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# Creating meaning in organizational change: a case in higher education

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CREATING MEANING IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: A CASE IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
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in

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by

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## Abstract

As change is an inevitable part of organizational life, this study explores one aspect of communication in organizational change: the creation and use of meaning during the change process. The implementation of a new, higher education admissions criteria framework of a state master plan is the specific change under study. University administrators, contracted consultants, and board staff members participated in the study. Framed by symbolic interactionism and a stakeholder perspective, I pose four research questions:

RQ1: What meanings were created during the particular process of change under study?

RQ2: How were meanings intentionally and unintentionally created among stakeholders during this organizational change?

2a: How do the various elements (e.g., documents, meetings, etc.) of organizational change interact with and influence one another during the change process?

RQ3: How does the presence of similar and dissimilar meanings influence the change process?

RQ4: From a symbolic interactionist perspective, how does the concept of multiple levels of power affect the process of creating meaning during organizational change?

A qualitative approach, including interviews, text analysis, and observations was utilized to address these questions. In all, twenty interviews were conducted and fifteen texts reviewed for analysis.

As a result of data analysis, categories of meaning were determined. These categories help to define the experiences of the participants and reveal subtle details of the interactions taking place among the stakeholders. The concept that meanings are created intentionally and sometimes unintentionally through the use (or lack) of symbols was also evident. Examples of symbols in this study include meetings, workshops, and written documents.

Data analysis further revealed that both similar and dissimilar meanings were created through interactions. The existence of similar meanings helps to facilitate change processes while dissimilar meanings can hinder the process. Aspects of power are relevant to this study as evidence points to the concept that the type of power a person possesses impacts the meanings created.

Several strategies for more effective communication in organizational change are suggested as a result of the findings from this study. Finally, implications for future research are included.

## Chapter 1

### Introduction

“The train is moving, we’ve got to be a part of it. We’ve got to be on it or under it. You got a bull and we can either grab the tail and let it throw us around or try to grab the horns and ride along the front end. Our position is we’ve got to be up there. This is happening anyway.” (A university administrator commenting on a state-wide change program in higher education.)

Change in organizations is probably one of the few constants organizational members can rely on to happen now and in the future. Logically, those that implement change would hope for a successful outcome that benefits the majority of those involved. That outcome of course, is not always the case. I think there are certain communicative elements that allow for a more satisfying change experience and I will explore those elements in the course of this qualitative study. The implication for this line of study is that the analysis of the findings may be helpful to those who must implement change now or in the future.

The process of change is a phenomenon that takes place in organizations large and small, for-profit or nonprofit, and industrial or academic in nature. Given the political, social and economic climate of today, some form of change is inevitable and has become a common event for organizations and their stakeholders (Akin & Palmer, 2000; Burke, 2002; Cleary & Packard, 1992; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Lau & Woodman, 1995; Piderit, 2000). Factors such as the fluctuating economy, changes in competition, customer bases, technology, and the ongoing development and evolution of



organizations are just some of the issues contributing to organizational change (Barker & Tompkins, 1994; Burke, 1990; Lewis & Seibold, 1998; Morgan, 2001). For organizations to survive, compete and prosper, changes in policies, members, and products must occur over time.

Colleges and universities are certainly no exception to change. As Tierney (1998) stated:

Recent economic, demographic, political and social changes in U. S. society have dramatically come together to alter both the purposes higher education is asked to serve and the resources available to it. Higher education is now faced with a new set of social roles and responsibilities, an increasingly diverse student population, new and changing demands from both students and society, limited or declining resources, and escalating costs. Together these changes comprise a fundamentally new set of challenges to the higher education system. (p. 93-94)

Universities must now ask which changes they must make, rather than resisting the concept of organizational change (Farmer, 1990). Since some sort of change for universities is inevitable, it is important to study the change process in order to better understand it and determine the most effective methods for implementation.

Communication figures prominently into the study of organizational change (Morgan, 2001; Lewis, 2000; Kellett, 1999; Lewis, & Seibold, 1998). Whether it is the process itself through which the change event is communicated or the meanings created by the stakeholders involved in change, communication is a key element in understanding organizational change.

Given the elements of communication and change in higher education, the focus of this research study is on the creation of meanings by stakeholders during change and the effects of those meanings (both similar and dissimilar) on the change process. Also in the study, I will look at the effects of power on the creation of meaning. The study will look at organizational change through the statewide implementation of a new master plan in higher education, utilizing qualitative methodology. The implementation of a new admissions criteria framework of a state master plan is the specific change under study. Stakeholders directly involved in the implementation process, including university administrators, contracted consultants, and board staff members, participated in the study.

Emphasis is placed on meanings for several reasons. The very nature of change renders an organization's system of shared meanings ambiguous and somewhat obsolete. As Eckel and Kezar (2003) stated: "Familiar and long-standing meanings and interpretations – which compose the current negotiated reality – are challenged as the circumstances in the institution finds itself changed" (p. 53). Hence, if change is to be successful, it is imperative for organizations and their stakeholders to work to create new, shared meanings during times of organizational change – meanings that will move the process forward.

An organization's future growth and survival depends on its ability to successfully implement change that has as its goal to ultimately improve the organization in some way. Communicative elements can positively and/or negatively facilitate the change processes of organizations. In studying organizational change, one would logically assume that organizations would strive to have an efficient, successful change event that is a satisfactory experience for all those involved. Not every organization

attains this goal, however. Very often the inability to successfully implement change is a result of the failure to produce shared understanding or meaning among organizational members involved in the change (Lewis, 2000). The ability or inability to successfully implement change is thus based on the concept of the creation of meanings for purposes of this study.

The nature of this study will allow for the integration of my research interests in both organizational communication and higher education by studying change in the context of the system of higher education. The significance of this research is not merely my own interest in the subject matter, but rather the contribution it will make to the existing body of work on communication in organizational change.

This study seeks to expand on the existing communication and organizational change research in several ways. First, gathering perspectives from different stakeholder groups involved in the same change event will differentiate this study from the current literature on organizational change. The majority of the current studies focus on only one stakeholder group at a time. These studies generally take on a managerial bias considering change directed as from the top down – managers to employees. As a result of this bias, there is little consideration as to how other stakeholders participate in the change process (Lewis & Seibold, 1998). The proposed study will look at three groups of stakeholders participating concurrently in organizational change.

Second, when studying change from the perspective of a managerial bias the presence of a dominant power implementing the change is implied. But what if there are multiple levels of governance creating and influencing change? Such is the case with the state-system under study. This state system includes: (a) a governing board responsible

for the for statewide coordination of all public institutions of higher education in the state, (b) four management boards that are responsible for the day-to-day operations of campuses, (c) eleven four-year universities, and (d) eight community colleges. Thus, power to implement, enforce, or comply with change is distributed across stakeholders and varies by institution. This distribution of power is evident in the statement made by a Board employee when he said: “ we’re starting to see some resistance. Some people (university administrators) figure they will just wait until the next governor comes in and there will be a new plan and they won’t have to deal with this. That’s how it’s been in the past.” How the issue of power plays into the creation of meaning among the stakeholders will be explored.

Third, much of the research in organizational change, regardless of the academic discipline, has been studied utilizing an empirical framework (e.g., Lewis & Seibold, 1998) resulting in significant findings that have had important value in the social sciences. Qualitative and more specifically, interpretative methodologies however are not as prevalent in the study of organizational change. Kreps, Herndon, and Arneson (1993) addressed the importance of qualitative methods in organizational communication when they stated:

Interpretative research is ethnographic, designed to describe more fully the symbolic structures members create about their organizations and the communication behavior they perform to develop and maintain these collective symbolic structures....The qualitative, ethnographic nature of interpretative research provides richly textured “thick descriptions” of organizational phenomena that enable the researcher to describe many of the complexities of

organizations [sic] issues. (p. 8)

Findings that result from a qualitative study such as this one will hopefully yield new and interesting communicative perspectives, thus enhancing understanding of organizational change.

Finally, the very context of the study takes the subject of organizational change out of the usual business setting to one of higher education, making the study significant to the field of higher education. Colleges and universities are certainly no exception to the phenomenon of organizational change, especially since, as centers for higher education, colleges and universities are perceived as institutions of innovation and development. As Burke (2002) stated:

Institutions of higher education no longer exist exclusively in the non-profit sector....So, even in the domain of higher education which includes some of the oldest, most traditional types of organizations in the world, the external environment is changing” (p. 7).

According to Gioia and Thomas (1996): “There is growing insistence not only that change occur but that it must be accomplished quickly in institutions that historically have been comfortable only with slower, self-paced, incremental change” (p. 352).

Administrators faced with issues such as fluctuating enrollment and retention numbers must determine ways to accommodate their stakeholders (both internal and external) so the changes taking place within the organization are beneficial to all parties involved.

Hence, the research has a significant place in both the studies of communication and higher education. Interviews gathered from stakeholders will provide for exploration of the creation of meanings in organizational change from varying perspectives and the

effects of those meanings on change. The four research questions found in this study are framed by several communicative elements as follows: (1) What meanings were created during the particular process of change under study? (2) How were meanings intentionally and unintentionally created among stakeholders during this organizational change? (2a) How do the various elements (e.g., documents, meetings, etc.) of organizational change interact with and influence one another during the change process? (3) How does the presence of similar and dissimilar meanings influence the change process? and (4) From a symbolic interactionist perspective, how does the concept of multiple levels of power affect the process of creating meaning during organizational change?

The theory and perspectives by which I have chosen to frame this study are discussed in the following chapter.

## Chapter 2

### Conceptual Framework

“Organizations are collections of people trying to make sense of what is happening around them.” (Weick, 2001, p. 5).

The current study considers organizational change as an ongoing process that is created and sustained through the communicative interactions of stakeholders. Various participants of the change event interact and communicate in different ways, and at different times. The conceptual approach for this study is a broad theoretical framework in which to explore the subject of communication and organizational change: symbolic interactionism.

#### Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism grew out of the work of Mead (1934). He was intrigued by humans’ ability to use symbols in order to create an individual identity for themselves while at the same time contributing to the concept of the continuation of society as a whole. Among the elements often associated with symbolic interactionism are self, action, interaction, interpretation, meaning, and joint action (Weick, 1995). These elements are interrelated as evident in the statement, “the meanings of words and actions must be interpreted symbolically through the mutuality of experience itself rather than the sender’s intent or the conceptual filters of the receiver” (Krone, Jablin, & Putnam, 1987, p. 28). Thus, a major premise of symbolic interactionism is: meanings are created by individuals through their interactions with other individuals.

When the theory of symbolic interactionism is applied to an environment, the individual in the environment is seen not as a passive participant, but rather, as an

unpredictable, active participant who attempts to define the world in which he or she lives. As individuals interact, definitions begin to take shape and the experience begins to take on meaning for those involved. In turn, meanings then guide the actions of the individual and allow the person to interpret the actions of others. Once the interpretation is formed, the individual may then redirect his or her behavior if necessary, in order to achieve a particular goal (Charon, 1995). For example, individuals may redirect their behavior in order to align themselves with others with whom they have a shared meaning or distance themselves from others with dissimilar meanings.

Certain elements of the theory of symbolic interactionism are of greater relevance than others in this study and are further explored and discussed here. First is the element of society, defined as “a set of forces that exert themselves on the individual” (Charon 1995, p. 166.) When one thinks of society one thinks of the institutions, systems, and cultures that comprise various societies. Through these institutions, systems, and cultures the individual is socialized into society. Society is therefore a powerful, life-long influence on the individual (or self). Moving beyond such a deterministic view however, one realizes that the individual, through interactions with society, shapes that society as well. Such a perspective is further explained by Herman and Reynolds (1994):

For interactionists, human society, like mind and self is a social product.

Emphasizing its processual nature, society is conceived as consisting of individuals involved in symbolic interaction. A society is comprised of actors who act back and forth, and form their acts in relation to one another. Such “joint action” (Blumer, 1969) may involve as few as two individuals, or involve the actions of a large institution. It involves interpretation and communication on the



part of actors. Society is made possible when individuals act with one another in mind, alter their behaviors as they go along, symbolically communicate behavior to others, and interpret the behaviors of others. (p. 2)

Reference groups, also called societies or social worlds, are simply those groups whose perspectives the individuals borrow to define reality (Shibutani, 1961). The author goes on to explain that these societies are each held together through communication and culture. For example, a city is a society that might be held together through government, economic development, community involvement, sports, families, and tourism. “Human beings identify with a number of social worlds (reference groups, societies), learn through communication (symbolic interaction) the perspectives (symbolic/conceptual frameworks, culture) of these social worlds, and use these perspectives to define or interpret situations that they encounter” (Charon, 1995, p.31). Thus, society shapes the individual and the individual shapes society.

Society and interaction are interrelated in symbolic interactionism. Charon (1995) offered an explanation of this interrelation when he talked about society as defined as individuals in interaction. He goes on to state: “Society is ongoing social interaction. Social interaction means, first of all, that actors take one another’s acts into account, and they decide on action dependent on that fact” (p. 168). Society therefore brings individuals together with opportunities to interact and these interactions in turn, serve to maintain or disengage the society.

Shibutani (1995) includes the premise that human beings are social: they interact and form societies, and in that interaction they come to develop a shared perspective or culture. Charon (1995) stated: “Interaction and culture hold society together. The

individual takes the perspective or culture and uses it to define reality” (p.31). From these perspectives of society, I have defined the system of higher education as a society for purposes of this study. In my findings I will discuss how members of this society interact.

The second aspect included in the vernacular of symbolic interactionism that I wish to discuss is the term meaning. Meaning is derived from interaction. As Charon (1995) pointed out, “symbolic interactionists call objective reality the situation as it exists” (p. 61). Individuals interpret the actions of others and ascribe meaning to those actions. Interpretation is viewed as “the encoding of external events into internal categories that are part of the group’s culture and language systems” (Daft & Weick, 1984, p. 286). Also illustrative of the point that meaning is derived from interaction is Erickson’s (1981) statement: “Social construction involves making use of the constraints provided by the actions of others as structure points around which one’s own activity can be shaped” (p. 44). Finally, as Weick (2001) noted, “action is decision interpreted, not decision driven” (p. 75). In other words, the actions or behaviors of individuals are formulated as a result of the individuals’ interpretation of a decision, not necessarily the decision itself.

Why then, are some meanings created within the same society similar and some dissimilar? If individuals are interacting within the same context, or society, should not they all arrive at the same reality? I think these questions can be answered by looking at several scholarly works. Charon (1995) stated, “perspectives and culture are dynamic. As defined through interaction, perspectives are a product of communication” (p. 30). While symbolic interactionism concerns itself with what is going on in the present, this focus does not mean however, that past experience is ignored, rather, “the past enters into the

interaction as we recall it in the present and apply it to the situation at hand” (Charon, p. 24). Because individuals interpret different social interactions through varying perspectives, different realities are created. Charon (1995) stated: “Perspectives make it possible for human beings to make sense of what is out there” (p. 4). Depending on the individual and society’s perspective, I believe meaning can take two different paths. Individuals may guide themselves by taking on the perspectives of those with whom they interact and shared meaning is created. If however those same perspectives are dismissed or rejected, dissimilar meanings may be created in that society.

Another insightful explanation to the understanding of the element of meaning is presented by Herman and Reynolds (1994) in the following excerpt from their text:

A basic proposition of symbolic interactionism is that humans live in a world of meanings. The objective world has no reality for humans, only subjectively-defined objects have meaning. Individuals respond to objects and events on the basis of the subjective meanings that these things have for them. Meanings, according to interactionists, are neither static entities, nor are they entities that are merely bestowed on humans and learned by habituation. The meanings of objects and events can be altered through the creative capabilities of humans, and individuals may influence the many meanings that form their society, as well as being influenced by these meanings themselves. Meanings then, are conceived as social products arising through the defining acts of individuals as they engage in social interaction – social products that may, in turn, exert influences upon them. These socially-created and socially-shared meanings function in determining the

behavior of individuals. The meanings that humans give to objects, events, and other people have motivational significance. (p.1)

Furthermore, language influences meanings that are created. Schiappa (2003) illustrated this point when he made the following statements. First, he said: “definitions, [meanings] because they are linguistic propositions, unavoidably depend on social interaction” (p. xii). Second, he stated: “One of the most important functions that language performs is to categorize and, thus, to make sense of our experience” (p. 13); and finally, “all discourse contributes to what can be described loosely as the social construction of reality” (p. xi). In the current study, the idea of the use of language to create meaning is explored in several ways. I will categorize the meanings created through stakeholder interactions based on the analysis of the language taken from the data. In addition, I will look at the effects meanings have on stakeholder behavior.

The final element of symbolic interactionism relevant to this study is that of symbols. Symbols have been defined as abstract, arbitrary, and ambiguous representations of other things. Charon (1995) viewed symbols as a class of social objects. He said: “A social object is any object in a situation that an actor uses in that situation. That use has arisen socially” (p. 39). Social objects can be anything including: physical natural objects, human-made objects, animals, other people, our past, our self, ideas, perspectives, and emotions. Charon (1995) goes on to define a symbol as “a social object used for communication to self or for communication to others and to self” (p. 42). Whatever the symbol stands for constitutes its meaning (Shibutani, 1961). Symbols are social objects used to represent whatever people agree they shall represent. “Between objects out there and the individual’s overt action is a perspective – a definition, a

meaning – socially derived” (Charon, p. 39). The symbol is therefore used intentionally to communicate.

The relationship between symbols and interactions serves as a frame of reference for understanding human communicative behavior in this study (Huber & Daft, 1987). The self is an object that the actor acts towards and is a social object that is anchored by our social interaction. Through the interactions of individuals [or stakeholders] within specific societies, the symbols found within the change process take on meaning (Morgan, Frost, & Pondy, 1983). Huber and Daft (1987) presented a vivid picture of how symbolic interactionism plays into organizational communication when they stated: “imagery of symbolic interactionism conceptualizes the organization as a dynamic web of human interactions. Overtime, and through communication among organizational members, symbols – including language and behavior – evolve and take on meaning” (p. 151).

### Sensemaking

Although not specifically linked to symbolic interactionism, the concept of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) has grown out of the work of symbolic interactionism and warrants a brief mention in this chapter on conceptual framework. Sensemaking has been defined as “placing stimuli into some kind of framework...When people put stimuli into frameworks, this enables them to comprehend, understand, explain, attribute, extrapolate, and predict” (Starbuck & Milliken, 1988, p. 51). Sensemaking has been studied extensively and conceptualized in various ways as information seeking, interpretation, action, structuring the unknown, creating frameworks, shared understandings, and

individual and social activity (Feldman, 1989, Starbuck & Milliken, 1988; Thomas, Clark, & Gioia, 1993; Waterman, 1990, Weick, 1995, 2001).

Weick (1995) identified differences between sensemaking and interpretation. Sensemaking is viewed as being about the ways people generate what they interpret. Sensemaking is therefore about an activity or process. Interpretation can also be a process but is just as likely to describe a product of the process.

Weick (1995) also talks about language in sensemaking. He stated: “The words that matter to self, matter first to some larger collectivity....People pull from several different vocabularies to focus their meaning” (p. 107). I think the concept of sensemaking works hand in hand with symbolic interactionism regarding the creation of meaning and is applicable to this study. Sensemaking will be applied in applicable areas discussed in the findings.

#### A Stakeholder Perspective

As noted, symbolic interactionism includes the premise that individuals interact with one another to create and assign meaning to their world. Therefore, it makes sense to include in this study, representatives of various stakeholder groups who interact with one another during the change process. Hence, a stakeholder perspective is included in the conceptual approach as another means of framing the study.

For purposes of defining stakeholders, I have adopted Freeman’s (1984) definition: stakeholders are “any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm’s objectives” (p. 25). In this case, the objective is to implement a new admissions criteria framework across the state. Various groups of individuals from employees to communities will be affected by the new admissions policy, hence a

diversity of stakeholders exist in this change process. One purpose of this study is to ascertain how the existence of different stakeholder groups affects the process and how these groups are in turn, affected by the process (much like the aspect of symbolic interactionism whereby the individual is shaped by society and society is shaped by the individual).

Another important contribution to the concept of stakeholders in the organization is the work of Deetz (1995, 2000, 2001). Members of organizations have keen insights to offer that can aid in creating and achieving a vision for organizational change (Deetz et al., 2000) and should therefore be included when studying organizational change. Deetz's (1995, 2001) stakeholder model is based primarily on the idea of stakeholder participation in decision-making. This particular model emphasizes participation by calling for an inclusion in the process of all those who have a stake in the outcome of the decision. The model moves away from the belief that management controls the members of the organization and moves instead towards stakeholders having real opportunities to have their voices included in the act of organizing. I hypothesize that the stakeholders included in this study have different opportunities to participate in decision-making based on their place within the society under study and therefore will utilize the model in my analysis.

Since the proposed study seeks to identify various perspectives of those involved, the stakeholder groups of university administrators, governing agency staff members, and employees of a consulting agency will be included. While the findings of the study may or may not support the utilization of Deetz's (1995, 2001) stakeholder model (i.e.

participatory decision-making) in this particular change process, the model will be used for data collection purposes.

#### Symbolic Interactionism Framework Application

As stated previously, symbolic interactionism allows for individuals to create a reality for their current situation or experience through social interaction. A symbolic interactionist framework is applied to this study in several ways. For example, society indeed pertains to, and functions within, the organizational environment. In the particular case under study, society includes certain groups of stakeholders as well as the system of higher education itself. As members of an organizational society, these stakeholders must interact with one another if the society and work environment are to be, at the very least, maintained. The societal, communicative interactions of these stakeholders serve to create meaning for both the individual and the society in general. The broad scope of the theory, often times viewed as a problem by critics of the theory, actually allows me to explore multiple aspects of the change process including the meanings and interactions of the stakeholders.

The interaction among stakeholders, as conceptualized in the current study, is the result of the implementation of a new admissions criteria framework. The state is moving from a policy of generally open admissions to a policy of selective admissions. The implementation of the new framework consists of several phases. Most prominent of the phases for purposes of this study is the development of recruiting and retention plans for state universities. As an ongoing, evolving process, the social interaction under study extends over a period of time. Similar to Goffman's (1976) assertion that "conversation is organized not only in terms of local, adjacent relationships but in terms of larger chunks



of time spanning the whole history of the conversation” (p. 260), this study explores the discourse of this change process over a period of time.

