate conflict management approach is critical and has great impact on the performance of the employees and on organizational results. Additionally, the conflict management process may have high costs to the organization, such as lost productivity and administrative time. Depending on how an individual, such as an academic administrator, reacts to conflict, it can present an opportunity for growth or challenge to the organization. It seems that Georgia Peach University did not have specific strategies to solve the conflicts related to the merger.

This chapter was supported by the dual concern theory. According to Rahim (1983), there are five conflict management styles, and each of them fits in different situations. Adoption of an appropriate conflict management style affects relationships with administrators, employees, and eventually job satisfaction (Naji & Tabouli, 2011).

Issues related to the administration of the organization are the main source of conflict in the workplace (Rahim, 2011). The climate of organizational communication is extremely important for how the organizations function. Issues related to communication such as decision-making, instructions, and administrative practices affect conflict management practices and plans. Conflict management may have better results if the process is sustained by effective communication between the parties.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

It has been a few years after the merger, and I can see we are doing better, and function as one university. Since the first two colleges have been merged, it definitely had not been easy. From organizational culture and communication, to conflict management strategies, everything plays an important part during the consolidation.

Mason, Faculty, GPU

The newly merged institution--Georgia Peach University--is hoping that by officially merging together, it will bring greater opportunities for the enhancement and expansion of its academic and research activities. College A had a teaching-based culture. College B had a very different culture, stemming from its basis as a four-year college with graduate school programs. The merger between these institutions was a big surprise to many faculty and staff members. While a merger creates opportunities, challenges exist as well as blending the schools' varied cultures and identities without causing a major disruption in their operations or tarnishing their reputations. Effective communication strategies and conflict management strategies all influence the merger process.

The challenge for the newly created organization is to minimize any disruptions, dysfunctions, cultural issues or communication obstacles that may generate conflicts. The way conflict is managed is intimately related to employee communication, creation of ties and relationships, job satisfaction, and the culture of the new organization.

Mergers generate a transformational change that occurs over a period of time, which impacts the institution's culture and identity. The research on higher education mergers seems to be focused on the reasons for mergers, outcomes, process and planning (Han & Boschoff, 2006). However, little research has been performed on the organizational culture, communication and conflict management aspects of mergers

between institutions (Han & Boschoff, 2006). Additionally, little attention has been paid to the sociocultural issues of mergers (Locker, 2007). This lack of research and attention is important because transformational change is guided in part by organizational culture clashes and assimilations with culture and identity becoming important components during the merger process (Locker, 2007).

This dissertation systematically collected and analyzed 35 interviews to identify factors of organizational culture, communication and conflict management strategies during mergers in higher education. Using the merger between the two institutions as a case study, this research establishes a benchmark for future research, such as a possible longitudinal study of administrators, faculty and staff members' perceptions of organizational culture, communication and conflict management strategies changes following a university merger. Through in-depth interviews, this study attempted to answer the following 5 questions:

RQ1: How are organizational cultures preserved and/or changed in the process of consolidation?

RQ2: How was information of consolidation communicated to various group of people?

RQ3: How do various group of people make sense of the information provided regarding consolidation?

RQ4: What aspects of consolidation generated the most conflicts?

RQ5: What conflict management strategies were adopted by administrators and faculty leaders in order to solve conflicts during consolidation?

The findings of this study generate new knowledge and recommendations for practitioners and add to the literature, which connects conflict management and communication to the organizational development area. This chapter will discuss the

findings from the analysis section and integrate the case study with the literature review. This chapter discusses the findings, provides conclusions, and then makes suggestions for future research.

Discussion

Based on the data collected during the interviews, several emergent themes were derived, which included for Research Question 1: *changes in culture, importance of culture, length of time, and organizational structure*. For Research Questions 2 and 3: *effectiveness of communication and information channels, sensemaking, and communication gaps*. For Research Questions 4 and 5: *areas causing the most conflict, feelings of unequal treatment, conflict management strategies and consequences of conflict*.

The data obtained from the participants indicated that inhibited communication up and down the hierarchy, incongruence between leaders' words and actions, and doubts over the leadership's organizational decisions have led the participants to question their leaders' competence to manage the merger process. Essentially, a breakdown in the culture of familial trust experienced by participants post-merger has occurred where the instability of leadership processes has introduced an isolating influence on the developing culture of the new university. Most participants point to a significant lack of trust that has entered the culture of Georgia Peach University.

Organizational Culture

Organizations are dependent on the human capital they possess. This human capital inspires and maintains the organization's culture. Culture can be viewed as the foundation of the organization. It includes, but is not limited to, the history, traditions,

stories, missions, values, and perceptions (Pick, 2003). Culture also separates one

organization from another. As noted in Chapter 2, Locke (2007) informs us

"organizational cultures are critical to the successful integration of administrators,

faculty, and staff members" (p. 84). Associated with culture is the organization's identity.

Identity is the visual and verbal expression of the organization. From participants'

perceptions, it is clear to see that both institutions had rich and distinctive personalities as

represented by their unique cultures and identities. The organization's culture is its

personality and the organization's climate is its mood (Masland, 2000). While people can

easily change their mood, changing their personality takes a greater effort. This is true as

well for organizational culture. Organizational climate can change quickly, but a change

in culture occurs over a period of time. Culture change requires a greater strategic

approach as culture may have a more direct influence on the organization.

