A PUBLIC MARRIAGE: A COMPARISON OF ORGANIZATIONAL

CHANGE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TWO CULTURES

INVOLVED IN A GOVERNMENT

FACILITIES MERGER

by

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ABSTRACT

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This study compares the change communication of two public organizations (a City and School District) during a municipal government facility merger as well as the effects of the merger on the organizations' cultures. It is unique in that the organizations merged only their facilities and not their business operations or organizational cultures. Therefore, the two organizations remained distinctly separate institutions. Data for this study consisted of 14 in-depth interviews. The results revealed that due to the separation in communication before the change, the School District had less formal communication with their employees as did the City. The limited communication resulted in more cynicism and apprehension about the change. Additionally, employees reported that the culture of the School District weakened after the merger; however, the City's culture only grew stronger. The study concludes with a discussion of future implications for similar public organizations considering a facility merger.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Organizational Change Communication

In an uncertain economy, many organizations undergo change. In just the past year Borders filed for bankruptcy with plans to close 200 stores nationwide (Guest & Meyer, 2011), Southwest Airlines announced plans to buy AirTran (Smith, 2010), and BP's chief executive officer resigned after the worst oil spill in the history of the United States (Gismatullin & Swint, 2010). All of these are major organizational changes requiring highly coordinated efforts and organizational change communication tactics.

Organizational change communication refers to the internal communication from an organization to its employees about a change before, during, or after the change has taken place (Bordia et al., 2004). Often, an organization's change communication can greatly affect the success of the implementation of the change itself, whether it be the adoption of new software programs, changes to employee performance policies, or even a merger between companies. If change communication is not adequately managed, it can result in rumors and resistance to the change at hand. As Cornelissen (2008) states, "Communication is central to how a change is formulated, announced and explained to employees and also contributes to a successful implementation and institutionalization of the change" (pp. 201-202). This study sets out to examine the organizational change communication of the two organizations during a merger, and the effect the merger had on the two organizations' cultures.

1.2 Background to the Study

In July 2008, the Government Center opened its doors to serve the citizens of a small suburban town in north Texas. The facility consists of seven different buildings connected by an

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atrium, and is the culmination of 10 years of cooperative planning by the City and the ISD (Independent School District) administrations and elected officials. The design of the facility is meant to integrate not only City departments but also the offices of the ISD utilizing more than 33,000 square feet of shared space (as illustrated in Appendix A). The sharing of a facility in this manner is not a common practice in the United States, and especially in the state of Texas, given that the ISD and the City have slightly different geographical boundaries, different funding sources, and are each governed by different laws. Not only do they share the facility physically, but they also both own the building and the land it is on, making it a distinct partnership (Booth, 2005).

The idea for building a shared facility came from a former City council member nearly 10 years before the Government Center opened. While the reasons for not sharing a space were often discussed, both organizations needed a new facility and the unique opportunity remained appealing. They wanted to not only partner in the building, but partner the organizations as a whole. It was initiated because it was argued that both organizations needed a new space, it would save taxpayer money to share space, it would build a better relationship between the two entities, and it would provide constituents with a "one-stop shop" for City and ISD services (Goolsby, 2008).

In 2005, an agreement was finally reached and groundbreaking took place in 2006 (City, 2006). Due to the unusual nature of the agreement and even the building itself, the Government Center was often a topic in the local media reports, as well as in the City and ISD newsletters. The media and newsletter articles were framed in a positive manner to highlight the partnership between the two organizations as well as the distinctive characteristics of the building. In a newspaper article highlighting the opening of the Government Center, the City Manager explained:

From what we can research, this is the only building of its kind in the state where the City and school administrations are located in one building… This is not an easy project, but building this together is saving the taxpayers money and is going to benefit the community. (Goolsby, 2008)

Prior to the opening of the Government Center, the ISD offices were located in one building, and the City offices were divided and located in several small office spaces throughout the community. Because the City was facing the biggest change by combining many separate offices, they formed a "Move Masters" committee made up of employee volunteers to coordinate the facility merger and even formalized their organizational culture in a culture statement (see Appendix B). The one-page document describes the City's formal organizational culture as being comprised of values which included high standards, teamwork, premier customer service, family-oriented, and fun, as well as including a formal culture statement. The ISD used a less-formal approach to their change communication and appointed a specific department made up of two people to handle the move. The two ISD employees met with individual departments to co-ordinate moving arrangements and furniture needs. Moving forward from there, they communicated mainly via email.

When preparing to move into the space, the agreement became known by those in administration as a "marriage" of the two cultures, a concept also communicated to staff throughout the two organizations. People and departments formerly separated were "moving in together," or "cohabitating," and the two cultures were being asked to exist harmoniously under the same roof. The concept of the "marriage" between the two organizations was also reflected in the media, with one article stating the two organizations were "beyond walking down the aisle… [and were] about to seal their unusual marriage with a kiss" (Booth, 2005).