As a means of further defining the particular social interaction under study, I have identified several social objects and/or events. These objects and/or events include statewide meetings, local meetings, formal and informal discussions among stakeholders, workshops, and text construction. Such social objects are an integral part of the change process and represent the interactions taking place among stakeholders.

As stakeholders interact through the system of higher education, they begin to interpret the actions of others. This interpretation allows the individual to arrive at a meaning and construct a reality for the experience. Stakeholders use their interpretations and the resulting meanings to guide their own behavior within the societal framework. The stakeholders’ perspectives figure in here as it is speculated that depending on which stakeholder group one belongs to, affects the meanings created. Any preconceived notions the stakeholders have about one another serve to influence the process as well. Meanings are therefore conceptualized as a product of interactions among stakeholders.

From these explanations, one can see how the theory of symbolic interactionism would facilitate the study of communication in organizational change especially among varying stakeholder groups. The conceptual framework described here provides a logical basis for exploring the research questions presented in the next chapter. Now that I have established a conceptual framework for the topic under study, in Chapter Three I will discuss the relevant literature and present a list of four research questions.

## Chapter 3

### Literature Review

“It [the implementation process] is like an epic – it just goes on and on, so you hop on and if you don’t want to play you hop off for a day or two and then you get back on. That’s the way it’s worked.” (university administrator)

Scholars across academic disciplines of communication studies, higher education, and business have explored and analyzed the dynamics of organizational change (Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Morgan, 2001; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). Researchers have operationalized factors such as announcing, adapting, implementing, and responding to organizational change, among others. Since the current study focuses on communication during organizational change in a higher education context, I have included literature from both the disciplines of communication and higher education as the findings pertain to organizational change.

#### Definitions of Organizational Change

Scholars of organizational change have described and defined change in several ways. In one study by Van de Ven and Poole (1995), organizational change was expressed as “an empirical observation of difference in form, quality, or state over time in an organizational entity. The entity may be an individual’s job, a work group, an organizational strategy, a program, a product, or the overall organization” (p. 512). Ford and Ford (1995) described change as “the difference(s) between two (or more) successive conditions, states, or moments of time” (p. 543). Change has also been defined as an event that is frozen, unfrozen, and refrozen (Lewin, 1951). Similarly, innovation is a term that has become associated with organizational change. The term innovation ties in

closely with the idea of organizational change. Innovation has been described as “an entity, such as a new technology, idea, product, policy or program that is introduced to potential users in the organization” (Lewis & Seibold, 1993, p. 323). Based on these definitions, change in organizations can take on numerous configurations and dimensions. These varying definitions of organizational change allow me to readily identify change in organizations.

### Communication Studies in Organizational Change

In studying the role of communication in the organization from a broad framework, the works of several different scholars frame the concept of organizational communication in ways that are appropriate for purposes of this study. For example, it has been said that communication is fundamental to organizing in the organizational entity (Farace, Monge, & Russell, 1977). Furthermore, as Lewis and Seibold (1998) stated: “Organizing entails the exchange of symbolic representations of ideas, events, emotions and information in order to overcome problems related to uncertainty, identity and interdependence” (p 94). Deetz and Mumby (1990) concluded: “People [including those in organizations] not only communicate things about their social world, they also create their social world in communicating” (p. 42). Therefore, communication is constitutive of organizing. Hence, communicative exchanges, or interactions among stakeholders, contribute to the creation of meaning both within and among the groups associated with the organization during a change event.

More specifically, findings in studies of communication and organizational change have shown that change and communication are interrelated (Lewis & Seibold, 1996; Lewis & Seibold, 1998; Miller & Monge, 1985). Change has been conceptualized

as an occurrence that results from the daily communication interactions in organizations. Ford and Ford (1995) for example stated: “change is a phenomena that occurs within communication” (p. 542). Morgan (2001) reflected on the findings of Ford and Ford (1995) and posited: “In this sense, communication is not a tool to disseminate change, but the central element that creates and sustains a change reality” (p. 87). Communication then, is integral to change and serves as a valid theoretical approach to the study of organizational change. Aspects of organizational change researched from a communicative perspective have included variables such as the invention, design, implementation, adoption and responses to planned organizational change (Cheney, Block, & Gordon, 1986; Chreim, 2002; Howard & Geist, 1995; Kellett, 1999; Lewis, 2000; Lewis & Seibold, 1996, 1998; Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994; Miller & Monge, 1985; Morgan, 2001; Smith & Eisenberg, 1987).

Deetz, Tracy, and Simpson (2000) provided a good starting point for discussing the literature on communication in organizational change. In their work they talked about the importance of guiding interpretations and managing meaning through the process of framing. The authors stated: “Framing refers to the ways leaders can use their language to shape or modify particular interpretations of organizational events thereby directing likely responses” (p. 67). Framing devices include language tools such as metaphors, stories, artifacts, and myths and allow organizational members to shape and/or assign meaning to a change event.

Framing devices utilized in organizational communication are the subject of several studies reviewed here. Morgan (2001) talked about the positive and negative aspects of congruence in language in working towards a goal such as organizational

change. By analyzing emerging metaphors, the author gathered perceptions regarding a change event. Morgan found that managers could readily name and reiterate dominant corporate change rhetoric, but their ability to do so did not necessarily translate into an understanding or personal investment in that rhetoric. Hence, the meanings ascribed among groups were dissimilar. The author's findings indicated a more passive stance by the managers who participated in the study, for while they could recite the corporate rhetoric, they did not fully understand or identify at that point with the change process. Such passivity hinders the efforts made by the organization to implement change. Morgan (2001) called for researchers of organizational change to critically examine the language of change to assess how that language creates and sustains change issues such as power and control.

The essence of organizational change presents the institution with a contradiction. While it is normal and commonplace for an organization to strive for stability, at the same time the organization must go through various change processes in order to survive. Howard and Geist (1995) studied the organizational contradiction of stability and change. The authors looked at the organizational members' discursive responses to contradictions resulting from a corporate merger. Findings were analyzed along a four-unit continuum ranging from active acceptance to passive rejection in terms of how the organizational members positioned themselves ideologically in relation to the merger. Interestingly, the authors found that ideological positioning changed with time and context. For example, managers would actively present an attitude of acceptance towards the merger to their staff members, but were more passive and reserved in their own self-reflective view of the value of the change event. The studies by Morgan (2001) and Howard and Geist

(1995) point to the idea that there may be a private versus public meaning created by stakeholders. Members of the organization may appear in public as though they have arrived at shared meanings regarding the change efforts while they actually express dissimilar meanings in private.

Smircich's (1983) case study looked at a company with a history of varying leadership styles, mergers, and promotions and demotions. All of these factors qualify as change events based on the definitions put forth earlier. Interactions among stakeholders during these changes contributed to the development of shared meanings within the organization. The author conducted an ethnographic study of an insurance company and the findings described "the system of meaning the group members used to make sense of their experience" (p.61). Interestingly, the study traced the creation of meaning as that process emerged from interactions among employees. Smircich stated: "the experiences of the formative period [of a change event], characterized by interpersonal conflict, worked their way into the fabric of meaning shared by the [members]" (p. 64). The author also noted the influence of meanings on employees' future behavior and actions. Through rituals, slogans, vocabulary and leadership style, employees were able to develop common referents among themselves in order to initiate action and, sometimes, inaction.

In another study investigating communication in organizational change, Pondy (1983) explored the role of metaphors and myths in the facilitation of the change process. From Pondy's viewpoint, metaphors, including the "special case of myths" represent a symbolic reality in the organization as opposed to an objective reality. According to Pondy, "symbolic reality constitutes a patterned set of meanings and is socially

constructed by the actors in the situation” (p. 159). To illustrate the use of metaphors and myths in facilitating organizational change, the author cited military metaphors used in organizing Chinese communes and a myth from an east African tribe. Through his analysis of these examples, he ascertained that “the metaphor and myth not only facilitates change but shapes it” (p. 164). The use of metaphor and myth allows organizational members to create meaning.

Language impacts the change process in other ways as well. Kellett (1999) argued that dialogue, and more specifically dialectics, can be used to facilitate change. An organization usually works towards creating a shared vision regarding the change event, perhaps through a mission statement or other symbol of the organization (James, 1996; Morris, 1995). Kellett believed however, that dialectics, such as stability/change and individual/team, can be central to effective change processes. He stated: “social [or organizational] life is an ongoing dialogue that is marked by the struggle of multiple voices to be heard....Conflict *and* cooperation can be viewed as coexisting dialectically in organizational change” (p. 213). Hence, the organization should not disregard opposing, or dissimilar, meanings as necessarily negative. The author’s findings indicated that conflicts found in the dialectics of change indeed lead to the dialogues that ultimately create shared meanings.

Cossette (1998) approached the study of language in organizations through a symbolic interactionist perspective. While the study is written from a management research perspective, I have included the work in this section of the literature review as it so closely ties in with the focus of this project. The author’s contribution to this study is clear. Cossette’s proposed model looked at communication among and between the

organizational actors and the factors that affect ascribed meanings. He stated: “language in organizations must be examined on the basis of the experience of the actors in the interactive situation” (p.1362). Girin (1990, as cited in Cossette) believed the lack of interest by management researchers towards the study of language in organizations is a result of their lack of understanding of the many functions of language and their lack of understanding regarding the technical aspects of language used by linguists.

Cossette (1998) presented a strong case as to why a symbolic interactionist perspective makes sense in studying language (i.e., communication) in organizations. The author acknowledged the more commonly used approaches of objectivism and subjectivism and pointed out their contributions to the study of organizational language, however, he also argued why these approaches are not the most suitable. From Cossette’s viewpoint, researchers using the objectivist approach to study language in organizations are generally concerned with the objective meaning of the concepts used, the assumption being that the word or phrase has a meaning in itself. The subjectivist approach accepts the fundamental uniqueness of individual experience. The failure of the subjective approach, Cossette points out, is the inability to recognize an underlying intersubjective agreement as to the meanings of the words used.

Cossette’s (1998) symbolic interactionist model is much like a basic communication model with two communicators simultaneously interacting and influencing one another. Cossette’s model includes factors between the two communicators that affect the meaning created including language and the environmental context. The representational, or cognitive function of language in organizations addresses the interpersonal social relationships and the rituals and ceremonies within the



organization. Within this function, language is defined as a set of symbols used to build knowledge in organizations (written documents, collective schemata for interpreting events, etc.) While Cossette's model focuses primarily on the interaction itself between communicators, the current study borrows from this model with regards to the meanings produced from the communicative interactions during a change event.

In addition to many qualitative, interpretative studies, the findings of several empirical studies that have focused on topics such as employee attitudes and antecedents to willingness to participate in change (Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994; Miller & Monge, 1985) provide insight into communication in organizational change. Miller et al. (1994) posited that cooperation by members is a necessary condition for organizational change to succeed. Resistance, according to the authors, can hinder the change process. (This concept is contradictory to Kellet's findings regarding dialectical tensions among stakeholders ultimately leading to shared meanings). Resistance by members can be expressed in numerous ways and attributed to multiple forces and factors. In the Miller et al., (1994) study, researchers examined two antecedents, employee needs and information environments, as predictors to the employees' willingness to change. Findings indicated that employees who had a high need for achievement and who received ample information in a timely and appropriate manner were more willing to participate in organizational change. The quality of the information environment had an effect on the level of anxiety and anxiety reduction experienced by employees. The better the environment, the more receptive and cooperative employees were towards organizational change. Information-related aspects of the change process included such factors as the timeliness of information and the method of communication. The relevance of the Miller

et al. study is that information-related interactions are tied to the creation of meaning: stakeholders present and exchange information during the change event.

### Power in the Organization

Power in the organization has been conceptualized and defined in numerous ways (Deetz, 1992; Deetz & Mumby, 1990; Eisenberg & Riley, 1988; Kramer & Neale, 1998; Mumby, 1988; Mumby, 2001). For example, the concept of power may be framed by structure as part of a hierarchical perspective with those at the top of the hierarchy possessing the most power. Power has also been described as pertaining to the interests of groups within the organization. Lukes (1974) described power as being exercised when one is able to shape the interests of the individuals within the organization. Similarly, Mumby (1988) defined domination as “getting people to organize their behavior around a particular rule system” (p. 56). Power is a concept that is “noticeably absent in the writings of the interactionists” (Hall, 1973, p. 46). Hall went on to describe the process of power as:

Power, the control of others, is accomplished by getting others to accept your view and perspective. This is achieved by controlling, influencing and sustaining *your* definition of the situation since, if you can get others to share your reality, you can get them to act in the manner you prescribe. (p. 51)

These different approaches to defining power and its relationship to communication are relevant to the current study and are explored in more detail.

Deetz and Mumby (1990) posited that power is “a structural quality of institutional life, which is chronically reproduced by the day-to-day communicative

interactions of its members” (p. 32). Furthermore, in trying to explain the relationship between power and communication the authors stated:

...power is not defined simply in terms of one person or group exercising control over another, but rather is conceived as the process through which competing interests [or meanings] exist interdependently, simultaneously vying for a privileged status in the whole constellation of interests that characterize institutional life. (p. 32)

The idea of meanings competing for a place in the change process is an interesting consideration for this research. Determining which meaning(s) ultimately dominate(s) the change process could help to explain the impact of power structures and stakeholder interactions, within the context of higher education, on the creation of meaning. For example, how does the power (or lack of power) of a particular stakeholder group impact that group’s reality? Does power then have an effect on what meanings are created?

Deetz and Mumby (1990) further explicated the relationship of communication to power when they talked about communication being constitutive of power. They stated:

.....the most important site of the struggle over power in organizations is not the context of allocation of material resources and decision-making capabilities; rather, power is most successfully exercised when an individual or group has the ability to frame discursive and nondiscursive practices within a system of meaning that is commensurate with that individual’s or group’s own interests. (p. 32)

I think this statement by the authors may figure into the analysis of the data as stakeholder groups compete to have their voices heard. Given the problems universities often face regarding allocation of resources, this issue, contrary to what the authors state, may indeed be considered an issue of power that impacts meaning for some.

Mumby (1989) explored the relationship between power and communication, proposing the idea that “Communication not only constitutes cultural meaning systems, but it is also an intrinsic part of the means by which relations of domination are produced and reproduced” (p. 293). Mumby’s conceptual framework could serve as a means of further analysis of the data. For example, does the use of certain symbols (meetings, newsletters, etc.) serve to produce and reproduce power structures during the change process? Are these symbols used in a strategic manner in order to achieve or maintain certain power structures?

Mumby (2001) discussed the effect and value of an interpretative research approach to the concept of power in organizations. Mumby asserted a commitment to an organization is achieved through a “struggle over meaning” in which the corporation and its members compete over definitions of reality. Utilizing an interpretative approach therefore, allows for multiple insights into the relationships among communication and power. If power is conceptualized as multiple voices that develop varying meanings regarding organizational events that then vie for a position to have their meanings presented and heard in the organization, it makes sense to follow an interpretative approach. The design and implementation of the state’s master plan has provided for a multiplicity of voices to be included in the process. Stakeholders in the current study may

potentially express meanings that create and influence power structures. Such power structures then in turn determine the dominant narrative of the change process.

Power is conceptualized for purposes of this study then as not only influencing reality but as being sustained through dominant meanings.

### Power Structures in Higher Education

The very nature of the university system and its structure creates multiple levels of power or governance. The concept of governance has been defined as “including not only the formal decision arrangements by which colleges and universities carry on their work, but also the informal procedures by which standards are maintained.”(Carnegie Foundation, 1982, p. 7). Governance has also been loosely defined as the authority to establish or change policy (Westmeyer, 1990). Birnbaum (1988) defined governance as: “the structures and processes through which institutional participants interact with and influence each other and communicate with the larger environment” (p. 4). Through the structure of governance, decision-making is supposedly spread out among different groups of institutional participants including trustees, faculty, and administrators (most specifically the chancellor or president of the institution). But the issue as to how much power each should have remains ambivalent.

The university governance system, while hierarchical in nature, does not operate the same way as other hierarchical structures, such as business institutions (Tierney, 1998). The goals and missions of universities do not allow the structure to do so. For example, universities are not structured around the concept of money and profits but rather the missions of teaching, research, and service. Thus, while university hierarchies exist, decentralization of power exists as well in order to attain missions and goals. While

the question of power remains ambivalent, various levels of governance must work together in order for the system to function. As Tierney stated: “Even those leaders at the very top of the governance hierarchy, however, must build coalitions with administrative and faculty leaders in order to implement change successfully” (p. 101). A building of coalitions, it would seem, would include the process of creating meaning, shared or dissimilar, among stakeholders.

Birnbaum (1988) further discussed the issue of universities as organizations and the implications for power within these structures. He stated: “there are patterns in organizational life....by viewing colleges and universities as organizations, one sees groups of people filling roles and working together toward the achievement of common objectives within a formal social structure” (p. 1). Birnbaum went on to explain how the concept of authority (hence, power) differs among institutions of business and institutions of higher education. The author cited the work of French and Raven (1959) which merits review in this study.

French and Raven’s (1959) typology of power includes five kinds of power found in social groups: (a) coercive; (b) reward; (c) legitimate; (d) referent; and (e) expert. Coercive power exists when one interactant has the ability to punish another for not accepting one’s attempt at influence. When one person has the ability to offer rewards or decrease negative influences to another, reward power exists. Legitimate power exists when both parties involved have agreed to a common code or standard that gives one party the right to influence the other in a specific range of activities or behaviors and obliges the other party to comply, such as in a hierarchical structure. When one person is willing to be influenced by another because of the person’s identification with the other,

referent power exists. Finally, expert power is exercised when one person is willingly influenced by another because of a belief the other person has some special knowledge or competence in a particular area.

Based on French and Raven's typology, Birnbaum (1988) posited that universities rely primarily on referent and expert power. While university stakeholders may indeed be concerned about rewards, say, monetary rewards or tenure, they are by and large more concerned with issues such as principles of education and citizenry. Therefore, Birnbaum concluded that attempts to influence behavior and action in a university structure are different from attempts in a business structure. The use of expert and referent power, Birnbaum believed, is less likely to cause alienation, hence, producing committed participants who are influenced through the manipulation of symbols.

Another difference in the power structure between business organizations and university organizations, closely related to power, is the concept of authority. Of interest are two types of authority: (a) administrative and (b) professional (Etzioni, 1964). Administrative authority is predicated on the idea that control and coordination of activities is exercised by superiors in the hierarchical structure. Professional authority, much like expert power, is predicated on autonomy and individual knowledge. In business organizations, the administrative authority is typically in charge and has overriding power. Within the university structure, the professional authority (usually described as faculty) is more likely seen as having power. The faculty set the curriculum and requirements of the school, which in turn drives the school's goals and mission.

Stakeholder interactions serve as an opportunity for creating meaning during the change process. The presence of multiple levels of power within the university system

makes those interactions more significant in considering the meanings created. Hence, the issue of power in the university structure and the impact of that power on the creation of meaning will be explored in the study.

### Change in Higher Education

While institutions of higher education are steeped in tradition, they are not immune to changes in their environment. Researchers have explored issues of change in higher education including, the impact of an institution's culture on change (Bruhn, Zajac, Al-Kazemi, & Prescott, 2002; Wong & Tierney, 2001), sensemaking in the institution (Gioia & Thomas, 1996), and managerial aspects of change (Austin, Ahearn, & English, 1997; Curri, 2002; Eckel & Kezar, 2003; Hipps, 1982; Nicholls, 1983; Steeples, 1990). As in other institutions, resistance to change can be found among members of the university institution. Often times, universities resist change not because of the substance of the change, but rather because change is viewed as a threat to the culture of their institution (Farmer, 1990). The idea of campus culture as it pertains to issues of access, academic standards, and/or academic programs will be explored later.

Several key issues inherent to universities may impact the change process on campus. The ASHE-ERIC Higher Education Report (2001) reviewed thirteen university factors that affect change. I have focused on three factors that I think are most relevant to the study. These factors include: (a) public universities, such as the ones in the current study, do not exist independently of one another and therefore cannot set a course independent of one another (Alpert, 1991), (b) universities have institutional status, meaning they serve long-standing missions and are closely tied to individual identities and ongoing societal needs, resulting in change being slow and difficult, and (c)



universities have multiple power and authority structures indicating change will involve a great number of people and political processes. These distinctions are taken into consideration in the current study as to the impact they may have on the creation of meaning in organizational change.

Making sense of change through a socially constructed reality is present in the higher education literature as well. Eckel and Kezar (2003) focused on the importance of getting participants of change in higher education to rethink their beliefs and values. As stated previously in this study, due to the nature of higher education, universities do not change their mission or basic reason for being. Rather, the thinking in the institution has to change to reflect what is currently taking place around the institution. The authors underscored this when they stated: “Over the course of transformation efforts, people develop new beliefs and interpretations and adopt new ways of thinking and perceiving that help create the foundation of significant change. Transformation is about making new sense” (p. 49). The new understanding stakeholders may achieve during change falls under two types: attaching new meaning to familiar concepts and ideas and developing and adopting new language and concepts to describe the institution.

Eckel and Kezar (2003) found campuses “full of incidents that in and of themselves do not have any meaning and that ask to be collectively understood. In most cases, the environment itself is open to negotiation and is shaped by those seeking to understand it” (p. 54). On campus, “people work to understand collectively what is occurring by interpreting ambiguous events and assigning them meaning” (p. 51). The authors believe then that continuous negotiation occurs over what things mean. The negotiations eventually may create a shared interpretation that impacts the selection of

priorities and behavioral action by the members. Much like the concepts presented in symbolic interactionism, the authors view understanding as a social process. They stated:

Creating new institution-wide understandings is done through talk, discourse, and conversation and is based on interaction. The nature of work in organizations is social....they together develop a common language that shapes what they think and perceive....Creating a common understanding depends on the interactions of people working together, obtaining information from one another, acting, and reacting (p. 55).

Eckel and Kazar studied over 20 universities engaged in the transformation process and developed five core strategies from the universities most successful in achieving effective change. These strategies included: (a) senior administrative support, (b) collaborative leadership, (c) flexible vision, (d) staff development, and (e) visible action. They found that the core strategies had one thing in common: each provided a means to help people on campus think differently about their institutions.

Gioia and Thomas (1996) investigated how top management teams in higher education institutions make sense of issues that affect strategic change in modern academia. Their approach to the topic was through both qualitative and quantitative means. Findings revealed that top management team members' perceptions of identity and image are key to the process of interpretation and assigning meaning. In another study Gioia, Thomas, Clark, and Chittipeddi (1995) showed that the common tradition of establishing university task forces and committees is in itself a process through which members interpret and make sense of their worlds.