      Participants' understanding of their organizational culture, communication

strategies, and conflict management strategies helped me to find the connections and

relationships between each of them. It also proved the importance of organizational

culture that directly affects the way people communicate and handle conflicts. Many

participants agreed that organizational culture plays a key part in the merger process.

Even when creating a new identity for the university, leaders should not ignore the pre-

merger organizational culture.

      When the merger occurred, anxiety also greatly increased among the employees.

The pressure to conform to a new set of mission, values, and expectations in the new

institution was generally not well received by the members. The stage was not set for the

transition process to occur.

Through data analysis on RQ1, I found that the merger affected the employees'
sense of identity. Most of them were frustrated to accept the new policies and to try to
develop and adopt the new identities at the same time. The interviews revealed that the
employees do not identify strongly with the new post-merger institution. As shown in
figure 5, creating a new identity is not difficult; but adopting that new identity is the
difficult. Even more than two years after the merger happened, a few participants still
have problems fully adjusting to the new identity.

Based on the findings, it is concluded that mergers in higher education need to
create a new identity. The new identity should not be completely "new," and the new
identity needs to consider both old organizational cultures. This finding supports some
scholars' idea that the identity before the merger culture is very important (Schein, 2004;
Rousseau, 1990; Masland, 2000). The findings also support studies on individual identity
affected by organizational change during mergers (Martin, 1994; Haslam, 2001; Carnall,
1990). The organization should have enough time to carefully plan the merger process,
and help employees from both universities to smoothly transition to the new organization.
This will help to reduce fear and anxiety.

Communication Strategies

In order to create a unified culture, organizations need to manage the socialization
process. Management must develop a core ideology that can be expressed through rituals,
ceremonies, storytelling, language, communication strategies, and symbolic and value-
based management. This is important because creating a collective organizational culture
can help employees to identify with the organization.

The literature review discussed how important communication is in the merger process, emphasizing that it is important for management to inform and communicate with the employees. Open communication reduces uncertainty and improves organizational commitment. Administrators should focus on answering questions employees may have on issues that are important to them and also should explain why some questions cannot be answered rather than not giving any information at all. An organization can help its employees cope with uncertainty by giving relevant information, but the information needs to be developed by leadership and needs to be consistent. By communicating care and concern about their employees, organizations can create commitment. Commitment is important during a merger because it allows the organization to be more flexible during the process.

Internal communication is the key when managing an organization's survival and growth. Employees are the most important part of an organization; therefore, the communication between the organization and its employees is of utmost importance. It is important that organizations integrate positive attitudes towards their employees in the process of change as they go from a stable situation to an uncertain future. Organizational communication stimulates team cohesion, inclusion and a participative culture. It prepares employees for potential positive and negative consequences generated by the merger. The communication needs to be clear and transparent, and the identity, vision, and values for the new organization must be clearly defined and stated.

Furthermore, the literature review argued that intranet is one of the most important channels of communication during mergers. In this case study, the university did develop an online news channel. Updates on the merger were posted. However, the

literature review also argued that information should not be distributed from any of the former organizations but from the new organization. In this case, the majority of communication seemed to come from the two former institutions. With too much information occurring, employees did not know what to believe.

Additional findings of this study indicate that effective, open communication between executive leadership and staff members is important for employees to develop a perception of trust in leadership during the merger process. It supported that frequent communication that contains useful information is needed to enhance employee perceptions of trust in management. A lack of poor communication equals distrust.

Conflict Management Strategies

The conflict management strategies employed by administrators when faced with various types of conflicts are indicated in Table 3. These strategies were interpreted according to those described by Rahim's conflict management model (1983). Many of the administrators in this study were not only aware of conflict, but they also appeared to recognize what it entails to manage conflict. Most of the administrators, when asked what conflict management meant to them, mentioned components of conflict management consistent with the literature.

Through data analysis on Research Questions 4 and 5, I found aspects that created the most conflict during the merger process and who were affected the most during this changing process. A common theme emerging in the data is the employees' feelings of unequal treatment. Interviewees reported alienation in the new environment and with interactions with their new colleagues. One of the major issues during the transition was ineffective communication, which was caused by the clash of cultures. This ineffective

communication has created more conflicts. For example, the lack of communication caused rumors, which created anxiety for many people.

In summary, the findings show: (a) organizational change will cause conflicts so employees and leaders should be prepared to handle it; (b) organizational structure changes including leadership changes will cause more conflict among employees. The findings show that more than half of participants had experienced leadership changes during the merger. Many new leaders were not familiar with the organizational culture in that office or department. As a result, employees had to continuously adjust to and deal with new leaders.

Practical Implications

Mergers could be attractive ways for struggling colleges and universities to survive when dealing with low enrollment and budget cuts. However, struggling institutions of higher education must consider the importance of organizational culture, communication and conflict resolution mechanisms as decisive factors that affect the success of mergers.

The findings from this study prove that mergers can be a very challenging and difficult time period for employees. The findings also suggest that the organizational culture is the key to connect communication and conflict management strategies, as it had a big impact on employees from both universities. Any changes in an organization will cause conflict and communication issues. Colleges and universities should prepare adequate conflict resolution mechanisms to deal with the high degree of conflict generated during mergers.

Study Limitations

Sampling

The study had sampling limitations. The sample included administrators, faculty, and staff members, but only three students participated in the study. This is because most of the students who experienced the merger that started in 2013 had already graduated by the time the research was conducted in 2015-2016. Students' perception and attitudes toward the merger could be different from employees. Next, the sample size is fairly small, although the information collected was in-depth.