Nicholls (1983) talked about innovation in education systems in the classroom and while she did not specifically talk about higher education, her thinking on resistance to changes in education systems is transferable to this study. The author presents two approaches to framing resistance during change. In the first instance, resistance is seen as a negative force and something change agents must overcome. Nicholls, however, argued that resisters are rational beings who can positively contribute to change. Change agents would have to be open to listening and considering the ideas and comments of resisters. The second means of coping with resistance is the idea of participatory decision-making where the stakeholder takes a more active role in the process. By allowing some input during the change process, it would seem that change agents would be more likely to achieve more similar meaning among stakeholders.

Dill (1982) spoke of the need for universities to manage their academic cultures in order to adapt to external changes that impact the university. He defined organizational culture as “the shared beliefs, ideologies, or dogma of a group which impel individuals to action and give their actions meaning” (p. 307). The managing of academic culture can be achieved through the management of meaning. Dill conceptualized the management of meaning as attending to the specific components of culture including: myth, symbol and ritual to sustain common belief systems. In Dill’s work, the importance of the creation of meaning to facilitate change is evident.

### Research Questions

Based on the assumptions of symbolic interactionism and the aspects of communication in organizational change in the context of higher education discussed here, several research questions are posited.

From a symbolic interactionist perspective, it is assumed meaning will naturally be created through interactions among stakeholders during the change process. Therefore, it is of interest to question:

RQ1: What meanings were created during the particular process of change under study?

Furthermore, the use of symbols is investigated through the questions:

RQ2: How were meanings intentionally and unintentionally created among stakeholders during this organizational change?

2a: How do the various elements (e.g., documents, meetings, etc.) of organizational change interact with and influence one another during the change process?

I think it is not only important what meanings were created but also to consider the impact these meanings then had on the change process. This leads to the question:

RQ3: How does the presence of similar and dissimilar meanings influence the change process?

Finally, the issue of power and meaning, as it relates to levels of governance in the university structure, should be explored. The issue is addressed through the question:

RQ4: From a symbolic interactionist perspective, how does the concept of multiple levels of power affect the process of creating meaning during organizational change?

The means of addressing these four research questions for study and analysis are determined and discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4

### Methods

“What do you think the university wants us to do with this?”

(a university administrator’s explanation of what his team would first ask themselves when considering information received from the consulting group).

My interest in studying communication in organizational change through the framework of a state master plan for higher education stemmed from a previous class project. (The existence of a state master plan is mandated by law and serves as a written document that sets the standards for higher education in the entire state). In that project the class studied administrative and philosophical aspects of the 2001 master plan through a panel discussion with university presidents or representatives from their offices. This particular project counted as the final project for the class and occurred in late spring of 2001. As a result of my participation in the class project, I was somewhat familiar with and understood the overall scope of the master plan. The project had piqued my interest in communicative aspects of change in higher education and therefore I chose a state system of higher education as the primary organization for study. The following section addresses methodological issues including the rationale for the approach to the study, the topic design, participant demographics, data collection and analysis, validity and researcher credibility.

#### Rationale for a Qualitative Approach

My approach to studying aspects of meaning in organizational change in this project was through qualitative methods. More specifically, an inductive approach

including interviews, observations and text analysis was used in pursuing this research. I found many dynamics going on in the change event under study and therefore did not believe that these things could be accurately captured at one fixed point in time. I considered this change process akin to a rolling wave that builds from the outer depths of the ocean to the shoreline, consistently renewing and recreating itself as it pulls back and then presses forward. Conducting interviews, observations and text analysis seemed to me a logical means by which to capture many of the elements taking place in this context. Several characteristics of qualitative research in communication further reinforced my methodological choices.

First, utilizing a qualitative approach to collecting data within the multi-faceted process of change under study had the advantage of providing for greater attention to the nuances, settings, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies, and contexts found in the data (Patton, 1990), providing for thick description that addresses the research questions posed. Since the conceptual framework of this project is grounded in symbolic interactionism, attention to those factors outlined by Patton (1990) were important in exploring and more fully understanding the social interactions and attempts to make sense and create meaning about the change phenomena. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) stated: “qualitative researchers understand communication through its indication of motives, thoughts, and feelings that connect actors to each other” (p. 30). The three methods of data collection I utilized allowed me to uncover such connections among actors and symbols.

Secondly, qualitative, and specifically interpretative qualitative research methods allowed for an exploration of the lived experiences of stakeholder groups involved in a

change process. I knew I wanted to capture these experiences from the different perspectives of those involved in the process. Interviews and observations were an appropriate means of accomplishing this goal. The thick description derived from my work allowed me to compare and contrast the perspectives of the change process through the eyes of various stakeholders (Denzin, 2001) while addressing the research questions.

Third, much of the research in organizational change, regardless of the academic discipline, has been studied utilizing an empirical framework (e.g., Lewis & Seibold, 1998) resulting in significant findings that have had important value in the social sciences. Qualitative and, more specifically, interpretative methodologies, however are not as prevalent in the study of organizational change. Kreps, Herndon, and Arneson (1993) addressed the importance of qualitative methods in organizational communication when they stated:

Interpretative research is ethnographic, designed to describe more fully the symbolic structures members create about their organizations and the communication behavior they perform to develop and maintain these collective symbolic structures....The qualitative, ethnographic nature of interpretative research provides richly textured “thick descriptions” of organizational phenomena that enable the researcher to describe many of the complexities of organizations [sic] issues (p. 8).

A qualitative approach adds a less-widely used methodological perspective that uncovers other aspects of change not found in traditional positivistic studies. Embracing a qualitative approach therefore would enhance understanding of the communication process under study.

## Designing the Study

My first step in determining how I wanted to go about conducting this study was to interview an employee with the state-governing agency whom I knew to be well-informed and involved in the development and implementation of the master plan. I approached this initial interview as an opportunity to ask a lot of questions about the master plan in general and get some background information regarding the governing agency and the agency's interactions with various stakeholder groups. I came away from that interview with several valuable insights into my topic including: what events had occurred thus far and what was scheduled to take place; who were the primary individuals involved; who would be my main contact person with the governing agency; who were the appropriate people to talk to in the consulting agency; and who would be appropriate to talk to at the university level. I was also given a final, published version of the master plan during that initial interview. To this point I had only gathered bits and pieces of the plan.

## Components of the Master Plan

From the beginning, an effective strategy in my research was to read through as many documents, articles, and websites that I could locate and then to think about what aspects I wanted to include in my study. In other words, my plan was to make sense of what I saw before me. I first focused on the master plan document itself. The plan was organized around three major components including: (a) statements of goals and objectives for the state system, (b) refinement of a comprehensive statewide system including a new admissions criteria framework for each institution, and (c) revised formulae funding for the state system. While each component of the plan provided for



interesting change processes, I determined that these three components collectively would be too much to cover in the scope of the current study and would not all lend themselves to the goals of the research. For example, the goals and objectives set forth in the plan in regards to the state as a whole were a result of focus groups with university officials. These focus groups had been held prior to any of my research planning and therefore did not seem like a viable component to try and study, as I would have to ask participants to recreate their experiences from what they remembered about the focus groups. Also, since the focus groups had been completed, I obviously would not have the opportunity to conduct any observations.

The second component was formulae funding. Mandated by the [state] Constitution of 1974, formulae funding allowed for the equitable distribution of state funds to all institutions of postsecondary education. As a component of the master plan, formulae funding was not really something that anyone could do much about without going to the legislature to bring about change. So, other than complaining about the lack of funding, there were not going to be many substantial communicative interactions regarding this element.

The third component was the admissions criteria framework. As I explored this particular element further, it became quite clear to me that this was by far the part of the change process that would involve the most communicative interactions among stakeholders at all levels providing for both consensus and disagreement among the stakeholders. As authors of the master plan (2001) stated: “Implementing admissions criteria throughout the system will change the enrollment patterns of [state’s] students. The change will encourage greater access through community colleges and technical

college campuses...” (p. 9). Thus, the implementation of a new admissions framework would change not only student behavior and enrollment but generate change in the recruitment and retention programs and strategies of the university administration as well.

The development and implementation process of the admissions criteria framework further illustrated how this component easily lent itself to this study. In order to implement the new admissions criteria framework, university administrators had to work with the governing agency and a contracted consulting group to create formal, written recruitment and retention documents. Additionally, administrators attended a wide array of workshops and meetings. Hence, the implementation of the admissions criteria framework allowed for the most interaction among a broad spectrum of stakeholders and thus made it appropriate for this communication study. Changing the admissions criteria framework is a 4-step process being carried out over several years.

#### Stakeholder Group Selection

Having determined which component of the master plan I wanted to study, my next decision was to determine which stakeholder groups I wanted to include as my focus. Having read Deetz’s (1995) work, I knew that I wanted to study the topic through the inclusion of several stakeholder groups. Reasoning from a symbolic interactionist perspective, including various stakeholder groups made sense as a means to uncover the interactions taking place and the meanings being created. The term interactions, as used in this study, referred to those contacts taking place between and among stakeholder groups through both informal and formal means of communication.

Regarding the admission criteria component of the plan, numerous stakeholder groups were involved including: staff members of the governing agency, boards of

supervisors for universities; staff members of the three state systems; university administrators on each campus; faculty; employees of the consultant group hired to work with the universities; key university students; high school academic counselors; high school students; parents; teachers; university alumni; community colleges and the universities' communities at large. All of these groups would be affected by changes in admissions but not all the groups were included in the planning and/or implementation of the new framework. Thus, it would not make sense to include all these groups in the study.

After careful consideration, I decided to focus on three particular stakeholder groups: the state governing agency, the contracted consulting group, and university administrators who were very involved in some aspect of either the development of the recruitment and/or retention plans or both. I chose these particular three groups as I found their roles in the change process to be integral to the implementation of the plan and, also, they were involved in the day-to-day work of the change implementation. By including groups with different levels of power I think I avoided the managerial bias so often found in organizational studies. The three stakeholder groups represented voices beyond just one level of managerial staff.

The stakeholder group identified in this study as the state-governing agency was created by a constitutional amendment in 1974 and was responsible for coordinating all public higher education in this state. The term state-governing agency referred to the fulltime staff charged with administering the policies and decisions of the fifteen board members appointed by the governor.

The consulting agency was formed in 1973 and now serves higher education institutions in the United States and Canada. They provide for enrollment management solutions in the form of recruiting, retention, and leadership programs. The agency uses a combination of full-time consultants as well as associate consultants who in addition to their full-time university positions, serve as consultants to agency clients on a part-time basis.

The universities selected are part of a state system of higher education. The institutions included a variety of SREB and SACS level titles and delineations. All universities granted some number of specialists, masters and/or doctoral degrees and were placed in one of three selective admissions categories. Categories were described by a student's GPA (grade point average) and ACT (American College Test) scores.

Through my initial examination of what was going on in the change process early on, I was confident that these three groups had frequent and communicatively-based interactions that would be an interesting triad to explore. For example, the change in admissions criteria was designed and directed primarily by one of these stakeholder groups (the state governing agency), was implemented and guided state-wide by another (the consulting firm); and directly affected a third group (administrators at state universities). The interview results from the first few interviews reinforced my belief that these were the appropriate groups to include in this study.

#### Sampling Techniques and Participant Demographics

A snowball sampling technique was utilized for the research project. As Lindlof and Taylor (2002) stated, "A snowball sampling technique is well-suited to studying social networks, subcultures, or dispersed groups who share certain practices or

attributes” (p. 124). The technique as such, fit in very well when exploring various stakeholder perspectives. In selecting people to interview, I first started with suggestions from the governing agency staff members. From that point, as I interviewed members of each stakeholder group, I would then ask those individuals for suggestions as to whom they thought I should interview. I would ask them to identify someone who had been closely involved with some aspect of the development and/or implementation of the admissions criteria framework in their organization. This direction, I thought, would be helpful to them in their recommendations. By asking about and identifying people continually throughout the study, I believe that I was able to identify the most appropriate people to interview.

As a result of the snowball sampling technique, the participants included in the interview all held positions in one of the three stakeholder groups. Three employees of the state-governing agency were included, three employees of the consulting agency, and 14 university administrators for a total of twenty interviews. The average length of the participants’ time spent in the university arena averaged 20.1 years.

I interviewed a total of three people from the governing agency. Two employees of the governing agency were directly involved with the development and implementation of the state master plan and worked closely on a day-to-day basis with the other two stakeholder groups. The third participant from the governing agency had been employed at the agency for many years and worked on previous master plans for the state.

Regarding the consulting firm, I interviewed three employees as well. One of the employees, who held a high position in the firm, was the firm’s main contact for the state

governing agency and oversaw the consulting plans and services of the entire firm. Because of this individual's position, this person was able to paint a picture for me of the process specific to this master plan as well as talk about institutional change in general. Another consultant I interviewed had conducted a major workshop for the state as well as met with individual universities. Again, because of this person's experience, the individual had pertinent insight into the admissions criteria framework as a whole. The third employee was serving as the retention consultant for one of the universities included in the study. I was also able to observe other consultants through the workshops I attended but did not interview them directly. While I had initially planned to speak to more employees of the consulting firm, the mix of people I spoke with, all working at different levels of the change process, allowed me to gain well-rounded insights into the phenomena under study.

For purposes of the university administrator stakeholder group, a sample of four-year state universities was included in this study. Universities were selected in order to represent three of the four state systems of higher education. The fourth system was not included as it pertains only to community and technical colleges and therefore did not provide for interactions on a regular basis with the other stakeholder groups under study. The representation of three of the state systems was therefore comprehensive in terms of the topic under study. Each of the three systems had different governing boards and differing admissions criteria framework requirements adding to the participant's perspectives. From these systems, I selected six universities to represent the university stakeholder group.

I believe I reached the saturation point with each of these stakeholder groups for several reasons. First, in two of the stakeholder groups, the individuals I spoke with held the highest-ranking positions within their organizations and were intricately involved in the implementation of the new admissions framework from the beginning. These particular individuals had more experience and insight in to the process than anyone else in their organizations. Other members of these organizations did not have the opportunity or need to look at the implementation process as a whole, rather, they could have spoken only to their experiences with a limited number of stakeholder members. Since this study focuses on the implementation process across multiple universities, individuals with limited interaction were ruled out. Also, the university administrators I spoke with were the most knowledgeable people on campus regarding the organizational changes resulting from the new admissions criteria framework. As I went further down the administrative hierarchy, I found interviewees had less and less background knowledge on the process.

The participants from the different universities held various titles and therefore could not be directly compared to one another. This difference in titles can be mostly attributed to their size and varying infrastructures. For example, larger universities tended to have specific departments to deal with the development and implementation of changes in admissions while smaller universities tended to utilize staff to cover a myriad of responsibilities including recruitment and retention. As a result, administrative titles of persons I interviewed covered a wide spectrum including: vice chancellor, associate provost, assistant commissioner, vice president of student affairs, director of academic planning, and director of recruitment and retention among others.

## Data Collection and Analyses

I was fortunate to be given access to the individuals, events, and documents pertinent to this change process as a result of previous professional relationships with several of the employees of the state-governing agency. I think having the support of these particular employees enhanced my initial credibility with the individuals I contacted and asked to participate in the interview process. I conducted the data analyses using an inductive approach and thus grounded theory. As Bogdan and Biklen (1998) stated: “Theory developed this way emerges from the bottom up (rather than from the top down), from many disparate pieces of collected evidence that are interconnected. The theory is grounded in the data” (p. 6). An explanation of data collection and analysis techniques for each of the three methods of qualitative inquiry included in this study follows.

### Interviews

My first step in data collection was to design and implement the interview process. Interviews provide a means by which a researcher can explore the feelings, beliefs, and experiences of the participants. The majority of interviews in this study were conducted between November of 2003 and February of 2004. Each interview lasted approximately 50-90 minutes. In-depth interviews were conducted in person at the participants’ offices wherever possible. Phone interviews were done with several members of two of the stakeholder groups: the members of the consulting agency, who were all based out-of-state, and several university officials. The university administrators I interviewed by phone were individuals I had met previously at a workshop so I had



some face-to-face interaction with them prior to the phone interview. In the end, I conducted a total of thirteen face-to-face interviews and seven phone interviews.

Interviewees signed consent forms prior to the start of the interview. For interviews conducted over the phone, I emailed a copy of the consent form to the participant and then got their verbal approval on the phone. The interview protocol included a set of open-ended questions designed to solicit as much information as possible from the participants. I made a few adjustments to the questions after the first few interviews. A copy of the interview protocol is included in Appendix A. Each interview, whether by phone or in person, was tape-recorded.

Prior to each interview, I familiarized myself with documents relevant to that participant, whether it was the institution's recruitment plan, biographical information on the consultants or press releases from the state-governing agency. Such documents afforded me the opportunity to learn something about the participants and/or their role in the change process prior to meeting with them. As a result of this, I was better able to target my questions to the various stakeholder groups. Once I left the interviewee, I sat down and wrote out observation notes and anything the participant may have said off tape that was pertinent to the research.

I started formal interviews with university administrators because this stakeholder group made up the largest part of my participant pool. Utilizing a list of possible contacts from the state-governing agency, I began contacting university administrators through email, giving an overview of the project and some examples of areas covered by the interview questions. If someone did not respond after 2 or 3 emails and/or follow-up phone calls, I determined the person was not interested and/or comfortable in

participating and did not contact that individual further. This only happened in one or two cases. Several individuals did refer me to others on campus that they thought would be more appropriate resources for the project. I spoke with a minimum of two people on each campus and more where it made sense to do so. I visited each campus included in the study. During my campus visit, I observed elements of the departments' operations, such as the front office staff, in order to pick up on anything that might be relevant to the study. Once I had completed almost all of the interviews with the administrators, I began contacting members of the consulting agency and then finished the interview process with members of the state-governing agency. I read the biographies of the consultants on the firm's website prior to interviewing them so I would have some insight into their backgrounds and experience.

During the interview process I assigned pseudonyms to the participants in order to maintain their privacy and honor the promise of confidentiality. These pseudonyms are found in quoted passages from the interviews in the discussion of findings. In order to give the reader a general sense of the interviewees' background experiences in higher education, I also wrote a brief description of the participants' demographic characteristics to use in the discussion of the findings. The pseudonyms and biographical sketches follow:

Eric: A former faculty member, this 57 year old has recently moved into a top administrative position after 30 years of teaching and research. Thus, he brings a different perspective than that of individuals who have served in administrative positions only throughout their careers.

Yvonne: She is a faculty member who was tapped to guide several different studies and administrative programs at this university over the past several years. She has since returned to teaching. Yvonne is 48 years old and has been in the higher education arena for over 20 years.

Helen: She is 46 years old and currently holds a top administrative position. She too is a former faculty member who took on administrative duties for several projects before moving into her current position concerning issues of university development.

As evident in the above descriptions, faculty members in higher education will sometimes move into administrative roles that allow them greater opportunity in guiding policy for the university. There are several more participants who have made this faculty to administrator transition.

Patrick: A former professor in the area of arts and sciences, this 56 year old participant has held administrative positions for the past 15 years. Currently he holds a position in academic affairs at a high level.

Kristen: Also a participant who has transitioned from academics to administration, this individual serves in the area of enrollment management. She is 48 years old.

Pete: Employed in higher education administration for over 35 years, this individual held a top-level administrative position in the university. He is 68 years old.

Virginia: This participant is 51 years old and has held several administrative academic positions at this same university, most recently in the area of enrollment management.

Richard: Fifty-two years old, this individual has held numerous administrative positions at various universities. He is currently employed by the governing agency.

Gary: He has worked for the same university for over 24 years in different positions in various departments. He currently is employed in the areas of enrollment management and retention. He is 50 years old.

Raisa: She has been employed in higher education for a little over ten years. She is 53 years old and has a teaching background in secondary education. Raisa currently holds an upper tier administrative position in enrollment and retention management.

Robert: This participant is employed at a university in the area of external affairs. In his role he works on a variety of programs that have far reaching effects for the university and community members including the selective admissions program.

William: He has served as a dean for various academic departments as well as working closely on numerous financial and budgetary programs for the university. He has been employed in higher education for over twenty years and is 61 years of age.

John: This person has been employed as a consultant to higher education institutions for over 20 years, most specifically in the area of enrollment management. He has guided the entire statewide program currently under study.

Harry: This individual has worked in the area of higher education administration for 22 years, primarily in the area of enrollment management including recruitment and retention efforts.

Heather: Employed by the consulting agency in the area of enrollment management, this 32- year old participant has experience as a university administrator at several different universities.

Craig: Also a member of the consulting agency this participant has extensive experience in enrollment management. He is 58 years old and has served in various capacities in the current statewide admissions implementation program.

Jim: He is a 49- year old administrator in the area of student development. He has held various positions at this institution as well as other institutions. His current position allows him access to numerous university officials. He himself is in the upper tier of university administration.

Dan: This employee of the governing agency has been with the agency for more than 20 years. He has worked on various higher education projects during the course of his employment all concerning statewide development of colleges and universities.

Carla: This participant has over 25 years of combined experience in both secondary and higher education administration. She has served in the capacity of liaison, among many other roles, in the current admissions criteria framework implementation process.

Beth: As an administrator of enrollment management, this participant oversees both recruitment and retention efforts for the university. She has served in this area for a little more than 5 years.

(This concludes the brief biographical sketches of the participants).

I personally transcribed each interview and then read the transcript through while listening to the tape again in order to ensure accuracy. Interviews were transcribed in their entirety except for passages of conversation that had no relevance to the subject under study. For example, if an interviewee gave a detailed explanation of formulae funding, I noted the topic but did not transcribe the passage in detail. At times, some words or phrases were difficult to understand in various interviews. In these cases I played back that part of the tape several times until I could decipher what had been said. If I could not determine the word or phrase, even after listening several times, I would then insert a question mark in place of the word or phrase. Occasionally, some parts of the transcripts needed editing to enhance clarity. An example would be if an interviewee did not complete a word or phrase because they thought of something else they wanted to say in mid-sentence. I would complete the word (when I was sure of what they had intended to say) so that the sentence made sense. The entire transcription process resulted in about 150 hours of transcription work and approximately 125 pages (single-spaced) of transcripts for analysis. Regarding analysis of the transcripts, each complete transcript was considered the unit of analysis. I read through each transcript several times, each time highlighting elements of that transcript that seemed to be occurring throughout, or at least in the majority of the transcripts. I also noted elements that were inconsistent with one another.

Once I determined the consistencies and inconsistencies in the participants' interviews, I developed broad categories that helped to define what I had discovered. These broad categories, while helpful in drawing a picture of what was going on and making the data more manageable, were not sufficient for my purposes though. I needed to refine them in order to account for the nuances and behaviors of the participants involved in the change process. I then read through the categories several more times and started to group and collapse categories together in order to make them more focused. Next, I had another person look over the data and categories to see if she agreed that the findings made sense. The volunteer is currently a graduate student in the college of business at a private university and has an interest in research. Prior to coding, the volunteer received a briefing on the research project including the research questions. The coder agreed with the existing categories, determining they made sense to her. A copy of the codebook can be found in Appendix B.

### Observations

The second method of data collection included my role as passive observer. Observation allows the researcher to rely not only on what participants say about how they think or behave in a certain way, but also to witness firsthand what is going on (Denscombe, 1998). My method of observation could best be described as composed of watching and listening to the environment and the people in it. In addition to observations I made while on interviews and campus visits, I also engaged in two opportunities to observe the stakeholder groups in workshop settings. My approach to these more formal observations was to predetermine a checklist of sorts, of areas I wanted to observe. The first area included physical components of the workshops for example, describing the

setting where the workshop took place, the number of people in attendance, how the room was set up, etc. The second area I wanted to observe was regarding the interactions taking place between the stakeholders. I looked for things such as opportunities for interactions, the formality or informality of the interactions, the communication climate of the interactions, the messages being communicated, who interacted with whom, and so forth. Finally, I also wanted to explore my experiences as passive observer during the workshops – what I was thinking, any assumptions I had made, and my overall feeling on the workshop as it related to the research. Detailed field notes were taken and served as either confirming or disconfirming evidence of emerging themes as well as provided additional data on the stakeholders in various contexts (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

The first workshop I attended, during my formal study, was held in the central part of the state in February of 2003. The workshop centered on getting the attendees to focus on the retention phase of the admission criteria framework. This workshop had over 200 people in attendance and was a 3-4 hour drive for most participants. Due to these circumstances, the event was designed as a two-day conference. While I was not able to attend both days, I was able to sit in for four hours on several afternoon sessions on the first day. I received a copy of the workbook materials designed for the conference. The workbook consisted mainly of copies of the power point slides utilized in all presentations from the two-day conference. The workshop was structured very similarly to a lecture classroom situation with the facilitators trying to get participation from the attendees at various points. A general session for all attendees was held after lunch, followed by breakout sessions on specific topics. I sat in the back or close to the back row



in all the sessions I attended trying to be as unobtrusive as possible. I had very little contact with the attendees.

The next workshop I attended was a regional workshop held in the southern part of the state. The location of the workshop made for a 1-2 hour drive for participants. The workshop was repeated the next day in the northern part of the state for schools. The workshop was a seven-hour, one-day conference and I attended the entire day. This workshop was a smaller group with approximately 50 people in attendance. I pre-registered for the event as a graduate student and was again given copies of all the materials. This workshop was held in November of 2003, which coincided with the time I was beginning my interviews. In addition to the points of observation, my goal was also to meet some of the individuals I would soon be contacting for interviews. During this workshop, I was able to sit in at several different university tables and listen to the discussion taking place. If they appeared to be hesitant to discuss some issue while I was sitting in, I quietly got up and moved to another table. I observed that all university administrators sat with other members of their institution as they entered the room although they were not required to do so until after lunch. The facilitator for the workshop made a similar observation and commented on the occurrence in her opening remarks. The participants did not know I was observing their interactions. I think the reason for sitting together had to do primarily with a team mentality of the participants.

After completing my observations at these two functions, I developed a system of putting my field notes together for easy reference. I filed my notes according to various categories of observation: physical, stakeholder communicative interactions, topics of communication, and miscellaneous. I found that by attending these workshops I was able

to gain additional insights into the change process in addition to observing how some people were reacting to the process at different stages. My observations throughout this study served to enhance my analysis of the transcripts and texts.

### Text Analysis

My final method of data collection was through the analysis of various texts related to the topic under study. Textual analysis is a method communication researchers utilize to describe and interpret the characteristics of recorded or visual messages (Frey et. al, 2000). I approached the use of textual analysis as a means of exploring the themes and issues found in pertinent texts and then comparing those themes with the data from interviews and observations. Thus, the creation and dissemination of formal documents were considered a part of the change process.

Portions of fifteen different texts were determined as units of analysis for the textual analysis. For purposes of this study, texts are defined as written documents related to the admissions criteria framework change process including reports, newsletters, websites, press releases, and printed plans, all authored by various stakeholder groups. Texts for inclusion were selected throughout the study through different approaches. In some cases, I was given copies of texts and told that I would need the document as a reference, in other cases I determined what texts to include based on how the research process unfolded and what points of the change I was focusing on. A list of all documents included in the textual analysis can be found in Appendix C.

While I was given a copy of each university's recruitment plans (retention plans had not been finalized within the timeframe of the research) only university documents from the six universities selected for the study were included in the data sample. The

primary unit of analysis for the university documents were the sections of the universities' marketing and recruitment plans titled: Executive Summary, History, Mission, Strengths and Weaknesses. These sections were found in all of the plans and will thus make for better and more consistent comparison and contrast of the text themselves.

Documents for analysis from the state-governing agency included the 2001 master plan and materials found on the website including the consultant's report on findings and recommendations as well as a final report issued prior to the start of the contracted agreement between the state-governing agency and the consulting firm. A few miscellaneous texts, such as press releases, were also included.

Texts from the consulting firm were also part of the textual analysis. For example, newsletters designed specifically for the institutions under study will be part of the textual analysis for the consulting firm as well as a website link designed specifically for the state development and implementation of the change process. Also included in this area of data collection were the workbooks I received at the two conferences I attended.

After selecting the documents to be included in the study, and following the interviews and observations, I began the analysis of the texts. Once again, I thought it important to determine overall themes that would help to define the data. After several readings of the texts, during which I highlighted consistencies and inconsistencies among the texts, I collapsed the existing themes into more definitive categories. The same volunteer coder I worked with on categories from the interview data reviewed these categories as well and was in agreement with them. The codebook for the text analysis can be found in Appendix D.

## Rigor and Validity

Qualitative inquiry in the social sciences provides for an interesting approach to the discovery of knowledge. Because of the more subjective processes of qualitative inquiry however, the use of such methods can lead to less pronounced and less definitive findings. To counterbalance this factor, there is an ever present need to clarify the methodological processes which lead to the conclusions drawn (Polkinghorne, 1983). Several approaches to enhance the validity and rigor of the current research were undertaken. For example, the process of triangulation of qualitative methods was utilized. Triangulation “involves the comparison of two or more forms of evidence with respect to an object of research interest” (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 240). The triangulation metaphor is taken from the navigation and military strategies utilizing multiple reference points to determine an object’s exact position (Jick, 1979).

Triangulation of methods “insures that emergent concepts and hypotheses are valid” (Mason, 1993, p. 32). Three types of data collection that are inherent to qualitative inquiry were included in this study in a triangulation of methods: in-depth, open-ended interviews; direct observation; and textual analysis (Patton, 1990). The data collected from these different methods was analyzed for emerging themes that addressed the research questions. Then I conducted a comparison of the data across the three methods of data collection to again look for similarities and differences in the findings.

Adding to the validity and rigor of the project, data were compared and analyzed with existing theories to explore how the emergent themes compared and contrasted with previous findings (e.g., Lewis, 2000; Morgan, 2001). In other words, did what I find through analysis of the data make sense in light of previous research and findings? The

findings did not necessarily have to support the previous research, indeed the findings could very well provide a disconfirming element. The comparison to previous research served as a valid reference and framework for this study, thus strengthening the validity and rigor of the current study.

In addition to triangulation and comparison with existing theories, I conducted member checks with three participants in the study: one from the consulting agency and two from the university administration stakeholder group. To do this, I summarized the overall findings from my analysis and asked if they agreed or disagreed with the findings. I also asked if there was anything substantial that had been left out or had been misrepresented. In this way, I was able to determine if my findings were in keeping with their experiences. I conducted the member checks by email as I thought this would be easier for the participants and would perhaps allow them to feel more comfortable in expressing disagreement. Those asked had some questions regarding minor clarifications and then stated that the findings were representative of various aspects of what they had experienced thus far in the process.

#### Researcher Credibility

An issue of qualitative research is the researcher's role in the project. Researcher bias is of concern in both objective and subjective studies but perhaps more so in naturalistic studies such as this one since the researcher serves as the research instrument in the process. "Any credible research strategy requires that the investigator adopt a stance of neutrality with regard to the phenomena under study" (Patton, 1990, p.55). While I do not believe it possible to approach a research project without some

preconceived notions, there are ways to minimize bias and I incorporated several of these into my study.

The first step was to reflect on my biases and the potential impact of these biases on the study. For example, my previous professional experiences with my contact at the state-governing agency predisposed me to think favorably of his work and efforts regarding the admissions criteria framework. To neutralize the bias as much as possible, I included perspectives from multiple stakeholders to better reflect all parties involved in the process. Secondly, the questions in the interview protocol (Appendix A) were worded as such to be non-leading, open-ended questions. This way, participants were not led to their answers. I also conducted what I called an assumption check to make sure my own assumptions were not factoring into the design or analysis. I did this throughout the study and would realign my thinking process when necessary. For example, I assumed there would be great resistance by the university administrators when, in fact, I found little to no evidence of overt resistance. I then had to rethink what I thought I knew about this stakeholder group. Finally, to enhance my credibility as a researcher, procedures such as systematic-data collection, triangulation of methods (as discussed previously), member checks, and other techniques were closely followed.

The phrase “attention to detail” best summarizes the methodological approach found in this study. Through devising and revising a systematic approach to the topic under study, I was better able to pull together and make sense of the findings that are discussed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 5

### Findings

“So part of the problem is there has not been coherent communication about what they [governing agency] were trying to do. Now along the way, as the pieces happened, it started to make sense.” (university administrator)

The data from this study yielded numerous and interesting findings concerning the creation of meaning in times of organizational change. The findings are best presented and understood when interwoven together with a discussion of the results of the findings. This chapter is organized by the research questions posited earlier in the study. Each question is treated as a separate section in this chapter and includes: a) Categories of meaning, b) Creation of meaning, c) Impact of similar and dissimilar meanings, and d) Impact of multiple levels of power and authority. All findings discussed here refer to the implementation of the new admissions criteria framework as put forth in a state master plan for higher education. The overall findings and components of each finding are previewed in the following table.

#### Summary of Findings

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Table 1

#### Summary of Findings

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<u>Overall Findings</u>	<u>Components</u>
Categories of Meanings	Reconstructing Knowledge
	Use of data
	Rethinking and redefining

	Getting the message out
	Inclusion and involvement
	Resources
	Financial sources
	Human resources
	Data resources
	Emphasizing differences
Creation of meaning	Symbols
	Intentional creation of meaning
	Documents
	Meetings
	Consultants
	Underutilization of symbols and
	the unintentional creation
	of meaning
	Influence of symbols on
	meaning
Impact of similar and dissimilar meanings	Similar meanings
	Dissimilar meanings
Impact of multiple levels of power	Types of Power
	Dominant reality
	Withholding information
	Different roles – different realities



## Categories of Meaning

The first research question asked: “What meanings were created during the process of change under study?” This question was intended to develop a foundation for findings regarding what was going on at the very inner core of the stakeholders’ thought processes. Three overall categories of meaning emerged through data analysis and are titled: a) Reconstructing knowledge, b) Resources, and c) Emphasizing differences. Within the three categories I have included the themes that best define and explain the categories.

### Reconstructing Knowledge

The category of reconstructing knowledge refers to the recognition by stakeholders that it is necessary to change the way people think about a particular subject in order to achieve the desired goals of the change being implemented. As Eckel and Kezar (2003) stated: “Transformation is about making new sense” (p. 49). The new understanding stakeholders may achieve during change falls under two types: attaching new meaning to familiar concepts and ideas and developing and adopting new language and concepts to describe the institution. Both types of understanding are evident in the emergent theme of reconstructing knowledge.

Reconstructing knowledge pertains to individuals rebuilding knowledge internally as well as getting others to think differently. Within the category of reconstructing knowledge are four themes that best describe participants’ attempts to inform themselves as well as others in regard to the implementation of the admissions criteria framework.

These themes include: a) The use of data, b) rethinking and redefining, c) getting the message out, and d) inclusion and involvement.

### The Use of Data

The utilization of statistical, quantitative data figured prominently in building new knowledge. Statistical data encompassed such things as ACT scores of entering freshmen and enrollment and retention numbers. Data came from different sources, flowing among stakeholder groups. The subject content of the quantitative data determined which groups received what information. All three groups studied in this project collected statistical data and exchanged data with other members to help create meaning and understanding for the stakeholders. This is clearly seen in a statement from one of the consultants. In this instance Joe said: “our approach to this is simply overwhelm the client with the logic and the research and the persuasiveness of results that can be achieved and have been achieved by implementing what we just consider to be best practice strategies.”

Several administrators mentioned their use of data in the process of establishing goals and making decisions. Harry, an administrator with 22 years of experience in the areas of student recruitment and retention had this to say:

I'll tell you that, first of all our goals were based on data, they were data driven. We used historical data from our own sources as well as the [governing agency and consulting agency]. But, when we looked at the data for the population of students that we were serving, and the students that we wanted to graduate, there were some inconsistencies in what we were finding.

In another example Yvonne, a faculty member who was serving as director for several different university efforts, described her experience with utilizing data to better understand the impact of decisions being made. She commented:

I was surprised at how long it [collecting and analyzing data] took. We would ask for data, and then you get that back and then you have to look at it and figure “well, does this really mean what it seems to say?” and then really think about it. Then you realize that you should have asked for other data too and then you get back the additional data and it’s like whoa, this tiny little change makes all these differences with minority students or some other cohort. We even looked at our top feeder schools, where [university] gets the majority of its students, to see what kind of an impact the tougher admissions standards would have on them.

The use of data in this situation and others led to a better understanding of the impact these decisions would have on the university and helped to create better, more informed participants. Deetz, Tracy, and Simpson (2000) talked about the importance of guiding interpretations and managing meaning through the process of framing. In the current study, data can be thought of as a type of framing device that helps participants to reconstruct knowledge. The statistical data helped the participants make sense of and assign meaning to the changes underway.

Using data to gain a better understanding of the situation often times led the stakeholders to rethink how they defined particular issues or factors in the change process. This is evident in the next theme associated with the category of reconstructing knowledge, that of rethinking and redefining.

## Rethinking and Redefining

In this theme of reconstructing knowledge, participants exhibited evidence that they were rethinking and redefining what they currently think about recruitment and retention and the impact of new admissions criteria on the status quo. In the past members of the governing agency and university administrators saw admissions as an open process that allowed all who wished to attend a university the opportunity to do so, no matter the student's academic preparation or ability. A selective admissions process however, limits a student's opportunity to attend a particular institution of higher education to factors based on the student's academic preparation and ability. In this sense, Eckel and Kezar (2003) focused on the importance of getting participants of change to rethink their beliefs and values. One means of getting stakeholders to rethink and redefine occurs when the participants attach new meaning to familiar concepts and ideas. An example is Gary's (a university administrator with 24 years of experience currently serving in enrollment management) statement when he said:

What has come out of this [master plan] is that as a university we are kind of retooling our thought processes, our goals and mission ....When the consultants come back, they will offer some suggestions as to how we may want to retool some of our day-to-day operations and policy and procedures in terms of serving students....and I'm kind of excited about that.

Eric, a former professor and now university administrator, gave an example of how his campus was going through a rethinking and redefining process by getting others on campus to think differently:

We started announcing to our faculty this is what it [master plan] was going to be

and of course the first three times you tell faculty something it's like "it doesn't apply to me, it's your job to go find kids for me to teach it's not our job," and so we have slowly started changing the culture of the campus to "hey folks, all of us have to be involved in recruitment, all of us have to be involved in retention" and so we started establishing campus-wide recruitment and retention committees.

Each academic college, and/or program, has a faculty member that's designated as a recruitment and retention coordinator, for that degreed program of that area, so that helps to ensure that it's going to be a topic of discussion for consideration at the faculty level, not just at the administrative levels. Now that doesn't mean all of them are working well, we have some that are doing an outstanding job, and others we're having to push and pull as they scream, but uh I think they're [faculty] starting to see it's going to happen, it's going to happen, and I think that they have seen a strong effort by the administrative staff who handle admissions to move towards that so I think people are starting to believe it's going to happen.

Robert, a university staff member employed in the area of external affairs, talked about the use of a campus newsletter to help explain certain concepts to the constituency in an effort to restructure knowledge. Robert said:

One thing that we will do that has not been done previously is to include a column in the [campus newsletter]. The column will be written either by the [administrator] or the [administrator] explaining some little piece of [the plan] and we will make it sweet and short so that people want to read it. They'll read it and walk away and hopefully we'll put some pieces of the puzzle together for them so that they understand what's going on.

Another means of getting people to create new knowledge and meanings towards change involves getting the information out to stakeholders. This process ties in with the third element of restructuring knowledge which I call getting the message out. In an effort to rethink, redefine and ultimately reconstruct knowledge, stakeholders find they must get the word out to other stakeholder groups impacted by the changes in admissions criteria, namely, the high school student systems that feed into the university system.

### Getting the Message Out

A part of reconstructing knowledge is that stakeholders realize the importance of sharing information with others in order to create a new reality for others. One of the main issues that had to be addressed by all the universities in implementing the admissions criteria framework was to make sure that the high school administrators were well aware of the changes in order to give the schools and students enough time to make adjustments in order to prepare for the higher standards. The idea of getting the message out was found repeatedly throughout the interviews with campus administrators.

For example, Gary emphasized the necessity of alerting others, including the high school systems, to the change. He said:

I think the university has been very resolute in letting the public know that we are ratcheting up the requirements here and we do it in a fashion where it's not so abrupt. The high school students and principal and counselors know that this is coming down the pike. I think we do that very effectively.

Jim, a student affairs professional in the upper tier of university administration talked about the necessity of getting the message out to quell fears in the community that the university would no longer accept the local high school students. He explained:

The initial reception by the general community was “well, does that mean [university] is not going to let us go there anymore?” And so we had to reassure them that we were committed to moving forward with the admissions criteria and that we were going to work with the local high schools to try to make sure as many students as possible are prepared. So, the high schools are one constituency we had to work with.

Jim went on to say:

Now, when our recruiters go out, all our publications have the information. The publications say that students have to have “this requirement, you need to have the core, you better have the ACT or your grades or whatever it’s going to be,” so that’s been an intentional public relations program and emphasis on our part.

High school systems were not the only stakeholder group that needed to be kept informed and in the loop. Subsystems within the university campuses needed to be informed as well. Helen, who is a former professor turned administrator for university development, describes her experience in getting the message out to other campus personnel.

Once the recruitment documents were finalized and turned into the [governing agency] we made copies for every department, the department head received a copy, every director of every major office on campus received a copy. We had presentations that [administrator and consultant] did for the academic community. We invited everybody, you know faculty, department heads, people in all of the areas of the university, and told them to come and see the presentation. We knew

they had questions about: What is this? And where did it come from? How did we get to this point and where are we expecting to arrive at?

A part of the effort to get the message out to others resulted in events of inclusion and involvement. This made the final theme of the category of restructuring knowledge.

### Inclusion and Involvement

The element of inclusion and involvement refers to recognition of the importance of including and involving stakeholders in order to achieve goals and direct and/or change thinking patterns. Many of the interviewees talked about their efforts to do that. Kristen is another administrator who moved from the arena of teaching and research. She currently works directly in enrollment management. She said:

Our experience has been very good. We've had a lot of meetings on campus – bringing people together from different departments. The buy-in has been good. We've had a lot of participation and input campus-wide. We've gotten student input. The president has been very involved, more so than we even expected actually.

Consultants also recognized the importance of involving those on campus they would be working with during the change process. One consultant, Heather, spoke of her initial experience with one of the universities this way.

What I tried to do is, well, you know there is a group that [the university] had already assigned and that was going to be the group that I would be meeting with, so selecting who should be included was something that was really out of our control. This was a group that included admissions people, enrollment officers, some faculty members, and financial aid people. Several of the meetings initially



included everybody in order to collect information. One key group that I met with on my very first visit was the president and his cabinet to find out their direction for the university, how they thought things were going, what their reaction to the master plan was. The second group of equal importance to me was the enrollment staff. I met with them because I needed to find out from them what they were really doing, what they thought about the master plan in order to try and make sure that everybody was sort of on the same page.

During our interview Heather reflected further on the process and went on to say: I think that in the end, in terms of how we get all these stakeholders to work together, it's important to include everyone, especially the people on campus that are key to the project – the people that are important to the project. You have to meet with these people and really listen to them and then, whether it's the end of the first day or the end of the entire visit it's important to meet again, with those same people so that they understand that you've heard what they were saying. I think you have to do a lot of playing back what people have told you and what you think you should do about it. In my opinion, if you're a consultant and they [client members] don't trust you or they don't think you're listening to them, or have their best interest in mind, it's going to be a disaster. Consultants are typically not met with open arms.

Reconstructing knowledge is an important aspect of creating meaning for stakeholders in organizational change. As the participants in the interviews spoke about issues related to reconstructing knowledge, another category of meaning emerged, that of resources.

### Resources

A primary factor in determining reality for stakeholders regarding the implementation of the admissions criteria framework was the availability of, or lack of, necessary resources. The second category of meaning, resources, refers to any element that helps or hinders stakeholders in creating shared meaning as they approach the idea of change. Three themes comprise the resource category: a) financial resources, b) human resources, and c) data resources.

### Financial Resources

Financial issues were by and large the most frequently cited issue regarding resources. Whether it was the lack of funding or whose responsibility it was to find more financial resources, this element was prominent throughout the interviews and text documents. Many of the concerns of the university administrators came from a belief that there was a lack of sufficient financial resources to make the recruitment and retention plans possible. Administrators were concerned they would in some way be penalized for not meeting the goals of the proposed plans, even though they had no control as to how the agency distributed its funds. William, who has served as a dean for various departments throughout his twenty-year career, described his concern with financial resources this way.