Qualitative Methods

Most of the data were collected during face-to-face interviews. However, due to scheduling and time constraints, some interviews were conducted by telephone. Face-to-face interviews allow a researcher to have first-hand data and observe both verbal and non-verbal responses from the participants. Greater use of this method could enrich the findings.

Recommendations

Mergers in higher education, as in business, may be motivated by a desire to build a broader strategic vision and position an institution more strongly in the higher education market. It is a complex change process. Each merger is a unique case. Research suggests that if the process is not handled appropriately, failure can occur very often (Kitchen, & Daly, 2002). Future colleges and universities may include ways to help employees better prepare for the clash of cultures and major changes. For example, training programs and counseling programs may be implemented so that employees have professional places where they will feel conformable and safe to go. Also, the study

shows offering conflict management strategies workshops before and during the merger may help both leaders and other employees go through this tough time together.

Another recommendation for practitioners is to create collaborative cultures, including a cooperative conflict orientation culture, which will enable open communication, trust and empowerment to constructively manage conflict. The influence of the organizational culture on communication and conflict management can affect mergers positively and negatively. As stated by Dill (2000), employees are more productive when they are "informed, involved, and respected" (p. 95).

Careful planning before the merger process begins also contributes to integration. Marin & Samels (1994) suggest that mergers of higher education institutions succeed when clear objectives are established. According to Marin & Samels (1994), "a key to merger planning is to anticipate and manage the inevitable hostilities that will arise from the start, some of which will persist throughout" (p. 32). Much of the news released by both schools regarding the merger indicated that the merger transition might continue for some time. These decisions included issues pertaining to curriculum, program integration, and leadership. As this case study shows, with such uncertainty those most affected by the merger may become hostile toward the process thereby hindering it from moving forward, as Marin & Samles (1994) suggest.

When faced with the intention to pursue a merger, the higher education institution's leadership should let employees know before the media. The institution's leadership should be cognizant of the need for open, clear and continuous communication to the entire university community during the process, particularly during the integration phase (Mitchell, Palacios, & Leachman, 2014). The merger decision and process should

not be rushed. Since it can take up to ten years to complete a university merger, decisions on key issues should be made in advance of the integration of the two merging entities (Schein, 2004). Based on the existing data, training programs should be created in order to prepare for future mergers.

Lastly, cultural integration is vital in merging. Colleges and universities who are going through a merger will find it will be smoother if they have a similar organizational culture. For example, it may be better to match a STEM focused school with another STEM school; or a community college with another community college because their organizational culture is likely to be more similar. If a merger happens between two unequal institutions, the smaller college will need more preparation and attention. Usually the smaller college will feel the most threated. It is likely to loose more in a completed takeover. Planners need to do their homework by getting to know the background of the two institutions before planning the merger. Another consideration is that alumni are also an important part of the college's culture and must be involved in the process.

Conclusion

In the literature on organizational change, it is well documented that organizational culture has a pivotal role in the success, or lack thereof, of a large-scale organizational change. Research on organizational change and culture by prominent theorists such Denison (1990) and Lee (2004) attest to the fact that poor or weak organizational culture hinders an organization's success; therefore, culture should be considered as an important aspect during a merger. The findings from this study also support the existing research that organizational culture may block peoples' view of the

potential advantages a merger may bring to the organizations. The assumption that two institutions would integrate easily just because they are both institutions of higher education is proven to be unfounded. Two institutions of higher education may have completely different cultures despite being in the same field. The findings suggest that organizational culture influences and impacts not just the way a college operates but also employees' attitudes. Based on the findings of this study, participants perceived that the organizational culture was far more important then they previously realized. Most of them still have a hard time forgetting the old organizational culture. Almost three years after the merger, the employees continue to strongly identify with their home institutions and remain skeptical and uncommitted to the mission and vision of the new merged university. Thus, the evidence shows that avoiding the shared governance principles of consulting the university employees on the decision to merge has long-term implications that affect the employees' buy in, commitment, loyalty to the merger's success and, ultimately, to the new organization.

The University System of Georgia Board of Regents mandated the merger that occurred between College A and College B. One of the main reasons was to save money, however based on the findings, there is no documentation, which can support or prove it. It seems that geographical location was a reason to merge College A and College B. This particular action seems to reflect a business mentality, which resulted in merger rather than a consolidation.

Thus, it did not have the support of the employees or the community it served. Most employees saw this merger between the two colleges as a takeover and, therefore, were more inclined to perceive it as a negative experience. First, the environment after

the merger's announcement dramatically changed. This led to great uncertainty among the employees, and the institutions failed to communicate with the employees in a way that reduced anxiety, confusion and uncertainty. Also, changes in both organizational culture and leadership occurred during this process. These changes led to an unstable situation and even more confusion among the employees. Communication could not keep up with all these changes. Furthermore, instead of adapting to each other, the competitive mentality grew stronger between the colleges. And even now, employees complain about the divisions created by the "us vs. them" culture. Training was also missing in this merger. The next, more positive step is to create a collective culture. This will help employees identify with the new university. Social identification, as argued in the literature review, is developed through the socialization process. When members of the group identify with the organization, they commit to the organization. Culture and communication are the most important means by which an organization can create organizational identification among its employees.

References

Ahn, M. J., Adamson, J. S. A, & Dornbusch, D. (2004). From leaders to leadership: Managing change. *Journal of Leadership and Organizational Studies*. *10*(4), 112-123.