The assumption from the [governing agency] was that the institutions would find the money internally, and, you can't find that much money internally. We have redirected some resources on our campus, but if you're talking about taking the plan to the next level, it's got to come from outside sustained funding, at least for a three to five year period before you start to have corporate culture change within the university.

Harry, had this to say about the implications of financial resources on their decision to implement higher standards:

We decided to take the steps [moving towards selective admissions] and it was a giant step for us, you know, to go from an open admissions. We really studied it for a couple of years, studied the statistics on classes, studied the profiles of our students who were enrolling and we found there were lots of implications on implementing standards of any kind. We have to be realistic and realize that there are financial implications that you have to take into consideration, for example, we couldn't just say "oh well, we want to be an exclusive, selective institution and not let anybody in unless they have a 27 ACT or higher." We would have to close our doors if we did that. So, all of those factors came into play, what we could afford to do while still doing enough to raise the level of standards, of the perception about the quality of our program.

Members of the consulting agency recognized the problem of funding and expressed an understanding of the administrators' reluctance to accept the plan without guarantees of funding. Craig, who had served in multiple capacities throughout the implementation process, explained it this way:

I think on the one hand the campuses tend to see this [implementation] as a good thing in the sense of having better prepared students. By and large faculty like this idea, that's always what they want. They say: "just get us the best students." On the other hand, from an administrative point of view there's some concern about if enrollment goes down, then does revenue also go down? So, it becomes a business question for many of them. From the institutional point of view, the major challenge is, "okay, we're expected to change and we can do some of that but where are the resources to help us do major expansion in terms of recruitment and retention?"

Craig went on to explain:

There was some money for recruitment but there really wasn't much of anything for retention so given the difficulty of the budget, I think this was probably the biggest negative as far as moving toward change. The idea was "okay, you're expecting us to do a lot more," because it is not cheap to recruit more students, so they think "Well, what's this going to cost?"

John, a member of the consulting agency who guided the entire implementation process explained the financial resource issue this way:

There was really a victim mentality in September of 2001. You could hardly blame them [administrators] with 13 state budget cuts in higher education in 12 years. It's a state that just didn't have enough resources to do anything and was ranking at the bottom of the fifty states, at the bottom of the SREB and just about any other measure of any importance. It just was not a happy place but there has been some progress made and for the last couple of years the governor has kept

the resources intact for higher education. In fact the state in the last few years has been either first or second nationally in terms of spending per student for higher education and that's just really a commitment that the governor made and sustained in spite of the fact the he was having to deal with tight budgets elsewhere.

Lack of money and funding was not the only part of the resource category.

Individuals were seen as resources as well. This element of resources seemed to be much more promising than budgets and funding in terms of availability.

### Human Resources

Participants talked about how they considered others as resources that helped them achieve certain goals. Human resources, such as the consultants, served as a means to clarify issues and create more shared meanings among the participants. For example, Jim commented:

We've had an outstanding recruitment consultant that helped us to put together a recruitment plan, and she was very knowledgeable. She knew how to work with people across the campus. She was professional and confident enough but yet had great communication skills that would allow her to interact with anyone, so there was a lot of success in what [the consulting agency] provided here.

In talking about the fact that the governing agency brought in a consulting agency to help administer the implementation, one enrollment administrator, Raisa, said:

By backing up [the plan] with consulting help, it makes it more likely that it [change] can happen instead of just being good words on paper. By bringing in

[the consulting agency] to work with recruitment, to include admissions processing and things like that, that just makes it more likely that it'll work.

Beth, an administrator in enrollment management, said this about the her campus consultant, "She was excellent and what made her excellent is that she could work with anybody on the campus, she knew her stuff, she was well organized, and she was well prepared."

The governing agency and consulting agency were also willing and able to provide data as a resource for the universities during the implementation process. While utilizing data was included and discussed in the category of reconstructing knowledge, data as a resource is discussed further.

#### Data Resources

In this category, data is referred to as statistical information made available by others. Again, stakeholders talked in terms of having an abundance of data or lacking data and the impact either scenario had on the change process. The data was provided primarily by the consultants and governing agency to the university administrators. Heather, a consultant, talked extensively about her experiences with what data could do to positively impact the implementation of a new program. She said:

You really have to back things up with a lot of data, a lot of facts, a lot of examples as to how this has worked before.... I do think that if you really are able to show them [clients] why you need to do this, by giving examples you can move the institution forward. I think sometimes they [administrators] think we just spit out statistics and data all the time, but numbers don't lie. Sometimes I think the most important role of the consultant is to help them [clients] understand how to

get data so you can use the data to your advantage, because it's really amazing once you start looking at things that you can see what works and what doesn't work.

Still another consultant stressed the importance of data. Craig stated,

One of our mottos is "if it moves, track it." You've got to look at the data and the information or else you're just sort of out there poking around somewhere. And with almost every campus we work with, around the country, we find their data are terrible. They just have not collected the right things or it's not in an accurate and appropriate format. So, the first step on almost any first visit to a campus is getting their data in order, and if they don't have it, okay that's fine, we'll build it from there. That's often the major challenge for their institutional research area but that's step number one. Figure out where we are, what do we have, what do we need and given what we need how do we set up the system so we are able to get this. Ideally, when we leave they have got standard reports. They've got information that's coming out on a regular basis, they're reviewing that, looking at it to see if it's accurate. Once you get all that in place you're in pretty good shape.

The consultants also talked about the importance of their having university data before they go in to work with the administrators. Consultants are therefore given background data on the universities they have been assigned to. Heather said:

The consulting agency is great about getting us tons of information, so before I ever went into to see anybody at [university] they sent a ton of information about the project in general and then they sent me a lot of information about the

university. Things like publications, long range plans, their budget, and staffing.

You know it's more information than you probably could ever comprehend, but it was really good to have - it was probably 4 four-inch binders of information.

The availability, or lack of, resources figures into the creation of meaning when it comes to change in organizations. Whether it is the claim that there is not enough money and funding or an abundance of data, participants rely on resources to get through the process of change.

#### Emphasizing Differences

Emphasizing differences is the third and final category of meaning that emerged from the data. This category refers to the stakeholders' beliefs that each university is different in some way from the others and/or in their approach to change. First, all university administrators I spoke with emphasized the fact that their university had already started to increase admission standards long before the governing agency plan to do so. Several administrators communicated that the universities had come up with this idea on their own. Essentially, they felt they were moving ahead of the governing agency. For example, Helen said:

They [governing agency] have what I think of as in the old vernacular, the role, mission and scope statement which basically says this is what you are, you are an institution in this category, you offer these kind of degrees etc., where as our strategic mission was very vision focused, you know "this is what you will become," and even though it's stated in the present tense, this is what your goal is overall. Our strategic mission was to become the educational, cultural, economic



leader of the [state region]. So, a very different kind of thing than what [governing agency's] determined as our mission.

Another senior level administrator Raisa, had this to say about differences in their plan and the governing agency's plan:

Well, [university] was already in the works to move to a 3.0 academic GPA which is on that core, and a particular ACT score. The [state plan] says a 3.0 cumulative or an ACT score of 25. But 25 is kind of high, you know. It is kind of high, but according to the [state plan] if a student had a 25 ACT and a 2.0 GPA, then the student would be admitted but [our university] says "we don't think so." So, right now, I think everybody is fine in working within the [state plan] because it actually gives all kinds of leeway to the universities.

Raisa went on to say:

By having different institutions with different focuses well, they can all be struggling. In the 70's [university] was doing a lot of remedial education and so was everyone and that's just, well, that's just dumb. You can't do everything and so to focus on different strengths of the universities just makes a lot more sense.

One consultant talked about his experiences with universities and the thinking of the administrators that their university is different from everyone else's. John said:

I think the approach we take is, well first of all we have a track record that we can point to, we have worked with numerous institutions similar to theirs. And of course, we hear "nobody is like our institution" and you have to be careful that you don't start saying to them: "It worked here and therefore it will work at your

place” because the first defense they have is that “we’re different, we’re unique.” Well, everybody is, actually.

When asked if his university had a mission statement, Jim said:

We have a mission statement and there are goals and the goals generally reflect or come directly or exactly from the master plan. Probably the biggest weakness we have, and we’re focusing on that now, has to do with image. We are an institution that has evolved from a typical regional state institution, primarily baccalaureate degree programs, to one that has not just that but some master’s degree programs/specialists and so we’re still evolving into what we’re going to be and one of the things that the new [administrator] wants to do is bring in a consultant that’s going to put us through a process that causes us to reexamine corporate image. You know, look at who we are, what we want to be, and of course in alignment with the master plan, but at the same time address everything from what image are we going to sell to the community to how are we going to sustain an image of the campus.

Generally, it is human nature to believe that we are our own, unique person, unlike any other. Individuals in organizations are no different. Stakeholders in the process firmly believe that their institutions have something different to offer the state and have different needs from other institutions and that these differences need to be recognized. As stakeholders interact with one another and attempt to comply with the state plan, they still hold on to their individual identities. This individuality further creates a reality for the change process.

## Creation of Meaning

In the second research question I chose to explore the creation of meaning and asked the question: How were meanings intentionally and unintentionally created among stakeholders during this organizational change? A second part of that same research question asked: How do the various elements (e.g., documents, meetings, etc.) of organizational change interact with and influence one another during the change process?

The data from interviews, texts, and observations showed evidence of change agents intentionally attempting to create shared meaning and buy-in to the change process. All of the stakeholder groups in this study took on the role of change agents at some point. The administrators acted as change agents towards faculty and community members and the governing agency and consulting agency acted as change agents towards the university administrators. Whoever the change agent, all employed the use of symbols in order to reconstruct knowledge and create meaning during this change process. The use of symbols is explored as to the ability of symbols to intentionally create meaning, unintentionally create meaning, and influence the meanings created.

The intentional creation of meaning in this study is considered a strategy to manage change and stakeholders. The strategy was implemented through the use and manipulation of symbols. Shared meaning, typically the desired goal in change, was not always the outcome of change in this process however. There is also what I call an unintentional creation of meaning. The unintentional creation of meaning seemed to occur more so as a result of missed opportunities to use symbols to create shared meaning. The meanings created unintentionally through the underutilization of symbols were most often dissimilar meanings. The underutilization of symbols is not considered a

strategy in this study as there was no indication that the change agents planned to create shared meaning by not fully using available symbols. I shall discuss findings relevant to both parts of research question two.

### Symbols and the Intentional Creation of Meaning

Symbols, as defined previously, are thought of as abstract, arbitrary, and ambiguous representations of other things. The state plan was originally created through a series of symbolic steps and actions. In the first step, focus groups, representative of the different universities and systems, were put together in order to gather initial input and feedback as to what should be included in the plan. From there, the governing agency created the plan, in turn hiring the consulting group to direct the implementation of the goals set forth in the plan. The consulting group conducted a statewide market research analysis that led to the development of several documents including the consultants' reports on findings and recommendations. These steps are reflective of the categories of meaning presented earlier. For example, the use of focus groups ties in with reconstructing knowledge by including a diverse sample of stakeholders to gather input and rethink reality. The step of hiring an outside group relates to the element of utilizing human resources as a means of providing for interactions and information among stakeholders. These steps, taken to formulate and implement the plan, are symbolic gestures that intentionally create some sort of meaning.

Based on the premise that symbols are used to intentionally communicate, I determined three categories of symbols found throughout the data. These categories include: documents, meetings and consultants.

## Documents

Documents were the texts created during this process and included the state plan itself, university documents and consulting agency documents. Documents served as symbols of the change process by their formal, written representation of the thoughts, issues, and goals of the various stakeholders involved. The instruments provided a reference for those participating in the change process as well as outsiders seeking information on the process.

The statewide plan document was considered a symbol of the entire change process, written to guide all aspects of the process. The formal plan was a bound document, professionally printed and distributed to multiple sources. An inclusive appeal was found in the opening pages of the plan which states:

[State's] postsecondary education system is dedicated to improving the quality of life for the state's citizens. It demands from its institutions a level of performance in teaching, research, and public service that both acknowledges and challenges the capabilities and mission of each. To pursue this vision for [state], the public postsecondary education community has adopted three primary goals:

1. Increase opportunities for student access and success
2. Ensure quality and accountability
3. Enhance services to communities and state

These goals served to set the tone and the direction for the rest of the plan and eventual implementation of the plan. While the state plan document was symbolic of the statewide system of higher education, it did not create a buy-in at the individual campus

level. For example, in the executive summary report by the consulting agency, the consultants wrote:

During the course of the strategic enrollment analysis, the consultants learned that there is little or no commitment at the campus level to the stated goals in the [governing agency's] master plan. Focus group participants describe the goals as worthy and they in no way opposed them. They simply did not view them as relevant to their respective campuses.

To correct this disassociation, consultants visited their assigned campuses and began the process of designing and constructing campus recruitment and retention documents that would meet the standards of the admissions criteria framework while at the same time allowing the campuses to identify with institutional-specific plans, thus creating more shared meaning and vision among the stakeholders. John, from the consulting agency, spoke about the importance of having institutional-specific goals when he said: “This [creating university documents] was an attempt to overcome their objections. By using institutional specific research to identify what the priorities were on that particular campus we were able to start building buy-in to their set of strategies that needed to be done.”

John went on to explain:

So, the observation we made back in September was that nobody subscribed to the goals set forth by the [governing agency]. The campuses lacked their own goals and we knew that's what they're really going to have commitment to. So we needed a process where we did goal setting at the campus level and then roll those goals up into a statewide projection to compare those university goals to what's

been assumed in the [state] plan. Then comes the negotiation: either the campus changes their goals based on that comparison or the [state] plan changes and in effect that's what has happened. The institutional goals have far and away exceeded the master plan goals, which is what we suspected would happen. The theory is then that if you've done the goals at the campus level then they're yours, so you're committed to them. So, now we've got a whole different dynamic going on with ownership, rather than the thinking that this [state] plan was created in a vacuum. If you're a campus you think that and that it's been imposed on you. Then when you've all of a sudden got your own goal that you're trying to achieve and it fits into a statewide vision, that's a different story.

Heather spoke to the idea of customizing plans and courses of action for each institution. She said:

The full time people at [consulting agency] give us consultants a lot of things to work from, a lot of samples of agendas, and suggestions for how we could proceed. But if I go in with that information and I never change that and just do things exactly the way every other consultant does, that really doesn't work.

Because [university] is different from [university or university] or whatever, so I think if they [administrators] really feel like you understand them and listen to them and are really there to help, it just makes it a lot easier obviously.

Examples of how institutions expressed their differences are found in excerpts from the recruiting plans. One plan states the university's mission as "the university is dedicated to meeting the unique geographic and multicultural needs of the south central

part of the state.” Another plan referred to the institution’s “standout facilities” including the library, arena, alumni house and aquatic center as some of their unique strengths.

Still another university plan highlighted the challenges the state plan put before them because of their institution’s uniqueness:

[This university] faces an uncomfortable challenge because of the policies and priorities set by the state and by educational governing bodies within the state which seem not to take into full account the unique mission of or the specific circumstances faced by [the state’s] major urban public research university.

While the meanings created did not always constitute a shared reality for the stakeholders, the intentional, strategic creation of campus-specific documents allowed for identification and better managing of the meaning that was created. Because even while campus documents expressed the uniqueness of the institutions, the documents still were written to comply with the goals and objectives of the statewide plan and the findings of the documents created by the consulting agency. Documents therefore served as tangible referents for stakeholders to utilize in order to create meaning and make sense of their role in the change process. Therefore, by having universities create documents symbolic of their institutions, meaning that could be related to the overall state plan was established. The administrators produced documents that emphasized the institutions’ differences and allowed the administrators to more readily identify with the proposed changes to the admissions criteria framework. This customization of documents intentionally helped to create shared meaning among the stakeholders and helped to move the change process forward while still respecting the stakeholders’ perceived uniqueness.



## Meetings

A second category of symbols that emerged is that of meetings. Meetings, including workshops, were held throughout the process. Meetings symbolize a formal bringing together of individuals to create and manage meaning. The gathering of stakeholders represented another opportunity to reinforce the message of change. Some meetings were statewide and others were regional or targeted to a specific group of administrators. John explained the value of having participants come together in formal meeting situations when he stated:

Another component of our project was the professional training and development that needed to happen. We're committed to facilitate that only not just with the on-campus consultations but we held a number of statewide workshops on a variety of topics including recruiting and retention related issues. In addition, [consulting agency] has national conferences and institutes, I think 17 years now we've run the [Conference]. We gave 50 free registrations to attend that and so over the last two summers we've had a lot of participants from the [state] project come through. The conference is designed to provide much more formal training and development in enrollment management and [university administrators] have been able to apply that information to their campuses. And so, I believe we were close to 800 different professional development experiences that were had by the folks in [state] in that two-year period. I think among other things that the quality of the thinking, the quality of debate and discussion from everybody around the state, has been facilitated by the fact that they've been participants in these things.

In an effort to be thorough in collecting data, I attended two of the workshops (one statewide and one regional) hosted by the consulting agency. The first conference I attended was a statewide workshop held in the central part of the state. The workshop was two days and included several hundred attendees. Sessions were sometimes held for the group as a whole and then smaller, breakout sessions were utilized as well. Attendees received nametags and workbooks with the name of the consulting agency on them. The majority of the presentations were made utilizing PowerPoint slides. Copies of the slides were included in the workbook. Session leaders also tried to engage those in the audience through questions and activities. Some audience members were enthusiastic and participated readily, while others did not. I was reminded of my own experience teaching in a college classroom.

The regional meeting I attended was a one-day meeting held in the southern part of the state and included all the campuses I included in the study. The meeting was a much smaller group with about fifty people in attendance. Once again, the attendees were given nametags and workbooks. Participants sat at tables with other members of their own universities. The morning session included the consultant explaining and reviewing the materials that would be utilized in the afternoon session. Another consultant, who had implemented this same program on her campus also spoke about the program. After lunch, participants were given an assignment to carry out in order to facilitate the implementation of this program on their campuses. The program was a survey instrument that would be utilized during the spring freshman orientation as a means of gathering data on the students that could then be utilized by academic counselors to assist in working with these students, ultimately working towards the retention of the students.

The consultants I spoke with explained their objectives in holding workshops and meetings. For example John said,

Last October we had a statewide forum for public post secondary education. [The head of the governing agency] assembled a lot of the statewide higher education leaders together including a number of board members from the governing agency and the management boards. At the same time, it was also a celebratory lunch for the governor, on his way out, kind of recognizing his role and contribution to higher education during his administration.

Craig, when speaking about another series of workshops said,

Then, as a separate item in another contract, the board entered into an agreement with us to provide leadership development for the institutions. This consisted of a university assessment survey as well as an executive team performance survey, in other words, the chancellor's or president's team. A performance evaluation was sent out to all of those in leadership positions that were involved in some aspect of this project. That's anywhere from 40 to maybe 100 people on each of the campuses. Another consultant and I then visited all of the campuses to do a two-day leadership development workshop. The first morning we usually meet with the chancellor, and then, the afternoon with the executive group, and we would go over the university assessment and also the executive team assessment. And then the second day all of the people who filled out the survey were invited and this was much more of a leadership development kind of activity for them. It included a lot of interactive activity including developing breakthrough ideas to move them from good to great and talking about redefining mission, goals, core values and

vision for the institution. Topics like what leadership is and how they can differentiate that from management. I would key in results and then throw it up on the projector so they had a running report in some areas that we thought they should concentrate on and we'd help them afterwards.

Significant evidence pointed to the use of meetings by university administrators to reach stakeholder groups. Administrators spoke of meetings held with other departments and staff across campus regarding the subject of the admissions criteria framework. They also spoke of their meetings with the stakeholders involved in the high school system in order to explain and intentionally create meaning for those participants as well. For example, Raisa commented:

With the high schools, every time we raise admission standards we meet with the principals first. We go to three or four or five different places around the state, invite them to lunch or have some kind of a food meeting where we can bring the principal, etc. in and talk about where we want to go and why and of course how will this affect them. When we went up to 2.8 [GPA] we invited many principals over to [university] meeting, gave them a briefing, and we had an interesting conversation with them, and then we did the same thing in [city] and the same thing up in [city].

Participation in meetings also serves to recognize the accomplishments of stakeholders. Look for example at this statement by John.

The administrators have been participants in these things so when we hold our national conference on student retention this summer our plan will be to feature on the program and in the sessions a number of our [state] campuses as evidence

of best practices, and that's really inspirational to them as well. To have put the work in, have achieved the results and now get a chance, a national forum to show formally how they've done – they're excited about that opportunity.

Recognizing accomplishments during meetings was another means of intentionally creating ownership in the program for those whose achievements were mentioned. Thus, this contributed to shared meaning across stakeholder groups. Recognition sent the message that institutions were doing what they were supposed to be doing as well as acknowledging that someone had noticed and appreciated their efforts.

Meetings therefore bring people together and serve as a symbol of participants facing the challenge of change together. In the process under study, meetings were used as a method to disseminate information, promote products, and provide for interactions among stakeholders.

#### Consultants as Symbols

After the consulting agency developed its first reports and designed a plan of action with the governing agency to implement the admissions changes, individual consultants were then assigned to particular campuses and began meeting with the universities. Consultants were assigned to the campuses so that each campus felt they had “their own” consultant working especially for them. Campus visits were frequent by the consulting agency. Through this framework, the consultant, and his or her methodology, then becomes a symbol representative of the change process through which the university can communicate.

For example, Heather explained how she saw her role in facilitating change for her clients. She put it this way:

I would say to the enrollment people, “let’s use me to be a voice for you all,” because unfortunately, sometimes presidents and cabinets listen to a consultant more than they listen to their own people. It’s a shame but that’s kind of how it works. It’s as though they sometimes pay you to tell them what they already know, and if that’s the case then let’s use me for that, let me be the one to say “hey this really isn’t working.”

In another part of the same interview, Heather gave another example when she said:

They [enrollment administrators] had some things they were trying to get through to be included in some publications and they were meeting some resistance with that. There were a few things the admission’s people wanted on their website that the public relations people didn’t agree with. I told [university administrator] the admissions people were absolutely right, that what they wanted done needed to be done. Once the [university administrator] heard that he said absolutely and the information was added the next day. I have been in both roles. Having been on the other end of the consulting process when at [her own university] we worked with a consultant from [consulting group], he [consultant] would always tell us whenever he came here “Let me be the heavy, if there’s something we’ve got to say let me do that.” And it worked. I would always tell them [enrollment people] “This [using the consultant as the heavy] might not be fair, or whatever, but if it’s going to make your life easier, let’s do it.”