Aldrich, H. E. (1992). *Incommensurable Paradigms? Vital Signs from Three Perspectives,* in Reed, M., Hughes, M., eds. Rethinking Organization: New Directions in Organization Theory and Analysis. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Amason, A.C., & Schweiger, D.M. (2000). The effects of conflict on strategic decision making effectiveness and organizational performance. In C. De Dreu et E. Van De Vliert (Eds.), *Using conflict in organizations* (p. 101-115). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Anderson, D. & Ackerman-Anderson, L. (2001). *Beyond Change Management.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Pfeiffer.

Argyris, C. (1993). Education for Leading-Learning. *Organizational Dynamics* 21 (3): 5-17. Winter 1993.

Authayarat, W., & Umemuro, H. (2011). Affective climate of workplace and its contributing factors. *Universal Access in Human-Computer Interaction, 6766*, 432-439.

Azziz, R. (2013). Consolidation in Higher Education: Thoughts from the Trenches. *The Blog.* Retrieved from www.huffingtonpost.cm/dr-ricardo-azziz/consolidation-in-higher-e_b_3784640.html.

Baronas, A. M. K., & Louis, M. R. (1988). Restoring a sense of control during implementation: How user involvement leads to system acceptance. *MIS Quarterly, 28*(1), 111-124.

Behfar, K.J., Mannix, E.A., Peterson, R.S., & Trochim, W.m.K. (2011). Conflict in small groups: The meaning and consequences of process conflict. *Small Group Research, 42,* 127-146.

Blake, R., & Mouton, J. (1964). *The managerial grid: The key to leadership excellence*. Houston: Gulf Publishing.

Board of Regents of the State System of higher Education. (2012). *Creating a more educated Georgia: Recommended consolidations*. Retrieved from http://www.SSHE.edu/docs/consolidations.pdf

Bridges, W. (2003). *Managing Transitions* (2nd Ed.). Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press.

Brockman, L.J., Nunez, A.A., & Basu, a. (2010). Effectiveness of a conflict resolution training program in changing graduate students styles of managing conflict with their faculty advisors. Innov High Educe, 35, 277-293.

Bryman, A. (2011). *Social research methods* (4ᵗʰ ed.). Oxford University Press: New York

Buono, A.F. & Bowditch, J.L. (2003). *The human side of mergers and acquisitions: Managing collisions between people, cultures, and organizations*. New York, NY: Beard Books.

Burns, J. M. (1978). *Leadership*. New York: Harper Colophon Books.

Carnall, C. A. (1990). *Managing Change in Organizations*. Hemel Hempstead, England" Prentice Hall International.

Chaffee, E. E., & Tierney, W. G. (1988). *Collegiate Culture and Leadership Strategy*. New York: MacMillan.

Chou, D. C. (2012). Building a successful partnership in higher education institutions. *International Journal of Information Systems and Change Mangement, 6*(1), 84-97.

Cohen, M.D., & March, J.G. (1974). *Leadership and ambiguity: The American college president*. New York: The Carnegie Commission on Higher Education/McGraw-Hill.

Creswell, J. W., & Miller, D. L. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice, 39,* 124-130.

Criddle, N. (2004). *Creating shared understanding: A vision for effective organizational communication at the Ministry of Health Services*. Retrieved January 23, 2017 f rom EBSCOhost database.

Conner, D.R. (1992). *Managing at the speed of change: How resilient managers succeed and prosper where others fail*. New York: Villard.

Conrad, C., & Poole, S. M. (2005). Strategic organizational communication in a global economy. Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.

Deetz, S. (1992). *Democracy in an age of corporate colonization: Developments in communication and the politics of everyday life*. Albany, NY: State University of New York.

De Dreu, C.K.W. & Gelfand, M.J. (2008). Conflict in the workplace: Sources, functions, and dynamics across multiple levels of analysis. In C.K.W. De Dreu & M.j. Gelfand, *The psychology of conflict and conflict management in organizations* (pp. 3-54). New York: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Dervin, B. (1983). An overview of sense-making research: Concepts, methods and results. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the *International Communication Association*. Dallas, TX.

Dervin, B. (1992). Form the mind's eye of the user: The sense-making qualitative-quantitative methodology. In Glazier, J. and Powell, R. R. *Qualitative research I information management* (p. 61-84). Englewood, CA: Libraries Unlimited

Dervin, B. (1996). Given a context by any other name: Methodological tools for taming the unruly beast. Keynote paper, *ISIC 96: Information Seeking in Context*. 1-23.

Dervin, B. (1999). Chaos, order, and Sense-Making: A proposed theory for information design. In R. Jacobson, Eds. *Information design.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 35-57.

Dervin, B. (2003). *Information Design.* Chaos, and Sense-Making: A Proposed Theory for Information Design. *Volume 4.* 325-340. *Issue: 3/4.*

Dervin, B. (2005). Libraries reaching out with health information to vulnerable populations: Guidance from research on information seeking and use. *Journal of the Medical Library Association* 94 (4): S74-S80.

Dervin, B. (2008). Interviewing as dialectical practice: Sense-Making Methodology as exemplar. Presented at *International Association of Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) Meeting,* Stockholm, Sweden: 20-25.

De Wit, F.R.C., Greer, L.L., & Jehn,K.A. (2012). The paradox of intergroup conflict: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 97,* 360-390.

De Wit, F.R.C., Jehn, K.A., & Scheppers, D. (2013). Task conflict, information processing, and decision-making: The damaging effect of relationship conflict. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 122,* 177-189.