Repeatedly in my interviews, administrators identified the consulting agency as a

good resource of information in assisting them with the implementation and to help them comply with the master plan. This is in keeping with the resources category of meaning discussed previously. Another example of consultants serving as symbols for the process was found in the following when Harry said:

I don't know if you know the [consulting agency] structure but they have full time people and they have associates. The associates are people who are in the field like me and others who are already practicing some of the best [consulting group] practices at their own institutions so [the consulting agency] hires them as associates to consult with other institutions. Our first consultant has been a great help and a great resource so we've really looked at them not as people who are coming in to tell us how to do something but people who were resources for us to help us get where we wanted to go and you know, from time to time we didn't fall in line quite as much as they may have wanted us to [laughter].

The inclusive approaches the consultants took with the administrators enhanced the ability of the administrators to feel a part of the change process. Consultants became a voice for the administrators and served as liaisons to the governing agency. Thus, consultants symbolically represented a means for the administrators to have their voices heard. Consultants also served as symbols of resources, facilitating the change processes for the universities. Administrators were able to look to their consultants to gain insight and ideas as to how best to direct their efforts. Because of the ways in which the consultants carried out their roles, administrators positively identified with them and therefore were ultimately more likely to arrive at shared meanings regarding the change process.

In these examples, documents, meetings, and consultants were used to intentionally create shared meanings among the stakeholder groups. For example, documents allowed the administrators to create customized plans for their institutions, allowing for increased ownership in the change process. Meetings brought agency staff members and administrators together in attempts to further the buy-in to the change process. The governing agency and consulting agency utilized meetings as an opportunity to reiterate and carry forward their messages to the administrators. The administrators used meetings with community stakeholders for the same reason. Finally, because administrators trusted and identified with their consultants, the consultants provided another opportunity to intentionally create shared meanings. Administrators viewed their consultants as being “on their side” in the change process, making it easier for the administrators to see the overall, big picture of the change process. The intentional creation of meaning through symbols was a smart, strategic move towards facilitating changes in the admissions criteria framework.

#### Underutilization of Symbols and the Unintentional Creation of Meaning

Sometimes, meanings were created unintentionally as a result of the underutilization of available symbols. In several cases it appeared stakeholders missed an opportunity to utilize a symbol to create a positive, shared meaning. For example, the consulting agency created a newsletter specifically for the state participants. The newsletter included graphics of objects that were inherent to the culture of this particular state and thus, familiar to administrators. The inclusion of these graphics appeared to be an attempt to create further identity among stakeholders towards the change process. Similar to creating institutional-specific research and documents, the newsletter related to



the theme of creating identity for stakeholders through inclusion, thus enhancing the creation of shared meaning. As I searched for documents and other materials, I could only find evidence of two newsletters being created during the course of the change process. None of the administrators mentioned a newsletter as a source of information. This struck me as odd because when I first spoke with Richard at the governing agency, he was very enthusiastic about the concept of the newsletter and told me to be sure and check it out as a resource. The limited number of issues I found and the failure of interviewees to mention this resource contradicted what I had learned from the governing agency.

In several interviews with administrators, they expressed frustration over not having adequate information about what was going on in the change process. Administrators cited a lack of communication on the part of the governing and consulting agencies. (This is discussed further in the last section of this chapter in regards to power.) The newsletter could have been a viable, symbolic vehicle to keep members focused and informed, thus creating and managing shared meaning. My analysis is that the change agents missed an opportunity to further create identity and ownership of the plan among the stakeholders by underutilizing symbolic instruments such as the newsletter, thus creating meanings among stakeholders that are far apart from the point of shared meaning.

Another missed opportunity to create shared meaning was in the documents produced for the workshop meetings. These documents, including workbooks and nametags, always featured the logo of the consulting agency prominently along with the state's name and the name of the conference. The documents were not personalized

beyond that for the workshop attendees. A simple logo that was exclusive to this state may have increased the feelings of collaboration regarding these workshops instead of some of the feelings expressed in the interviews. For example, Beth in enrollment management, had this to say about the workshops:

After a period of time of what seems like so many commercials [for the consulting agency], at some point people get tired of going to those [workshops]. They think: “why am I spending my time here for a commercial?” If you’re not going to have the money to implement what they’re talking about then don’t make us sit through it.

Again, a dissimilar meaning was created among stakeholder groups. The consultants saw the workshops as an important opportunity to share information and facilitate change. The administrators, because they had no sense of identity or ownership in the workshops, viewed the experience very differently. Had the workshop material appeared to be more inclusive and team-oriented, perhaps the participants would have come away with a different outlook on the experience – an outlook that was more in keeping with what the governing and consulting agencies had hoped to achieve.

The consulting agency also had a general website which described their company and the work they do. They also set up an additional site specifically for the state members involved in this process. The password (which I was given) was again something that was inherent to the culture of the state. The website included a master schedule and project timeline. Again, none of the interviewees, neither the consultants nor the administrators, mentioned the website as a source of information. The non-

promotion of the website by the primary change agents indicated another missed opportunity to create and manage shared meaning.

I think the underutilization of certain symbols provided for missed opportunities to create shared meaning and the unintentional creation of dissimilar meaning. The underutilization of symbols resulted in insufficient information provided to administrators in some cases. The lack of information through missed opportunities resulted in diminished identity on the part of administrators and, thus, led to the creation of more dissimilar meanings. The creation of dissimilar meanings was unintentional on the part of the change agents but could have been avoided.

#### The Influence of Symbols

The use or underutilization of the symbols of documents, consultants and meetings served to either intentionally or unintentionally create meanings for participants. The current data analysis points to the finding that these symbolic elements interact with, and influence one another, during the change process. The findings speak to part A of the second research question. All the elements weave together at some point in the process to impact the creation of meaning. Utilizing symbols in conjunction with one another, change agents are indeed managing stakeholders through the management of meaning. Failure to utilize available symbols can lead to the mismanagement of stakeholders. For purposes of answering part a of research question 2, I will focus on the proactive use of symbols by change agents.

The interweaving and influence of symbols is evident in my observation that themes emerged from the document data that mirrored many of the themes from the interview process. For example, words and phrases such as “partnerships,”

“collaborative efforts,” “university-wide efforts,” and “community” appeared over and over in each plan and were frequently used by the interviewees in their descriptions of the change process. The use of such terms is indicative of the acknowledgement that inclusion and involvement are necessary for reconstructing knowledge. Thus, it would appear that the language found in various documents became part of the language of the stakeholders. Documents influenced how stakeholders perceived, understood, and communicated about the change process.

Another example of this influence could be found in words and phrases appearing consistently in both written plans and interviews. These words referred to issues of resources. Plans repeatedly referred to topics such as funding, lack of funding, data, and intellectual resources. For example, the plan of one urban institution stated: “The level of financial support received from the state is not adequate to support the real costs of operations across the board.” Funding concerns was a recurring theme in interviews with the administrators. The university documents served as a symbolic means through which administrators were able to formally express their concerns.

Co-mingling symbols, such as documents and meetings or consultants and meetings, reinforces the concepts of the change process. Smircich’s (1983) case study spoke to the concept of creating shared meanings through various symbols. In her study, the author found that interactions among stakeholders during a change process contributed to the development of shared meanings within the organization. Through rituals, slogans, vocabulary and leadership style, employees were able to develop common referents among themselves for action and, sometimes, inaction. Similarly, the organizational change under study included numerous documents, meetings and

consulting methods used in conjunction with one another to create meaning. John spoke to this when he said:

Anytime you are engaged in transformational change, it really is important to stay the course and hold that vision out in front of everybody. In a lot of ways the [governing agency] has, especially the [administrator], has really kept that vision alive of what they want to see happen in postsecondary education in [state] and they've used us as a resource to the campuses. You know, there's sort of a natural tendency to resist the change and preserve the status quo even though the status quo isn't worth preserving. That's the devil you know, you're more comfortable with things the way they are rather than what change might bring. And because of that type of thinking, I think having us as sort of a catalyst for has been extremely helpful.

Deetz, Tracy, and Simpson (2000) talked about the importance of guiding interpretations and managing meaning through the process of framing. The authors stated: "Framing refers to the ways leaders can use their language to shape or modify particular interpretations of organizational events thereby directing likely responses" (p. 67). Framing devices include language tools such as metaphors, stories, artifacts, and myths.

Framing techniques were utilized by the governing agency and the consulting agency to create meaning. For example, much of the language and jargon of the initial reports by the consultants could be found in the recruitment plans developed by the universities at a later date. Many of these same concepts could be found in the interview text as well. Phrases such as "raising the bar," "measuring results and subsequent

accountability,” and “funding concerns” appeared frequently in the documents and interview texts.

A very specific framing device used by the consulting agency and picked up on by an administrator was evident in the following excerpt from the interview with the administrator. In the interview she kept referring to the enrollment management process as a funnel. Kristen said:

It’s a very simple formula as far as their [consulting agency] enrollment management approach goes. It’s all based on a funnel and once you understand the funnel and you’re in the funnel, and you understand things that move the funnel, the process becomes very clear. You know they could have just sent us a model of a funnel and saved us lot of time [laughter].

The administrator framed enrollment management as a funneling process several other times and in so doing, I took it as an acknowledgement on her part that this was a logical way to approach enrollment management. Later, when I was rereading some of the initial documents created by the consulting agency, I noticed their reference to the funnel model of enrollment management and realized where the idea of the funnel had originated. For example, one document stated: “The second model presented is the enrollment funnel which illustrates the three strategies any [state] public college or university can use to change the size or profile of the new student enrollment” (p. 20). Thus, the language of the change agents became the language of the university administrators to a certain extent. This would seem to be an important strategic outcome in attempting to manage stakeholders, thus creating shared meaning. John, an employee

of the consulting firm, spoke to this when he talked about the quality of discussion in a meeting. He said:

In the afternoon we had breakout sessions by campus systems so [system members] got together by group. We had a variety of topics that we facilitated and all were designed to engage the participants. For example, we had them look at the successes in fall 2003 we experienced. Then we had them look at the priorities for 2004 and reiterated to them: “let’s keep our eye on the ball, we’re only half-way through the master plan implementation” and so on. I walked around and listened in on that discussion and was able to compare that to the September 2001 statewide-focus groups that we conducted in order to explore the state of enrollment management and the capabilities of the campuses. I was able to compare the quality of the discussions and the thinking that was going on in October of 2003 to the discussions and thinking in September 2001 and it was as though it was a totally different state. And that was, I’ll tell you, pretty gratifying.

Many of the documents created by the various stakeholder groups communicated those emerging themes I found in the interview text. For example one document stated: “the governing agency and individual colleges/universities may need to both redirect and invest additional resources in developing a state-of- the-art enrollment program.” This sentiment is reflective of the theme of financial resources and concern about where those resources would come from.

A document from the consulting agency stated: “There is no group that can have more impact on retention than faculty. It is absolutely critical that colleges begin and sustain a program of education regarding the faculty role in retention....” In my

conversations with participants, they emphasized the importance of having faculty involved as well as their attempts to include faculty in the process. Inclusion of faculty is a strategy of stakeholder management.

These scenarios exemplify the impact multiple symbols can have on the creation of meaning. Reinforcing the messages associated with the change through documents, meetings, and consultant approaches, appears to enhance the objective of ultimately creating an overall shared meaning.

#### The Impact of Similar and Dissimilar Meanings on Organizational Change

The process of change, whereby individuals are faced with a new way of thinking about things, naturally leads to the simultaneous existence of similar and dissimilar meanings among stakeholders. In the change process under study, the creation of meaning takes two different paths: (a) individuals may buy into the perspectives of those with whom they interact and shared meaning is created, or, (b) a perspective from another individual is dismissed or rejected resulting in the creation of dissimilar meanings.

Participants may agree with some aspects of the plan and disagree with others. Thus, similar and dissimilar meanings co-exist. For example, there may be agreement on an overall concept but dissimilar meaning as to how, when, or where certain aspects of the plan should be executed. Such an example was evident in the fact that initially, administrators thought the state's plan was worthwhile but saw little relevance in the plan to their own institutions. Individual institutional plans were then designed in order to reach greater shared meaning and agreement on the implementation of changes to the admissions criteria framework. Dissimilar meanings, in the form of concerns about funding, still exist.



The existence of shared, or similar meanings implies more harmonious and balanced interactions among stakeholders. While such interactions are often thought of as more desirable, the existence of dissimilar meanings has its advantages as well. As Kellett (1999) discussed, dialectics, such as stability/change and individual/team, can be central to effective change processes. The author believed that there are a multiplicity of voices that should be heard during the change process. From these voices come both conflict *and* cooperation. Opposing views, or dissimilar meanings, then can and do exist throughout the organizational change process. Through consideration, interpretation, and assessment of opposing views, similar and dissimilar meanings can coexist and lead to greater understanding and enhanced perspectives. Therefore, the organization should not disregard or oppose dissimilar meanings as necessarily negative. Kellett's (1999) findings indicated that conflicts found in the dialectics of change indeed lead to the dialogues that ultimately create shared meanings. Therefore, it is important in a study such as this one to analyze both similar and dissimilar meanings.

Research question three explores the topic of how the presence of similar and dissimilar meanings, created through stakeholder interactions, impacts the change process in terms of hindering or facilitating change. Similar meanings are defined in this study as viewpoints shared by stakeholders. Dissimilar meanings are those viewpoints upon which stakeholders do not agree on, nor act in unison towards. Similar and dissimilar meanings can change with time. As Deetz (2001) stated: "Meaning, thus, is not universal and fixed, but precarious, fragmented, and situated" (p. 34).

## Similar Meanings

One could safely assume that organizations do not want the change process to be defined by chaos and disengagement. The act of reconstructing knowledge and getting people to think differently has as its goal creating similar meanings in order to eventually bring all stakeholders on board. Through several examples from the data, we see that the existence of similar meanings enables stakeholders to move forward towards reaching goals and objectives and therefore acts to facilitate change. For example, administrators with whom I spoke agreed with the governing agency's overall objectives in the admissions criteria framework. In several interviews, it was obvious that the stakeholder group of university administrators saw the admissions criteria framework and its implementation as a positive program for the state, similar to those beliefs of the governing agency. William said:

I think that there is a pretty strong consensus from throughout the university that the [governing agency's] move is the correct one for [university] at this time because it gives us an opportunity to more or less, raise the commitment to academic quality and enhancement across the board.

Helen stated:

The fact that admissions standards were being put in place [by the governing agency] was very clearly in line with our strategic plan and where we were going. Then the state started this whole retention and recruitment initiative. Our strategic priority number one is to retain, progress, and graduate qualified students so, the state plan fit right in with our master plan. We already had outcome measures that we had been collecting in terms of where we were and where we wanted to go, we

knew before the master plan even came out that we wanted to gradually step up our admission standards. So, it just kind of all folded together for us, that was exactly the direction we were going in already.

A senior level admissions administrator, Raisa, spoke positively of the method by which the governing agency was implementing the program. She said:

What's neat I think is that when the [governing agency] developed this plan with the different tiers of institutions and the different levels of admission requirements – the basic admission standards or admission floors you might say – and then backed it up with the consulting help, well, it makes it more likely that it can happen instead of just being good words on paper.

Another aspect of how shared meaning influences the change process has to do with the creation of similar meanings within the universities themselves. Helen talked about how having a written plan enabled participants to arrive at shared meanings. She said:

So, it [developing a university plan] was an eye opening process and we came away from that particular retreat with a draft of a mission statement and goals and all those other things. We then spent a full year basically with subcommittees that grew from the university planning council. We were working on drafting objectives and then measurable outcomes and we worked with that plan about 5 years and it served us very well both internally. We always knew that people were on the same page because you could talk about for example, “this is priority number one, or strategic goal number two” and everyone knew what you meant. Having that thinking always there, whether or not you were in a budget request

meeting or you were talking about developing some new kind of program, having people think about “where does this issue fit in the university’s strategic plan?” was very helpful.

In another example, a senior level university administrator talked about how stakeholders within his organization now better understand and share in the vision of making retention a priority across the campus. Jim said:

There didn’t used to be this focus on retention. It used to be a total revolving door. People thought “well, if we lose them [students] we’ll get more next year, we’ll get more next year.” It was sort of like the European Wars where you just keep sending in bodies and whoever runs out first loses. Now, I think they’re [faculty] starting to realize that the university, as well as, different degree programs and faculty in their departments, are directly going to be impacted by the retention efforts. There’s an emphasis now in the promotion and tenure programs on service to students outside the class, advising responsibilities, etc.

Still another administrator was pleased with the fact that the consulting agency agreed with some of his university’s existing programs. Because the two stakeholder groups had arrived at similar meanings in terms of what the university should be doing, the administrator felt good about his decisions and moving forward. Eric said:

Someone came through here to my office to talk about retention, I’ve forgotten his first name, but he came through as a representative for [consulting agency]. They were studying retention and he was interested in what I was doing in general studies with the capstone course and making sure students understood what the degree meant. He was interested in that and again, it seems like he was talking

about specific things again that the universities are expected to do and the more he talked to me, and I talked with him, the more I understood that what we're doing with [university program] is going to work. He said that the rest of the university needed to do the kind of reflective thinking and planning on curriculum issues that we were doing in general studies.

In the examples cited here, arriving at shared meanings regarding some aspects of the admissions criteria framework has enhanced the ability of the governing agency to move the program forward across the state. Shared meanings, it appears, may lead to greater compliance among stakeholders involved in change. In the following examples however, dissimilar meanings arrived at by the stakeholder groups result in hesitancy and/or resistance often leading to a temporary effect that stalls the efforts of the governing agency.

#### Dissimilar Meanings

Dissimilar meanings among stakeholders are found in various aspects of the change process including: (a) the intent of the governing agency to implement the plan, (b) funding issues, (c) the inclusion of a community college system, and (d) academic standards for the universities determined by the governing agency. While it is important to have participant voices heard, even if those voices represent dissent, the dissimilar meanings that may follow could lead to resistance to change. As Miller et al. (1994) pointed out, resistance can hinder the change process. Resistance can come in various forms and is attributable to multiple influences.

For example, the governing agency's intentions from day one were to move the

plan forward. Yet, previous experience working with this agency, whose most senior level employees serve at the pleasure of the Governor, caused concern and left administrators with a feeling of insecurity in terms of moving forward. The perception of the governing agency as inconsistent in their planning and implementation of programs did indeed influence the behavioral responses among stakeholders resulting in a hesitancy to move forward with the plan in some cases. Due to dissimilar perspectives on what was going to happen, the administrators decided to wait and see if things progressed.

In my very first interview with Richard I became aware of the history of the governing agency's proclivity to set goals and objectives and then have them change due to changes in political administrations. Richard said: "People are holding out because they know there is a new governor coming in 2004 and everything could change." The reputation of never fully executing programs left many administrators with a "wait and see" attitude regarding the current state plan. Dan, also with the governing agency echoed these sentiments when he said: " They [administrators] probably think they can wait this [new framework] out because we'll just change plans down the road. But this is going to happen." Thus, there was a dissimilar reality between governing agency stakeholders and the administrative stakeholders. The impact this dissimilar reality had can be seen in the following examples. As Beth said: "I think sometimes you'd have the admissions staff saying you know 'I don't know why we're doing this [working on the implementation of the plan] because you know the [governing agency] is going to change their mind because it's not going to work.'"

Jim commented:

A lot of people just said “oh well here’s another plan, I’m sure they’ll change it in a couple of years and we’ll be on to something else.” This thinking is a result of the fact there’s been no sustained effort in [state] and when I say sustained I mean there’s never been an overlap between administrations and governors so we have to shift direction every time there’s a change. I think by having a governor in place two terms the situation has improved. Because you have to remember that prior to [Governor] you had [Governor] for four, [Governor] for four, [Governor] for four, [Governor] for four, so every four years there was a redirection, radical redirection, you know, you went from democrat to republican, and then democrat to republican. So, there wasn’t any consistency.

In the following transcript excerpt, Craig had this to say about the hesitancy of some administrators:

Well, part of that [hesitancy] too was just wanting to wait and see if the [governing agency’s] direction would change. Some people wondered how serious the [governing agency] was right from the start. Because now, with the governor’s election I think a lot of people kind of went on hold and said, “well we don’t know if he [agency director] is going to continue, we don’t know that” so they were kind of backing off from the plan.

Another consulting agent reiterated the issue of some administrators trying to stall the process not believing that the plan was going to move forward. John talked about an effort to get everyone on the same page in terms of understanding the plan. He said:

In fact [system president's] reason for convening this retreat was because even at this late date there are still presidents in the system playing politics, going not publicly but very privately, behind the scenes, going to board members of the [system] board and bemoaning the fact that this is going to kill their campus and enrollment is going to plummet, and "help us get this delayed." So there's still that guerilla war mindset, that "we can't do this, there's not enough time before 2005, it's too ambitious" and all those things. Well, the [governing agency] isn't going to change their mind on it at this point, so this was a meeting to help them better understand the plan.

Another aspect of dissimilar meanings among stakeholder groups concerned the issue of funding. Because many of the university administrators feared a loss of revenue from the implementation of new admission standards, and the repercussions of that loss, they interpreted some aspects of the change as negative. Some of the administrators expressed a lack of trust towards the governing agency and how it was handling the funding aspects of the plan.

For example, a university administrator expressed disappointment and distrust regarding the governing agency and funding. William said:

The [governing agency] has changed plans. I mean there was a point in the past few months where money we thought we were getting for recruiting was withdrawn, and it's not a lot of money and it wasn't anything terribly fatal but, if they were truly able to stay the course and be on track and be honest with all the money and what we can do for you and what we can't, it would take some uncertainty away. Again, I know organizations enough to forgive them this, but



the fact is they have not been 100% stalwart in what they thought they could do and promised.

Beth was equally disappointed and somewhat distrustful. She said:

I think the recruitment part was successful because we actually got funding so, even though it was a work of blood, sweat and tears, at the end, we were rewarded for it. The retention is the same thing, beating our heads against the walls, and they promised us funding for it and it hasn't come through yet, so the thing is, I kind of smelled a rat about the whole thing because both of these things have to work in tandem if the enrollment management approach is going to work, and to support one without supporting the other...well.

Patrick, a former professor who now holds an upper level administrative position, said:

They [governing agency] hired [consulting firm] and the thought was, okay now they're going to bring these consultants in and tell us what we need to do and then we're not going to get any money to do it so we're back to square one anyway. I think that's been one of the biggest worries is that all the money that they [governing agency] spent on the consultants, they could have stopped at a point and spent the rest helping us implement it, because the funding hasn't been there to implement the plan.

Dissimilar meanings were evident when talking about how the community college system fits in with the state plan. The governing agency had been instrumental in developing this system but university administrators were concerned about access to higher education for the citizens of their communities and sending those students to a community college system. Not everyone involved perceived the community college

system as necessarily a good thing. Pete, a top-level administrator from one university said: "I'm not in favor of the idea of turning over our responsibilities in educating students to the college community system." Virginia, another administrator at that same university commented that, "now that the requirements for high school students are becoming more and more rigorous, we are concerned that these requirements will likely create a major obstacle for our prospective students." Interestingly, the university represented by these same administrators has lagged behind in implementation. This fact, coupled with the legal implications of a desegregation law, resulted in the campus receiving a one-year delay on implementation. Through my analysis of the text data from this school, I concluded that the recruitment plan for this campus was particularly weak when compared with other campus plans. Little emphasis was placed on goals and objectives or means to accomplish those goals and objectives. I believe this in and of itself can be taken as a symbol of resistance. The message seemed to be, "we're not going to do this so why bother with writing a comprehensive plan?" In this case, the existence of dissimilar meanings appears to have very much prevented the implementation process from moving forward.

Patrick said this regarding the community college system:

They've [governing agency] been putting a lot of money in this community college system and I don't accept their argument- I'm not sure it's good for long-term mobility. In fact even [university regent] talks a lot about how education is really there to provide employees for his companies, and I don't think that's what we're about. I think universities of this level are supposed to educate people so we have an educated citizenry and ...not focus on the job the student is going to get.

Still another administrator expressed his concerns regarding access and the community college system in his area. Jim said:

My biggest concern about the master plan standards, the admissions standards, has to be that we don't believe that the community college will be up and running at the quality level it needs to be by the time the admissions standards are imposed. We're looking at 18 months from now and they've only taught one college level credit course, one class, one section, and so now they have to bring on board faculty and develop courses, which we're going to help them do the whole thing, as much help as they want, we'll provide. We feel strongly that there will be good articulation agreements but we just don't think that the level of development is there. We don't think they're going to have sufficient staffing facilities, programs in place for people to have a place to go, for post secondary education so we've been appealing to our management board to take a look at it, not to back away from the commitment to implement it, but if they're [community college] not ready, still allow us to at least admit those students and provide the work they need to continue in higher ed, with the expectation that as soon as the community college is ready, then go to full implementation.

While the governing agency saw the community college system as a means of moving higher education forward, many administrators did not agree with fundamental issues regarding the system. Thus, the two groups held dissimilar meanings about this aspect of higher education. Additionally, not only were administrators concerned with issues of access and community colleges, they did not always agree on the standards or rating assigned to their schools by the governing agency. For example Helen, commented

on the difference in the mission statements between the institution's mission statement and the governing agency's version:

Well, they [governing agency] have what I think of as, well in the old vernacular, the role, mission and scope statement which basically says this is what you are, you are an institution in this category, you offer these kind of degrees etc. where as our strategic mission was very vision focused: this is what you will become and even though it's stated in the present tense, this is what your goal is overall. Our strategic mission was to become the educational, cultural, and economic leader of the [state] region. So, a very different statement than what our [governing agency] mission statement is. Also, there are a lot of people on our campus that didn't necessarily like the fact that [governing agency] placed us in the particular tier level that they did.

Patrick said:

[University] faculty through the university senate, had adopted new admissions requirements and then the [governing agency] came in with a different set of admissions requirements, so, we had to figure out how to deal with that. Our admission requirements had imposed a higher ACT level. But the [governing agency's] initiative requirements don't allow us to take students who are remedial in two areas, a double remedial, so we adapted ours and essentially lowered the GPA, yes, in some ways we lowered our GPA, to fit the [governing agency's] requirements.

From all of the examples cited, it is evident that similar and dissimilar meanings are created among stakeholders groups throughout the change process under study.

Similar meanings result in an experience that is defined as facilitating in moving the admissions criteria framework forward. Dissimilar meanings result in behaviors and actions that can be categorized as resistance, hesitancy, resentment and distrust. The presence of dissimilar meanings should not however be interpreted as a negative result, but rather as a means to ultimately arrive at a shared vision among stakeholder groups (Kellett, 1999). In the next research question, I will look at ways differing levels of power impact the process. The existence of dissimilar meanings comes into play in this next question as well.

#### The Impact of Multiple Levels of Power on the Creation of Meaning

The issue of power in higher education is different from power as we think of it in traditional, for-profit organizations. University administrators talk about power in terms of varying levels of governance. Thus, the institution of higher education is defined through the concept of multiple levels of governance. Governance is defined as “including not only the formal decision arrangements by which colleges and universities carry on their work, but also the informal procedures by which standards are maintained” (Carnegie Foundation, 1982, p.7). The concept of governance is also loosely defined as the authority to establish or change policy (Westmeyer, 1990). Additionally, in an informal review of the subject indexes of texts on governance in higher education, the term power did not appear. However, interview responses in this study reveal that there is an apparent awareness of power structures within the university systems and that certain stakeholder groups have power over others thus creating a hierarchy. Also, some of the types of power described by French and Raven (1959) are applicable to stakeholder groups in this study and will be discussed as well.

Administrators within higher education are often charged with implementing policy that has been established by other stakeholders including faculty and/or governing boards. Adding to this unusual (from a business perspective) managerial structure is the fact that there are not always clear boundaries of who is in charge among these multiple levels of power. The final research question therefore addresses the structure of higher education and such a structure's effect on the change process by asking: How does the concept of multiple levels of power among stakeholders affect the creation of meaning during organizational change?

Through analysis I have found that variations of power among stakeholder groups affects the creation of meaning in four ways: (a) groups possess different types of power that ultimately influence meanings created among stakeholders, (b) there is a creation of an overall, dominant reality, (c) information is sometimes withheld by stakeholders instead of being communicated to lower levels of management which hinders the creation of shared meaning, and (d) because of the different roles of stakeholders at different levels of power there are different day-to-day realities for these groups.

#### Types of Power

By including French and Raven's (1995) typology in the analysis of the data, it becomes evident that several types of power can be applied to the stakeholder groups. To begin, the consulting agency can be described as having expert power over the university administrators. Expert power is exercised when one person, or group, is willingly influenced by another because of the other's special knowledge or experiences with the subject at hand. Jim had this to say about the expertise of the consulting agency:

She [consultant] has been a great help and a great resource so we've really looked at them [consultants] not as people who are coming in to tell us how to do something but rather, people who were resources for us to help us get where we wanted to go.

Craig talked about the consulting agency's power in the following statement:

I speak to that from a consultant's point of view and from a campus's point of view. Our situation as consultants is always that we have absolutely no direct power to tell anybody anything. On the other hand, we have a lot of what I call, derived power, since the contract has been signed by the president, the chancellor or the board. Therefore, we try to put ourselves in the role of enablers and facilitators. I like using the metaphor of joining a health club: you go in there and they're going to give you every possible resource, from the equipment to the facility to the knowledge and skill, but it's up to you if you're going to lose that weight or build the muscles or whatever your goals are. It's much of the same thing, so we're really there to help them with all the processes and the structure.

Administrators, the governing agency, and the consulting agency see the role of the consultants primarily as resources to accomplish goals and enhance performance rather than to set policy. The consulting agency's power then is limited somewhat to that which concerns having information and insights which others need in order to successfully implement change in the organization, or - expert power.

In the case of university administrators, their power was most prevalent in their interactions with the community, specifically high school stakeholders, and with other campus administrators. With the high schools, administrators possessed a legitimate

power in that the universities implemented the standards, etc., that high school students needed to fulfill to enter college. Thus, there is a hierarchical structure among these groups. The second type of power administrators appear to possess is referent power, in that in this study, university employees identified with their university's administrators and therefore were influenced by these administrators to comply with the recruitment and retention efforts. For example, Gary had this to say:

The positive thing about all of this is that there are things happening at the university that I think have made people feel positive about the changes that are happening. There's always some angst and some issues that are created when change comes and you're dealing with people's lives and whether or not they're going to be employed this next semester. You understand that change can be painful sometimes. But in the long run I think that everybody feels good about the [university's] leadership and the changes they have envisioned. I think everybody on campus has bought into that pretty well.

Finally, the power held by the governing agency is best described as legitimate and is illustrated in the following section.

#### Dominant Reality

Although university administrators did not talk about levels of power within the structure, they obviously thought that they had very little to do with determining the admissions criteria framework for their institutions. Rather, the governing agency was the stakeholder group with the power to set policy and thus had legitimate power. For example, Patrick, when asked who determined policy in the state plan stated:



The [governing agency] pretty much drove the plan the way they wanted to. We would comment on it, we got some wording changes, but it almost seemed like they, the staff knew what their goal was and they went there with it. At least that's my feel on it. So, we interacted with them through formal communications through the system, through the university system, and then some informal interactions. Part of my job is going to the [governing agency] and part of what I can do is I can pick up the phone and talk to staffers and do some lobbying that way, but the plan had enough momentum going before it got to that stage that it really didn't change much, so it was pretty well moved along.

Another administrator, William, said this about who controlled the plan: "The master plan is mandated by the [governing agency] and so, then on behalf of the people in [State] they [the governing agency] essentially own us."

Another administrator recognized the ultimate authority of the governing agency when asked about which entity created plan policy. Harry said:

Well, I think, probably both. We had some institutional vision about where we should be headed but then of course you know we're part of a system and governed by a board of regents and there are the [state's university system] rules, and the state legislature rules, and so on, ... we have to operate within the framework of those rules. So, we have to propose what we want to do and get permission and support from our governing agencies to accomplish that.

The meaning set forth by the governing agency thus became the dominant reality for university administrators. While administrators seemed to accept this as the way things were, not every administrator thought there had been enough emphasis on

the universities' input during the implementation of the plan. For example, Jim expressed concern over the fact that individual needs of campuses had not been addressed in the consulting process and was relieved that this was finally happening. He said:

At this point they've [governing agency] allowed us to identify areas where we still might need a little help, where we could use some consulting services. So, we can pick up to 3 areas, and they're going to send somebody on site to cover those areas. But, that's the first time they've let us pick the areas we want to cover. Up until now it has been a cookie cutter format and you fill in and fit, so we're excited that finally somebody realized well, maybe they need to let them tell us where they need help.

Interestingly, how universities talked about who was in control varied depending on the size of the institution. Jim said this about where they fall in the overall scheme of things in terms of governance, or power:

Because we're one of the smaller schools in the state we play by the rules [laughter]. We don't have the level of political clout that some of the guys in [other cities] have and so you'll find [the university], on almost every policy there is, we follow it, almost to the point some times of our own detriment. We follow what we think the intent is to do it and so we're moving ahead full speed as if we're implementing it [admissions criteria] in 2005.

This statement is reflective of both coercive and reward types of power in that the governing agency can reward or punish the universities in terms of funding, etc. Jim went on to express concern that some of the larger universities in the state were not going to comply with the plan which would in turn negatively impact his institution. He explained:

I think the first thing that the board needs to do under the new governor is to make it clear to everybody, including you know the big bear in [city], that this is going to be implemented. That come 2005 the [university] system is going to do it just like everybody else because the scuttlebutt around the state is that [university] is not going to do it. If that's the case then we're going to end up getting punished for doing the right thing and they just keep doing what they want to do. So, I think the clear message is, and it has to get out quickly, is that everybody's going to play by the master plan. If there's one thing the regents can do is to send that message across quickly. They have the power to do it because they do take the capital outlay requests for all universities so they could turn around and say "I'm not sending this forward for you until you get on board." The [governing agency] carries a big stick, if they'll have the political courage to use it.

Raisa, from a larger university, had a different perspective. She saw the university as having equal or maybe even more power than the governing agency. She made these comments:

I think we have worked together on the plan with the [governing agency]. In any university faculty governance is a big issue and the faculty do own the curriculum and academic standards. So, when the [governing agency's] plan came out of course the faculty said: "Oh? I think we're still in charge of our admission requirements," so we've had our little conflicts.

Raisa went on to say:

It's really been kind of funny because when the latest plan came out with the admissions requirements our faculty senate said: "that's real nice but, we're

changing them anyway and they aren't that." Part of this adversarial relationship is because [the state] has an [administrator] of an institution and then a board for this little collection of institutions and then another board for that collection of institutions and that's a lot of levels of governance. Either, eliminate one or accept one as a puppet or something because it would define more clearly the roles.

Right now the roles are almost seen as equal and that always causes confusion if you just have levels that seem unnecessary.

Establishing and communicating who really does have power seems to be an important concern to Raisa. She continued:

If you haven't communicated on who does what, well, the constitution certainly says that the [governing agency] is the head of the higher education systems, higher education in the state, and it should be. But then the struggle becomes a question of "at what level of detail do you oversee?" How much micro management is a good thing? And it's not solved yet and I'm not sure how to solve it. I think it would be good to have a discussion with maybe the chancellors or the presidents or somebody to figure out "if I'm in charge of this institution, what exactly is my power here?" instead of saying, "here's what you get to do." I think the head of the institution should be able to determine where the line is, you know, what's federal and what's state law? [laughter]

From these examples, there is obviously a perception on the part of the stakeholders as to who has the power and authority in this process, differing at times based on the size of the institution. In addition to Birnbaum's (1988) contention that universities rely primarily on referent and expert power, I think legitimate power is

present in this change process as well. From the forward motion of the plan, it would seem as though the governing agency does indeed have the power to determine and establish policy and thus reality, for the other stakeholders. By demonstrating consistency in implementation and enforcement, the governing agency has moved forward with the state plan thus utilizing their power to effectively manage the meanings created during the change process.

#### Withholding Information

Hierarchical levels of power mean that, sometimes, information is known by some individuals at certain levels and not by others at different levels. At times, this information is withheld intentionally, and other times it is simply the nature of the organizational structure that information does not always filter down as it should. Some individuals from the administrator stakeholder group complained about not having enough information from the governing agency to understand what was going on. Jim said this:

We still don't know the final plan so the suggestion about maybe [what should be done differently] is for the [governing agency] to say, "ok we've been through steps 1, 2, and 3. This is what we're projecting for 4, 5, and 6." We may not have funding for it and we may not be able to do it but at least let us know where the ride is going before we jump in the car.

Eric had this to say:

Let's say those ideas about retention, advising, recruiting, the [state plan 2005], all of that is there, but getting it to the right people at a particular institution where you've got a lot of other things going on is always going to be a problem.... At

the last conference [with the consulting agency] I was kind of foggy making connections because I wasn't in on any of the [consulting agency] initiatives going on, on campus. That was the first meeting I went to except for the leadership conference where there was some retention initiatives going on. I just had to figure out what my role was. I think, say for example [senior university administrator] would know about it from the board level. I still don't know for example, since we're using [consulting agency] for this then what's expected of us, what do or don't we have to do? I'm still not sure of the relationship of [consulting agency] to the [governing agency]. Why are they doing this and not someone else? But then, maybe I don't need to know those things. It might be written down somewhere, it would be nice to know. Why them? What are they selling, being practical about it, why are they making this presentation and no one else? Do I have the right to look at other instruments? What instruments are there? How much time will I have to find other firms that offer instruments like this? Those are the things I think you have to trust that the [governing agency] knows. I guess they know the direction to take us in but I'm not sure.

Lack of communication, in the form of withholding information, from the governing agency to the administrators was not the only example of poor communication. One administrator talked about the fact that he could do a better job of communicating information to his subordinates within his own department as well. Gary had this to say on the subject:

One of the problems that I saw, and I was partly responsible for this I think, was that as we went through this process in retention consulting and developing the

plan that we were putting forth, I think that the players have not all been kept aware of what's happening here as they should have been. Because, for example, when [consultant] came back a few weeks ago for his visit, he asked to speak to quote "some of the players," and he began to ask them about the retention plan and they were kind of bewildered. It was sort of like they were saying: "I guess maybe you're going to have to tell us what the plan is, because we don't really know." And, and that's where I think we failed is to bring all the players into the mix and let them at least be aware that this plan is being devised.

Failure to communicate pertinent information, whether intentionally or unintentionally, can lead to confusion and lack of a clear, articulated meaning for some stakeholders, thus bringing about dissimilar meanings. As discussed in the findings for research question 3, dissimilar meanings can lead to resistance.

#### Different Roles – Different Realities

Finally, stakeholders at multiple levels of power have different roles and different concerns, therefore, different perspectives and realities are created by stakeholders. From the data analysis it appears that the higher the level of governance, the more abstract the reality is. The governing agency tends to look at things from a big picture perspective, taking into consideration what is good for the entire system of higher education in the state. At lower levels, such as that of university administrators, the stakeholders become much more concerned with the specifics of implementation. Most often, this stakeholder group is the one to address changes to their roles as well as changes in institutional goals and accountability. Thus, their day-to-day reality is impacted more so than those at higher levels.

An example of the governing agency's global perspective can be found in the written plan itself. The plan states:

Because economic and educational systems are mutually dependent, both must be linked to produce a well-educated, competitive workforce that can compete globally in this new century....At every level, in every region, the state must become, as Vision 2020 wisely recognizes, a highly coordinated and efficient learning enterprise...improving the quality of life for the state's citizens.

In another example, we see that the governing agency views the admissions criteria framework as fitting in with an overall state strategy, with the advantages of the program reaching beyond just the targeted stakeholders in this study. Carla, an employee of the governing agency said this:

I think [the plan] falls right in with the new governor's theme that education, economic development, and health care all are interrelated, and that the future of [state] will be better served if all of those areas continue to work with each other. You know we could certainly tie economic development into higher education and a better-prepared workforce and I think that is the benefit to the citizens of the state. It will bring in more job opportunities keeping people in [state]. It's educating the work force and then that leads to better health care, more trained health care providers. We can focus our energies on providing those programs that would provide job opportunities. I see it as a real positive and with the new governor coming in is very supportive of everything the department of education is doing as well as the [governing agency], so, it just all ties together.



The role of the governing agency is not to be concerned with the day-to-day effects of the plan on the universities but rather to think in more abstract terms of what is best for the entire state and how can it best position higher education in the state to move forward successfully. University administrators on the other hand are more concerned with the specifics of implementation and the impact the plan will have on their campuses and in their communities. Because of administrators' places in the hierarchical structure, their reality is much different from the reality of the governing agency.

Beth had this to say:

All along the way of developing the recruitment and retention plans we have said "It would be wonderful to do this, but where are the resources going to come from and how are we going to go about implementing it?" That's part of the plan that needs to be addressed: how are we going to redirect resources on the campus and reorganize?

She went on to say:

Either funding is going to be based on enrollment or it's not. If funding is going to be based on performance, the performance indicators shouldn't be the number of bodies, for instance. If you want people to really go to selective admissions for the senior colleges then don't punish them for not allowing those who shouldn't be here and so, they're [governing agency] going to need to reemphasize that the funding for [university] and the other state colleges is not going to take a hit. We've lost 400 or 500 students because we're doing what they asked us to do so don't punish us for doing it. The [governing agency] very strongly needs to look

at not having anything in their funding plan that ties strictly to enrollment. It ought to be enrollment as compared to your institutional goals, enrollment as compared to meeting the plan, and if it's not geared to that then they're going to kill their own admission standards.

William said:

On the loss side, what the university faces is some decline in enrollment of an unknown number at this point. It's unknown because we're not sure what our admissions patterns will be. Just to give a quick example, if [another university] for example does not take certain students then will those students come [here] or will they go elsewhere? If after a year or so if we've "lost" students to community colleges, will they come back [here] every two years? So, pinning down the number of "loss" is pretty difficult. Another area of concern is, will please Lord, the public school system and some of the parochial schools do better in preparing students to come here? Will the ACT prep courses qualify people that might not have qualified? So we're dealing with sheer numbers.

Jim had this to say:

I think all the attention is going to be focused on, "in 2005 how are we going to lessen the blow of selective admissions?" because every campus that implements selective admissions should expect a decrease initially in their first year in enrollment. So, we're doing things to try to reduce that as much as possible.

The multiplicity of voices inherent in the university structure creates a dichotomy regarding focus among stakeholders. Different realities then co-exist within the system as these different levels of power compete to move their reality to the forefront. Much like

the existence of dissimilar meanings, the varying levels of power create resentment and sometimes confusion among stakeholders. At the same time, it seems as though some degree of legitimate power is necessary to move forward the implementation process. Different levels of power serve the change process well. As stakeholders focus on different aspects of the change process, a system of checks and balances is created allowing for some to have a global vision while other focus on the day-to-day realities of implementation.

### Summary of Findings

Categories of meaning emerged from the interviews with stakeholders and from textual analysis. The first category, “reconstructing knowledge” focuses on stakeholders’ attempts to make sense of the change process for themselves as well as for others. Stakeholders did this by using data, rethinking and redefining their perceptions of recruitment and retention, getting their message out to other stakeholders, and including in the process those stakeholders who would be impacted by the changes to the admissions criteria framework. Concerns about the availability and/or lack of resources led to the second category of meaning, referred to as “resources.” Resources include financial resources, human resources, and data resources. In very simplistic terms, the findings indicated that money, the right people, and information were all necessary for the change process to be effective. The third and final category that emerged was that of emphasizing differences. Each set of administrators from the universities believed their institution to be different and unique from the other state schools. Having those differences recognized and acknowledged was important to the administrators. They wanted their unique identities kept intact.

The use of symbols to intentionally create shared meaning among the stakeholders was evident by the stakeholders' use of documents, meetings, and consultants. These symbols helped the stakeholders get others to understand and be more accepting of goals and objectives. Stakeholders missed opportunities at times to fully utilize the symbols available to them. Underutilization of symbols that could have created shared meanings unintentionally led stakeholders to create other meanings that were more dissimilar in nature.

When similar meanings existed among stakeholders, aspects of the change process seemed to move forward more readily. In situations where stakeholders understood and agreed on the goals and objectives of the plan, people appeared to be more willing to go forward with the plan. When stakeholders held dissimilar meanings regarding aspects of the plan, as with, issues concerning funding, stakeholder groups were more likely to experience behaviors that hindered the implementation of the plan. Behaviors such as hesitancy and resistance are included here.