Dill, D. D. (2000). The nature of administrative behavior in higher education. In M.C.I. Brown (Ed.), *Organization and Governance in Higher Education: ASHE Reader Series* (5th ed., pp. 92-110). Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing.

Erlien, B. (2006). *Intern kommuikasjon-planlegging og tilrettelegging* (4th ed.). Universitetsforlaget.

Fain, P. (2012). Major mergers in Georgia. *Inside Higher ED*. Retrieved from
http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2012/01/06/georgia-university-
system-proposes-consolidation-8-campuses

Field, A. (2005). What you say, what they hear. *Harvard Management Communication
Letter. 2*(1), 3-5.

Fullan, M. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. London:
Falmer Press.

Gardner, J. W. (1990). *On leadership*. New York: The free Press.

Gaughan, P. (1996). *Mergers, acquisitions, and corporate restructuring*. Canada:
John Wiley & Sons.

Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books.

Geiger, I., & Parlamis, J. (2014). Is there more to email negotiation than email? The role
of email affinity. *Computers in Human Behavior, 32,* 67-78.

Gmelch, W.H., & Miskin, V.D. (1993). *Leaderships skills for department chairs*. Bolton,
MA: Anker.

Goleman, D. (2000). Leadership that gets results. *Harvard Business Review,* 78-90.

Gorman, C. K. (2004). Communicate for commitment. *Strategic Communication
Management. 8*(4), 5.

Goodman, J., & Truss, C. (2004). The medium and the message: Communicating
effectively during major change initiative. *Journal of Change Management 4*(3),
217-229.

Green, C. (2008). Leader member exchange and the use of moderating conflict
management styles: Impact on relationship quality. *International Journal of
Conflict Management, 19,* 92-111.

Grensing-Pophal, L. (2004). Successful mergers. *Credit Union Management. 27*(12), 50-
54.

Gross, M.A., & Guerrero (2000). Managing conflict appropriately and effectively: An
application of the competence model to Rahim's organizational conflict styles.
The International Journal of Conflict Management, 11(3), 200-226.

Grossman, R. (1999). Irreconcilable differences. *HR Magazine,* 44, 7. April, 1999.

Guetzkow, H. & Gyr, J. (1954). An analysis of conflict in decision-making groups. *Human Relations, 7,* 367-381.

Hardy, C. (1990). Putting power into university governance. In J.C. Smart (Ed.). *Higher Education: Handbook of Theory and Research*. New York: Agathon, Press.

Harman, G., & Harman, K. (2003). Institutional mergers in higher education: Lessons from international experience. *Tertiary Education and Management, 9*(1), 29-44.

Haslam, S. A. (2001). *Psychology in organization: The social identity approach.* London: Sage.

Henningsen, D. D., Henningsen, M. M, & Eden, J. (2006). Examining the symptoms of groupthink and retrospective sensemaking. *Small Group Research, Vol. 37*, 36-64.

Higher Education Funding Commission. (2012, December 12). *Report to Governor Deal.* Retrieved from http://www.gov.georgia.gov/sites/gov.georgia.gov/files/related_ files/press_release/Recommendations%20of%20the%20Higher%20Education% 20Funding%20Commission.pdf

Hitchmough, F. (2004). Cutting through "noise" to achieve change at Barclays. *Strategic Communication management. 8*(4), 26-29.

Hocker, J.L., & Wilmot, W.W. (2007). *Interpersonal conflict* (7th ed.). Madison, WI: Brown & Benchmark.

Hofstede, G. (1984). *Culture's Consequences*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Holtz, S. (2004). *Corporate conversation: A guide to crafting effective and appropriate internal communication.* New york: AMACOM.

Jabri, M. (2004). Change as shifting identities: a dialogic perspective. *Journal of Organizational Change Management. 17*(6), 566-577.

Jacobsen, D. I., & Thorsvik, J. (2002). *Hvordan organisasjoner fungerer*. Bergen: Fagbokforlaget.

Jaschik, J. (2008). Will more colleges merge? *Inside Higher Ed.* Retrieved on July 17, 2016, from http://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/07/17/mergers

Jetten, J., O'Brien, A., & Trindall, N. (2002). Changing identity: Predicting adjustment to organizational restructure as a function of subgroup and super ordinate identification. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 41,* 281-297.

Jepperson, R. L. (1991). "*Institutions, institutional effects, and institutionalism"* in W.W Powell and P.J. DiMaggio, *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis.*

Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 143-163.

Jones, E., Wilson, B, Gardner, J. & Gallois, C. (2004) Organizational communication: Challenges for the new century. *Journal of Communication, 54*(4), 722-750.

Kassing, J.W. (2011). *Dissent in organizations*. Malden, MA: Polity Press.

Kaufmann, G., & Kaufmann, A. (1998). *Psykologi I Organisasjon og Ledelse* (2 Ed.). Gergen: Fagbokforlarget.

Kerr, C. (1991). *The great transformation in higher education: 1960-1980*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Kitchen. J. P, & Daly, F. (2002). Internal communication during change management. *Corporate Communication: An International Journal*, *7*(1), 46-53.

Kotter, J. P. (1999). *Kotter on what leaders really do.* Boston, MA: Harvard Business Press.

Kreps, G. L. (2009). Applying Weick's model of organizing to health care and health promotion: highlighting the central role of health communication. *Patient Education and Counseling, 74,* 347-355.

Kuh, G. D., & Whitt, E. J. (1988). *The Invisible Tapestry: Culture in American Colleges and Universities.* College Station, TX: ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report No.

Kyvik, S. (2002). The merger of non-university colleges in Norway. *Higher education, 44*, 53-72.

Lang, D. W. (2003). The future of merger: What do we want mergers to do : Efficiency or diversity? *The Canadian Journal of Higher Education, 33*(3), 19-46.

Leonardi, P. M. & Jackson, M. H. (2004). Technological determinism and discursive closure in organizational mergers. *Journal of Organizational Change Management. 17*(6), 615-631.

Levy, A. & Merry, U. (1986). *Organizational Transformation: Approaches, Strategies, Theories*. New York: Praeger Publishers.

Lewis, L. K. (1999). Disseminating information and soliciting input during planned organizational change: Implementers' targets, sources and channels for communicating. *Management Communication Quarterly, 13*(1), 43-57.

Lewis, L. Isbell, M.G., & Koschmann, M. (2010). Collaborative tensions: Practitioners' experiences of interorganizational relationships. *Communication Monographs, 77,* 460-479.

Littlejohn, S. W. (2002). *Theories of human communication.* Wadsworth, Thompson Learning, Belmont, CA.

Locke, W. (2007). Higher education mergers: Integrating organizational cultures and developing appropriate management systems. *Higher Education Quarterly*, (61), 19.

Lorence, J. J. (2013). Gainesville state college. *New Georgia Encyclopedia.* Retrieved from: http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/articles/education/gainesville-state-college.

Lucas, A.F. (1994). *Strengthening departmental leadership: A team-building guide for chairs in colleges and universities*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Mangan, K. (2007). A donor's ultimatum to 2 small, struggling colleges. *The Chronicle of Higher Education,* 53(28), A.32.

March, J., & Olsen, J. (1989). The new institutionalism: Organizational factors in political life. *American Political Science Review.* 78: 734-749.

Martin, J., & Samels, J. (1993-94). The new kind of college mergers. *Planning for Higher Education,* 22, 31-34.

Martin, J. & Samels, J. E. (1994). *Merging colleges for mutual growth: A new strategy for academic managers*. Baltimore, MD: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Martin, J. & Samels, J. E. (2015). Partnerships, mergers, and the consolidation of American higher education. *HigherEdJobs.* 11 September 2015.

Martins, L.L., Schlipzand, M.C., Kirkman, B.L., Ivanaj, S., & Ivanaj, V. (2013). A contingency view of effects of cognitive diversity on team performance: The moderating roles of team psychological safety and relationship conflict. *Small Group Research, 44*(2), 96-126.

Masland, A. T. (2000). Organizational culture in the study of higher education. In M.C. I. Brown (Ed.), *Organization and Governance in Higher Education: ASHE Reader Series* (5th ed., pp. 145-152). Boston: Pearson Custom Publishing.

Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative research and case study applications in social science.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Meyer, J. W., Rowan, B. (1977). Institutionalized organizations: Formal organizations as myth and ceremony. *American Journal of Sociology,* 83: 340-363.

Miller, K. (2009). *Organizational Communication: Approaches and processes* (5th d). Boston, MA: Wadaworth Cengage Learning.

Mitchell, M., Palacios, B., & Leachman, M. (2014). States are still funding higher education below pre-recession levels. *Center on Budget and Policy Priorities*. Retrieved from www. cbpp.org/cms/?fa=view&id=4135.

Moorcroft, D. (2004). Reaping the billion-dollar benefits of change at RBC. *Strategic Communication Management. 8*(4), 14-27.

Mortimer, K.P., & McConnell, T.R. (1978). *Sharing authority effectively: Participation, interaction, and discretion*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Naji, M., & Tabouli, H. (2011). Conflict rate and job satisfaction among staffs in the Islamic republic of Rafsanjan Township as a case study. *Asian Culture and History, 3*(2), 49-54.

Olaniran, B.A. (2010). Group communication and conflict management in an electronic medium. *International Journal of Conflict Management, 21*(1), 44-69.

Olekalns, M., Putnam, L.L., Weingart, L.R., & Metcalf, L. (2008). Communication processes and conflict management. In C.K.W. De Dreu and M.J. Gelfand (Eds.), *The psychology of conflict and conflict management in organizations* (p. 81-115). New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Ole-Jacob, S. (1999). Mergers in higher education—success or failure? *Tertiary Education and Management, 5*(1), 63.

O'Neill, J. P., & Barnett, S. (1980). *Colleges and Corporate Change: Merger, Bankruptcy, and Closure.* Conference-University Press.

O'Toole, J. (1995). *Leading change: Overcoming the ideology of comfort and the tyranny of custom.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Parsons, A., & Groh, K. (2006). The new road to effective communication: Content and techniques for benefits communication must be re-evaluated to keep pace with employee needs. *Compensation and Business Review,* 57-64.

Pearce, R.J. (2002). Case-based structured conflict: A means for enhancing classroom learning. *Journal of Management Education, 26*(6). 732-744.

Peters, T. J & Waterman, R. H. (1982). *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from American's Best Run Companies*. New York: Harper and Row.

Pettigrew, A. M. (1979). On studying organizational cultures. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 24*, 570-581.

Pick, D. (2003). Framing and frame shifting in a higher education merger. *Tertiary Education and Management,* 9(4), 299.

Pinkley, R. L. (1990). Dimensions of conflict frame: Disputant interpretations of conflict. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 75,* 117-126.