Finally, the findings indicate that the existence of multiple levels of power in an organization does impact the meanings and realities created. Different types of power among stakeholder groups were identified. Certain stakeholders, because of their level of power, were able to create a dominant reality. Some stakeholders at upper levels of power or governance were able to withhold information from others, which in turn hindered the implementation process by creating frustration and dissatisfaction in those at lower levels of power. The last indication was that stakeholders at varying levels of power have different roles and therefore have different day-to-day realities, which also impacted the meanings created. From these examples it becomes clear that power figures prominently

into how organizations create, understand, and sustain meaning during organizational change.

## Chapter 6

### Conclusion

“It is a good answer which knows when to stop.” (Italian proverb)

My experiences in this research project have allowed me to explore my interests in organizational communication during organizational change in the context of higher education. The changes to the state’s admissions criteria framework affect many people in numerous ways. For example, high school graduates may have to attend a community college first, before entering a university. University administrators are concerned that a drop in enrollment will translate to less funding for programs already in existence or programs in the planning stages. The governing agency must constantly monitor the impact of the changes in regards to what is best for the state. This multiplicity of participants lent itself to studying communication from a stakeholder perspective. The interactions among stakeholders led to the creation of meaning, both similar and dissimilar.

#### Utilizing the Theory of Symbolic Interactionism

Approaching this study from a broad theory such as symbolic interactionism served the subject matter well. The theory allowed me to explore the aspects I thought important, such as interactions among stakeholders, symbols, etc. The broad structure of the theory helped to illuminate how elements might come together, overlapping at times and influencing the creation of meaning. I do not think I could have made some of those connections using a theory more limited in scope. Utilizing a framework of symbolic interactionism and a stakeholder model, I was able to identify individuals who actively assessed and defined the organizational changes taking place. Consistent with concepts

often mentioned in reference to symbolic interactionism, stakeholders involved here were not passive participants in the process, but rather active participants seeking to define their reality. I also found evidence of the organization shaping individuals and individuals shaping the organization. For example, while the governing agency drove the plan for the state, the feedback and input from other stakeholders shaped and altered the direction of the process along the way.

By focusing on elements of symbolic interactionism such as the use of symbols, the impact of interactions, etc., I was better able to negotiate my way through the change process at different periods of time. The creation of meaning is an ongoing process and should be studied as such. Therefore, it was important for me as a researcher to have the leeway to move in and out of the process as the creation of meaning evolved. While broad in scope, the theory of symbolic interactionism, coupled with an interpretative methodological approach, allowed me to uncover some of the nuances that were occurring.

#### Connections of Findings to Theory and the Literature

Stakeholder groups, including university administrators, governing agency staff members, and employees of the consulting agency all interact with one another in their respective societies. By studying the interactions taking place among stakeholders, I was able to answer the four research questions posed.

First, I was able to determine categories for the meanings created. Meanings and realities differed depending on the stakeholders' roles in societies. These roles are created primarily through the hierarchical structure of higher education. Through the data analyses, I categorized the meanings created as (a) reconstructing knowledge,

(b) resources, and (c) emphasizing differences. By first defining categories, I was better able to understand some of the events occurring in the change process. I developed a clear picture of what was important (i.e., reconstructing knowledge) in order for there to be successful implementation of the new admissions criteria framework. I learned of the concerns of the stakeholders (i.e. resources) and obstacles that might stand in the way of successful implementation. Finally, I learned that stakeholders see themselves and their institutions as unique components of the overall system.

This exploration and determination of categories allowed me to further understand how meanings may be created, utilized, ignored, and manipulated during organizational change. As mentioned previously in the literature, learning to think differently about the status quo is a key element necessary for effective change in most organizations with perhaps a few exceptions. In this study, the use of data by stakeholder groups to persuade other groups that the impending changes were for the good of all involved played a key role in bringing people on board and creating similar meanings. Additionally, by including and involving stakeholders, the change agents were able to achieve greater levels of success in implementing changes. The category of inclusion and involvement is comparable to Eckel and Kezar's (2003) strategy of "collaborative leadership." Eckel and Kezar studied universities in order to determine the most effective strategies to get people to think differently about their institutions. Collaborative leadership was one such category.

Stakeholders sometimes created meanings based on past experiences of interactions with other stakeholder groups. The meanings they took from these past experiences influenced their decisions to take certain actions or inactions (Charon, 1995).



The governing agency's history of changing their minds mid-program caused some stakeholders to take a "wait and see" attitude regarding the implementation. This is a clear indication that previous interactions impacted the meanings stakeholders assigned to what was happening around them. The governing agency's strategy of continually moving their plan forward is similar to Eckel and Kezar's (2003) identification of "visible action" as an effective means to overcome past experiences and create shared meaning. Once the administrators realized that the governing agency wasn't backing away from the plan as they had in the past, they became more committed to doing what was necessary to move the plan forward.

Weick (1995) talked about how participants in organizations pick up on the language systems of others and incorporate that language into their own realities. In this study, I found evidence of language pulled from several different stakeholder groups and then utilized in order for people to better focus their meaning and make sense of what was going on around them. For example, the language found in the consulting agency's initial documents became the language of the plans designed by the universities. Phrases such as "best practices" and "getting a better prepared student" were found consistently throughout the interviews and documents, across stakeholder groups. The language of the consulting agency, it would appear, often times became the language of the administrators.

In the current study, the university administrators did a particularly good job of reconstructing knowledge and sharing data within the high school community. This stakeholder group realized that without the cooperation of the high school communities, the structure of the higher education system would be negatively affected. Therefore, it

was in the best interest of the university administrators to keep high school communities informed by sharing data relevant to changes to the status quo. Through their own admissions though, the university administrators fell short at times in effectively reconstructing knowledge on their own campuses as a result of their failure to get the message out to other administrators, staff, and faculty. This failure to communicate the message thoroughly should be closely addressed as the change process continues.

The study of what meanings are created is important because it allows for further insight into communication in the change process. Obviously, with different organizations and stakeholders, categories of meaning would most likely vary. Organizations would do well to assess and understand what stakeholders are thinking along the way when implementing change. Change agents should consider the categories of meanings created as a way of framing the on-going change process, making it more efficient and effective along the way.

Second, also evident in the findings is that stakeholder groups create meanings through the intentional use of symbols such as meetings and written documents. This ties in with Charon's (1995) findings that the symbol is used intentionally to communicate. As evident in the findings here, using symbols can be a good, strategic method by which stakeholders create shared meanings. People strive to make sense of their worlds. Often times, members of organizations create meanings for themselves, both similar and dissimilar, in order to continue to function within the organization.

Symbols can serve to help create a new, evolving identity for members as the organization changes, ultimately increasing buy-in to the change process. In this study meetings, workshops, and formal written documents held symbolic significance for

stakeholders. Serving as representations of the admissions changes and the ensuing process, these symbols often times enabled participants to communicate with one another while also helping them to define and assign meaning to the process and their places in the process. Symbols helped stakeholders to make sense of their world or, in some cases, caused them to question what was going on in their world. As such, symbols became important means by which participants within the organization were able to ascribe meaning to what is going on around them.

Documents as symbols serve as written records for people who may come into the change process at a later date as well as serving to carry the culture of the organization forward. The fact that the individual documents created by the universities helped them to better identify with the state's plan, indicates the power that documents have in creating shared meaning. Also evident was that people themselves can serve as symbols. The consultants served as catalysts for change. University administrators identified with their individual consultants more so than with anyone else outside of their immediate organization. The consultants became a voice for the administrators.

As stated previously, I think the governing agency and consulting agency missed opportunities to create more similar meanings and move the process forward in a more timely manner by not effectively utilizing certain symbols. Maintaining a newsletter and creating some type of readily identifiable logo for the state participants are examples of symbols that may have created more shared meaning for the participants. A newsletter could have addressed some of the concerns of the participants and have included a question and answer column with the governing agency staff and/or regents answering questions submitted by university administrators. Communicating through a newsletter

could have resulted in the governing agency doing a better job of getting the message out and made the university participants feel more involved in the process. More efforts to answer the concerns of the university administrators would have helped to reduce uncertainty and manage meaning more effectively. Because stakeholders at times felt that they did not have enough information or the right information, they were more likely to create meanings dissimilar to what the governing agency had intended. Change agents therefore need to think strategically about their selection and use of symbols to create greater shared meaning.

Third, both similar and dissimilar meanings are created during change. As I discovered through this study, the two types of meanings have different effects on the change process. Similar meanings serve to facilitate and move the change process forward at every level. For example, participants all agreed that a new admissions criteria framework was a good idea. Participants were willing to consider the implications of changing the status quo and the impact the change would have on the state. Overall, the new admissions criteria was considered to be a good idea, thus participants shared similar meanings on the subject.

When it came time to actually develop a strategy to implement the new framework, dissimilar meanings arose regarding aspects such as funding resources. The dissimilar meanings created a feeling of distrust resulting in behaviors of hesitancy and resistance. Those involved in organizational change should weigh the impact both similar and dissimilar meanings have on the change process and determine strategies to convert dissimilar meanings into similar meanings by addressing the issues on which the participants do not agree. This is not to say that dissimilar meanings should not exist.

Dissimilar meanings allow for new ideas and solutions to be introduced through discussion. Rather, dissimilar meanings should eventually be turned into meanings that reflect a shared meaning in order for the changes to be implemented successfully.

Lastly, power issues come into play during organizational change. Power structures exist and by their very existence influence the meanings created. Certain types of power that stakeholders possess allow for some to dominate others. As such, a dominant reality may be created that dictates the change process. Deetz and Mumby (1990) talked about those participants that have the ability to frame information in a manner that is in keeping with their own interests as possessing true power. This is evident even within the structure of higher education. The governing agency in this study created a dominant reality. From a critical perspective, this could be considered as a negative component of communication in change, however, I believe that some entity has to possess some degree of authority and power or chaos would occur. What is important then is that there is a balance in input in determining the overall meaning which will eventually guide those with less power. The opportunity for greater input might lead to more similar meanings being created and, thus, enhance cooperation. The utilization of a critical perspective regarding the subject matter can be found in the implications for future research found in this chapter.

The ability of some stakeholder groups in this study to withhold information indicates that some have greater power than others. The management and/or manipulation of information ties in with Deetz and Mumby's (1990) theory of what is the greatest exercise of one's power over others as discussed above. The governing agency either intentionally or unintentionally withheld information from administrators, allowing the

agency to communicate information in such a way that was in keeping with their own interests. Very often, I think organizational societies are hesitant to share information for fear of losing status and/or power within the organization. Stakeholder groups involved in change would do well to realize the importance of sharing data with others in order to reconstruct knowledge.

On the other hand, contrary to what Deetz and Mumby (1990) said about the allocation of resources not being the true struggle for power or the true indication of power, the availability and allocation of funding resources did indeed have an impact on the meanings created here. For example, those with greater power did not see funding as a particularly worrisome problem, whereas those with less power, i.e. the admissions administrators, did see funding issues as a major concern. So again, it would seem that where one fell in the power structure influenced the meanings created in relation to the changes and implementation process.

Another interesting aspect as to how the allocation of resources seems to influence meaning in the current study is how the size and perceptions of power of the institutions influences meanings. For example, representatives of the largest state institution presented themselves as much more autonomous than did their smaller, less influential counterparts. Representatives of the largest state institution were the only ones that made reference to their faculty's ownership of the curriculum. Smaller institutions indicated they pretty much went along with the state's wishes in order to fit in the system and receive their share of the resources. Thus, the structure of the system seems to allow the larger institution to wield the most power and therefore, we see differences in the meanings created.

## Strategies for Successful Communication During Organizational Change

The findings from this study revealed several factors important to the exploration of communication in organizational change. Specifically, the study illustrated the importance of the role stakeholders play in creating meanings and how such meanings can either facilitate or hinder the change process. As a result of the findings, I have determined several strategies that could lead to more effective communication within change processes. These strategies could be incorporated into change processes in higher education and other organizations as well. The strategies are:

1. Establish and assess the interpretations/meanings of stakeholder groups in order to determine where similar and dissimilar meanings occur. Then, based on that information, determine if a change in implementation strategy is necessary to facilitate the change process.
2. Identify groups whose participation in the change process has the ability to enhance or detract from the process and ensure that pertinent data is shared among those stakeholder groups.
3. Strategically utilize symbols to facilitate the change process. These symbols may come in the form of meetings, on-line newsletters, small group discussions, etc.
4. Acknowledge the existence of power structures and create real opportunities for communication among the varying levels of power.
5. Recognize that employees' willingness to accept change is in part based on their perceptions of the organization and the organization's reputation to

follow through on plans. If the reputation of the organization falls short in this area, address those perceptions in the beginning of the change process.

From an applied research perspective these strategies would serve to help change agents be more attuned to the complexities of communication in organizational change. Being more aware should lead to a more effective, efficient, and satisfying change process.

#### Implications for Future Research

In summary, the findings indicate that attention to meanings in organizational change and how those meanings are created and used is an important area of research. Communication in organizational change is an interesting and integral part of the day-to-day life of organizations. This line of research has several implications for the future.

First, the research topic is certainly pertinent to other types of organizations, both for profit and nonprofit, and can be applied to both. While this study looked at multiple organizations within one system, subsequent studies could just as effectively focus on a single institution or organization. With either approach, there would be opportunity to utilize a stakeholder model perspective. As in this study, utilizing a stakeholder model would allow for rich, descriptive insights to the research questions and should be considered in subsequent studies.

Second, a study that focused on how meanings ultimately affect the outcome of proposed change would be interesting. Such a study would include a longitudinal approach, following the dynamics of the change process until the implementation was complete. The results of the study could indeed provide a template of effective communication in change implementation by determining which communication



strategies worked and which did not. This type of study and the results lend itself to the area of applied communication research.

Third, other theoretical approaches could yield even more conclusive communication results. For example, Berger and Bradac's (1982) uncertainty reduction theory could be used as a theoretical approach. While the theory focuses on the ways in which people gather information about others in interpersonal relationships, I think the theory could be extended to the organizational context as to how and why members gather information on events taking place within the organization. Is it strictly to reduce uncertainty or as Sunnafrank (1986) suggests, is it that people seek information to assess the potential outcome of the communication? For example, do organizational members try and make sense of their worlds primarily because of concern for their jobs? Do they try and make sense in order to maintain an identity with the organization and determine where they fit in? Or do they gather information primarily in order to complete the tasks required of them more effectively and efficiently? Or is it a combination of all of these things or something completely different? The subsequent meanings that stakeholders create from their efforts to reduce uncertainty would give greater insights as to how members think and behave within organizations. This information could be of value to change agents and others.

Fourth, the focus of the research questions in this study lends itself to data analysis from a critical perspective. An issue, such as power and the creation of meaning, should be studied from the perspective of what voices are not heard and/or marginalized in organizational change. The data that results from this framework could provide for greater application of the findings for change agents. Deetz's (2001) stated: "The results

of my studies aim more at finding and giving suppressed positions a means of expression than realizing an ideal speech situation or reaching a purer consensus” (p. 18). Thus, a critical perspective could help change agents identify suppressed voices and perhaps eventually result in greater stakeholder participation.

Finally, the scope of the research could be expanded theoretically to include the area of organizational culture. I think the current study is certainly in line with Pacanowsky’s and O’Donnell-Trujillo’s (1982, 1983) cultural approach to organizations theoretical framework. The authors surmise that understanding individual organizations is more important than generalizing from a set of behaviors or values across organizations. Following this line of thinking, data from the current study could be analyzed in order to discover the values stakeholders hold and how these values in turn impact the meanings created. Data could further be analyzed in terms of the communicative performances present in the study. For example, the meetings and workshops I attended might be evaluated more closely in terms of organizational rituals. Other research questions that evoke a cultural perspective would be: How might the organization’s existing culture impact the meanings created during a change process? And how do the meanings created during organizational change ultimately impact the culture?

The above ideas are representative of a few different directions for further research on this topic. In summary, the findings indicate that attention to meanings in organizational change and how those meanings are created and used is an important area of research. Identifying the meanings of change allow for greater understanding of what is going on in the process. If organizations fail to take the time to assess members’ reactions and concerns, they run the risk of missing opportunities to reconstruct

knowledge in a positive way that will be beneficial to the organization in the long run. Stakeholders' who fail to acknowledge the impact of meanings on the change process are setting themselves up to experience resistance to change. Change will continue to be a constant in organizations. Insights into the meanings created during change can enhance the organizations' ability to adapt to its future.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Protocol

#### **Interview protocol for university administrators:**

1. Describe to me how this change in admissions criteria came about (or from your understanding since you joined the organization).
2. What has been the most important thing your organization has done in order to bring about the successful implementation of the new admissions criteria framework?
3. What do you most like about the way the board has implemented this change? (probe for aspects such as development, communication, participation.) What do you least like and why? (Probe for examples).
4. Describe some of the methods that you or other participants have utilized to show your agreement or disagreement with various proposals, etc. What has been the most effective means in having your “voice” heard in all of this?
5. What are some of your experiences with your colleagues on campus in instituting the new criteria framework?
6. How do you think such a change process could be improved in future applications?
7. Is there anything else you think is important for me to know that I have not yet asked you about?

**Interview protocol for governing agency employees:**

1. Briefly describe to me how this change in admissions criteria came about (or from your understanding since you joined the organization).
2. What has the response to the change been from the university level? Why do you think this has been the response? (Probe for specific response examples.)
3. Describe some of the methods which you have utilized in the change process to encourage participation from various groups. (Ask about focus groups if not brought up). Did some methods appear to work better than others? If yes, which ones and why?
4. Your organization currently does not have the power to require universities to accept policies and implement change. What effect has this had on the change process? How do you overcome this opposition? How could this be improved in the future?
5. Have the state universities “bought into” the change? Why or why not? If so, at what point do you think this stakeholder group came on board with the changes?
6. Is there anything else you think I should ask you or be aware of?

**Interview protocol for consulting agency employees:**

1. How does this implementation process compare and contrast to other similar processes you have been involved in as a consultant?
2. As the change agents who are closely working with the universities, what has the response been to the change in admissions criteria?

3. Why do you think this has been the response? (Probe for specific response examples.)
4. Describe some of the methods that you have utilized in the change process to encourage participation from various groups. (Ask about focus groups if not brought up). Did some methods appear to work better than others? If yes, which ones and why?
5. Your organization currently does not have the power to require universities to accept policies and implement change. What effect has this had on the change process? How do you overcome this opposition? How could this be improved in the future?
6. Have the state universities “bought into” the change? Why or why not? If so, at what point do you think they came “on board” with the changes?
7. Is there anything else you think I should ask you or be aware of?

## Appendix B

### Interview Data Codebook

Categories of Meaning: Reconstructing Knowledge; Resources; Emphasizing Differences

Descriptive summary of the elements included in each category:

#### 1. Reconstructing Knowledge

- a. Use of data - included here are any instances where there was a reference to the use of data to make a point, convince someone of something, or explain something to someone, etc.
- b. Rethinking and redefining – references to participants thinking about elements of recruitment and retention and/or acknowledging a change in attitude as a result of interactions.
- c. Getting the message out – instances where stakeholders talked about their interactions with other stakeholders in order to inform them of the changes to the admissions criteria framework and subsequent plans.
- d. Inclusion and involvement – included here are examples of stakeholders talking about the importance of including and involving others and their descriptions of events for that purpose.

#### 2. Resources

- a. Financial resources – financial resources includes references to issues of funding, both internal and external sources, as well as implications of funding issues.

- b. Human resources – these resources refer to instances where participants identified others as resources to increase knowledge, facilitate the process, etc.
  - c. Data resources – data resources include the availability and use of numerical and descriptive data regarding individual institutions as well as the state system overall.
3. Emphasizing differences – this category included all instances where administrators identified their institutions as unique and different from other state institutions.



## Appendix C

### Documents Included in Text Analysis

1. Board of Regents/State of Louisiana. (2001). *Master plan for public postsecondary education: 2001*.
2. Noel-Levitz. (2001). *Report of findings and recommendations: Executive summary*.
3. Noel-Levitz. (2000 – 2001). *The Bayou Bulletin Newsletter*. Issues 1 & 2.
4. Scott E. Bodfish for Noel-Levitz. (11/5/02). *Statewide market research: Final report*.
5. University recruitment and marketing plans (2002-2003). Selected sections. From:
  - Nicholls State University
  - Southeastern Louisiana University
  - Southern University (Baton Rouge campus)
  - Northwestern University
  - University of New Orleans
  - Louisiana State University (Baton Rouge campus)
6. Noel-Levitz. (2003). *Louisiana universities' retention conference resource workbook*. Alexandria, LA.

## Appendix D

### Text Analysis Data Codebook

#### I. University documents

Categories: Correlating categories - interview codebook

##### Working together/or not

Stakeholders  
Partnerships  
Collaborative efforts  
Community  
Public  
University-wide  
High school counselors  
Shared vision  
Lack of faculty involvement  
The state/economic development

##### Inclusion and Involvement

##### Resources

Lack of Funding  
Human  
Intellectual  
Data  
Declining High school grad rates  
Possible declining enrollment due to selective admissions  
Out-of-date technology/website

##### Resources

##### Uniqueness

Diverse cultures  
Unique geographic region  
Multicultural needs  
Culture  
Serve particular region

##### Emphasizing differences

#### II. Consulting agency documents

##### Change

Changing Times  
Changing environment  
Change their approach

##### Reconstructing knowledge

##### Working together/or not

Don't view MP goals (worthy)  
as relevant to their campus – lack

##### Inclusion and involvement



Public service  
Services and programs  
Develop partnerships

Diversity

Emphasizing differences

Cultural diversity in LA  
Institutions to create identity thru role, scope, and mission  
Goals  
Institutions to create specific campus goals and objectives

Resources

Resources

Leadership entity  
Citizens of state

## Vita

Kathleen Barnett received her Bachelor of Arts in the field of speech communication from the University of Louisiana/Lafayette in 1980. She then attended the University of South Carolina where she received her Master of Education in the area of student personnel administration with a minor in counseling in 1982. Following that, Ms. Barnett worked as a student program advisor for university student organizations for several years. In that position she guided student leaders through the planning, development, and implementation of major campus activities. Ms. Barnett then enjoyed a long career in marketing and community relations for several national companies. For the last several years Ms. Barnett has been an instructor at various universities while completing her doctoral work.