Pondy, L.R. (1967). Organizational conflict: Concepts and models. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 12,* 296-320.

Priem, R. & Price, K. (1991). Process and outcome expectations for the dialectical inquiry, devil's advocacy, and consensus techniques of strategic decision-making. *Group and Organization Studies, 16,* 206-225.

Pritchard, R. M. (1993). Mergers and linkages in British higher education. *Higher Educational Quarterly, 47*(2), 79-102.

Pruitt, D.G. (1983). Strategic choice in negotiation. *American Behavioral Scientist, 2,*167-194.

Pruitt, D.G., & Rubin, J.Z. (1986). *Social conflict: Escalation, stalemate, and settlement.* New York: McGraw-Hill.

Purdy, J.M., Nye, P., & Balakrishnan, P.V. (2000). The impact of communication media on negotiation outcomes. *International Journal of Conflict Management, 11*(2), 162-187.

Putnam, L.L. (2006). Definitions and approaches to conflict and communication. In J.G. Oetzel & S. Ting-Toomey (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of conflict communication: Integrating theory, research, and practice* (p. 1-32). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Putnam, L.L., & Wilson, C.E. (1982). Communicative strategies in organizational conflicts: Reliability and validity of a measurement scale. *Communication Yearbook, 6,* 629-652.

Quirke, B. (1995). *Communicating change.* McGraw-Hill, Maidenhead.

Rahim, M.A. (2011). *Managing conflict in organizations* (4th ed.). Westport, CT: Quorum Books.

Rahim, M.A., & Bonoma, T.V. (1979). Managing organizational conflict: A model for diagnosis and intervention, *Psychological Reports, 44*(3), 1323-1344.

Ramsden, P. (1998). *Learning to lead in higher education.* London: Routledge.

Roach, T. J. (2004). Talking mergers, sales, and acquisitions. *Rock Products. 107*(10), 12.

Robertson, E. (2005). Placing leaders at the heart of organizational communication: A model to improve the internal communication climate. *Strategic Communication Management, 9*(5), 34-37.

Rousseau, D. M. (1990). *"Assessing organizational culture: The case for multiple methods"*, in B. Schneider, ed., *Organizational Climate and Cultures*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, Inc.

Scein, E. (1984). Coming to a new awareness of organizational culture. *Sloan Management Review, 25*(2), 3-16.

Schall, M. S. (1983). A communication-rules approach to organizational culture. *Administrative Science Quarterly. 28*(3), 557-581.

Schein, V. E. (1985). Organizational realities: The politics of change. *Training and Development Journal*. 39(2): 37-41.

Schein, E. H. (2004). *Organizational culture and leadership* (3re Ed.). San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.

Schweiger, D. M., & Denisi, A. S. (1991). Communication with employees following a merger: A longitudinal field experiment. *Academy of Management Journal, 34*(1), 110-135.

Scott, R. (1987). Adolescence of institutional theory. *Administrative Science Quarterly*. 32:493-511.

Selznick, P. (1957). *Leadership in Administration*. New York: Harper & Row.

Shapiro, H.T. (1998). University presidents—Then and now. In W. G. Bowen & H. T. Shapiro (Eds.), *Universities and their leadership* (pp. 65-99). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Smart, J. C., Kuh, G.D., & Tierney, W.G. (1997). The role of institutional cultures and decision approaches in promoting organizational effectiveness in two-year colleges. *The Journal of Higher Education, 68*(3), 256-281.

Speight, R., & Goodman, A. (1998). Communication during mergers & acquisitions: Organizational communication during mergers. *Strategic communication management,* 16-21.

Stephenson, S. S. (2011). Discursive "policy logics" of mergers in US higher education: Strategy or tragedy? *Tertiary Education and Management, 17*(2), 117-137.

Stohl, C. (1997). *Organizational communication: Connectedness in action.* Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, CA.

Szpekman, A. (2004). Guiding principles during a merger. *Strategic Communication Management. 8*(4), 9.

Taylor, J. R. (1999). What is 'Organizational Communication'? Communication as a dialogic of text and conversation. *Communication Review, 3,* 21-36.

Thomas, K.W., & Kilmann, R.H. (1974). *Thomas-Kilmann Conflict MODE Instrument.* Tuxedo, NY: Xicom.

Thomas, K.W., Thomas, G.F., & Schaubhut, N. (2008). Conflict styles of men and women at six organization levels. *International Journal of Conflict Management, 19,* 148-166.

Tierney, W. G. (1988). Organizational culture in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education*, in *Organization and Governance in Higher Education: An ASHE Reader* (1991).

Tjosvold, D. (2000). *Learning to manage conflict: Getting people to work together productively.* New York, NY: Lexington Books.

Ullrich, J., Christ, O., & Schluter, E. (2006). merging on mayday: Subgroup and superordinate identification as joint moderators of threat effects in the context of European Union's expansion. *European Journal of Social Psychology, 36*, 857-876.

University System of Georgia. (2012, January 5). *Eight USG institutions recommended for consolidation*. Retrieved from http://www.usg.edu/news/release/eight_usg_ institutions_recommended_for_consolidation

Van Knippenberg, D., Van Knippernberg, B., Monden, L., & de Lima, F. (2002). Organisational identification after a merger: A social identity perspective. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 41,* 1-14.

Wall, V.D. & Nolan, L.L. (1986). Perceptions of inequity, satisfaction, and conflict in task oriented groups. *Human Relations, 39,* 1033-1052.

Walker, D.E. (1979). *The effective administrator: A practical approach to problem solving, decision-making, and campus leadership.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Waters, W.C. (2000). *Mediation in the campus community: Designing and managing effective programs*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Weber, M., Gerth, H., & Millis, C. W. (1958). *From Max Weber: Essays in sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Weick, K. E. (1976). Educational organizations as loosely coupled systems. *Administrative Science Quarterly, 21*(1), 1-19.

Weick, K. E. (1993). The collapse of sensemaking in organizations: The Mann Gulch disaster. *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 628-652.

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Weick, K. E. (2003). Enacting an environment: The infrastructure of organizing. Debating organization: Point-counterpoint in organization studies. In R. Westwood & S.R. Clegg (Eds.), *Debating organization: Point-counterpoint in organization studies*   (pp. 184-194). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Weick, K. E. (2005). Managing the unexpected: Complexity as distributed sensemaking. *Uncertainty and Surprise in Complex Systems: Questions on Working With The Unexpected, 51*.

Weick, K. E., Sutcliffe, K. M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking. *Organization science, 16*(4). 409.

Weick, K. (1979). *The social psychology of organizing.* Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company.

Wilkins, A., & Ouchi, W. (1983). Efficient cultures: exploring the relationship between culture and performance. *Administrative Science Quarterly,* 28, 468-481.

Womack, D.F. (1988). A review of conflict instruments in organizational settings. *Management Communication Quarterly, 1,* 437-445.

Yin, R. (2003). Case study research: Design and methods (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Yin, R. (2009). Case study research: Design and methods (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Zucker, L. G. (1977). The role of institutionalization in cultural persistence. *American Sociological Review*, 42: 726-743

Title of Research Study: Mergers in Higher Education: A Case Study on Organizational Culture, Communication and Conflict Management Strategies in the University System of Georgia.

Researcher's Contact Information: Sarah Jia Min, jmin1@kennesaw.edu

Introduction

You are being invited to take part in a research study under the direction of Sarah Min for the Ph.D. program of International Conflict Management of Kennesaw State University. Before you decide to participate in this study, you should read this form and ask questions about anything that you do not understand.

Description of Project

The purpose of this study is to find out how do organizational culture, communication, and conflict management strategies would affect consolidation and merger in higher education.

Explanation of Procedures

During the interview, you will be asked 10 questions that are based on your own experiences and views on consolidation. The interview will be recorded for researcher's future use and record.

Time Required

It will take about 40-60 minutes (may go over depends on the individual's answers).

 Risks or Discomforts

The study has NO Risks. If any of the questions asked as part of this study make you feel uncomfortable, you may refuse to answer them, and you may take a break at any time during the study. You may stop your participation in this study at any time.

Benefits

You will not benefit directly from your participation in the study. The benefits to science and humankind that might result from this study are a better understanding of the how do organizational culture, communication and conflict strategies would influence the consolidation.

Compensation

You will not receive any payment for participating, but you may enjoy the experience by answering the questions.

Confidentiality

The results of this participation will be confidential. The researcher will keep all the records of the interviews and data during the study, and will erase all the voice recorder notes. Transcription of tapes will occur promptly following interviews. All analysis of individual interviews will be reported at the collective level, eliminating the need to reveal any individual responses.

Inclusion Criteria for Participation

All participants are employees of Georgia Peach University, and have been through the consolidation process.

Signed Consent

I agree and give my consent to participate in this research project. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw my consent at any time without penalty.

_____
Signature of Participant or Authorized Representative, Date

_____
Signature of Investigator, Date

APPENDIX 2: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Disclaimer: Dear   , Thank you so much for accepting my request for an interview. I appreciate you sharing your knowledge and insights with me regarding various issues in higher education consolidation. I appreciate you help me out with my dissertation project.

Introduction:
1. Please tell me a little bit about your job responsibilities. What are your duties and responsibilities related to your position? What was your role/position at the college/university at the time of the consolidation?

2. When did you first hear about the consolidation? What were your thoughts when you heard the news? How did you make sense of the news regarding consolidation throughout the process? **(RQ2)**

Organizational Culture:

3. Do you believe the culture of your organization (department, college, university) plays an important role in the consolidation process? Why or why not? What are the changes in the culture at the newly created university? How long do you think it takes for the two institutions to function as one unified culture? **(RQ1)**

Communication Strategies:
4. How did you communicate with your employees the news about the consolidation? What aspects of consolidation have you highlighted? **(RQ2)**

5. When you look back at the time of the consolidation has been announced, are you pleased with how communication has been handled on the consolidation process? Can you think of a better way to communicate this decision with the employees and everyone involved? **(RQ2)**

Conflict Strategies:
6. How did faculty members and staff of the institution react to the idea of consolidation? What were they most concerned about? How were those solved by you, and by faculty? Did they feel they received enough information about consolidation? If not, what are the aspects of the consolidation not clearly communicated? **(RQ3 & RQ4)**

7. What were the aspects of the consolidation that created the most conflict? What were the strategies that you/leaders adopted to resolve these conflicts? **(RQ3 & RQ4)**

8. Who do you think were impacted more by the consolidation? Who was worried more about the consolidation? (Administrators, faculty, students or staff?) **(RQ3)**

Future Suggestions:

9. What do you think worked well and didn't work so well during this consolidation? What did you wish was handled differently?

10. What suggestions do you have for other institutions of higher education will go through a consolidation process in the future?