The Government Center is the first of its kind in the state of Texas (Goolsby, 2008). It houses a total of 239 people, 170 employees from the City and 69 employees from the ISD. The

shared staff between the City and ISD consists of only two facilities personnel who handle general building maintenance and repair. The departments that make up the Government Center are the City's administrative offices, parks and recreation, code enforcement, public works, neighborhood services, human resources, municipal court, utility billing, information technology services, finance, facility maintenance, police, and economic development. ISD departments include the administrative offices, operations, information technology, the athletic director, the education foundation director, purchasing, special programs, special education, human resources, and finance.

According to the City's public relations manager (personal communication, September 21, 2010), the Government Center has also won numerous awards including the 2009 TEXO Summit Award, the 2009 Outstanding Construction Award from Associated General Contractors, and the 2009 Golden Hammer Award from the North Texas Roofing Contractors Associated, and was meant to serve as a benchmark for other municipal and government entities looking to enter into co-ownership and facility mergers.

The author's interest in this particular topic was two-fold; first, she is employed with one of the organizations, and second is the lack of research specific to facility mergers. The author's employment began shortly after the two organizations merged facilities and so she was not involved with the change process. As she became more familiar with those in both organizations and heard accounts of the merger, she began to understand just how unusual the partnership was. However, her research into the topic revealed a dearth of scholarly work on the subject of facility mergers.

There are many types of changes an organization can go through, and an area that is studied often in organizational research is that of mergers and acquisitions. The merger of the City and the ISD in this study has been termed a "facility merger" due to the legal agreement the two organizations have to share space, but not to merge the organizations themselves. Although

a facility merger is somewhat different than a traditional merger or acquisition, it shares some of the same concerns. As with many mergers, the issue of communicating the change to employees is prevalent, as well as the successful combination of the two organizational cultures once the merger has occurred.

<div align="center">1.3 Facility Merger Issues</div>

According to Stahl and Voigt (2008), while some mergers take place for financial reasons, the main reasons for businesses to go through a merger are "to improve the competitive position of one or both of the firms by generating 'synergies,' whereby the two firms create more value than either could achieve alone" (p. 163). These *synergies* can range from cost reduction by elimination of redundant positions, to cross-selling of products. These mergers are a global trend occurring in organizations and business units in every industry (Balle, 2008). Although the facility merger between the City and ISD was considered to be so different from other public partnerships and meant to serve as a benchmark for other entities, it still experienced similar issues facing more traditional mergers. First, those in the administration of both the City and the ISD had to decide how and when to communicate the change to employees. The second concern was how to integrate the two different cultures of the organizations in the shared facility.

1.3.1 Organizational Change Communication

While anything altering the daily routine of an organization can be considered change, organizational change is often defined by the degree of the change, whether the change is radical and major, or convergent and minor (Cornelissen, 2008). Highly social and interactive organizations tend to have more organizational change than others in an effort to be flexible and keep up with an ever-changing world (Griffin, Rafferty, & Mason, 2004; Rooney et al., 2010). How that change is communicated to members of the organization can vary greatly both between organizations and within them (Balle, 2008).

Just as organizational change communication can vary amongst the members of the organization, so too can the approaches of how to study that change communication. Four primary approaches to organizational change communication can be identified - functional, interpretive, critical, and structurational. In this study, the interpretive approach is used which defines change communication as a communicative action used to construct a social and organizational reality (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001).

1.3.2 Organizational Culture

The interpretive approach shares key elements with the theory of organizational culture in that "culture is usually thought of as a general shared social understanding, resulting in commonly held assumptions and views of the world among organizational members" (Weber & Camerer, 2003, p. 402). In fact, Schein (1992) defines organizational culture as:

> A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems. (p. 12)

The culture of an organization can often be of great influence on the outcome of a facility merger. Between half to three-quarters of mergers are considered unsuccessful. This is oftentimes due to the inability of companies to foresee the requirements of the integration of multiple cultures needed for a successful merger (Balle, 2008). While studies show that the integration of two cultures in a merger is one of the most important factors in its success, it is often not a consideration beforehand by the merging organizations (King, Dalton, Daily, & Covin, 2004). This study seeks to determine what measures were taken to integrate the two cultures through change communication, and what effect the merger ultimately had on the two organizational cultures individually.

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1.4 Theoretical Perspectives

This study operated under the sociocultural tradition, which seeks "to understand ways in which people together create the realities of their social groups, organization, and cultures" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p. 43). Under the sociocultural approach, research is considered to be highly interpretive and the meaning of words and actions in specific situations is given great importance. This study of change communication and organizational culture during a facility merger was also highly interpretive, and therefore used Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory. The theories that emerge from the grounded theory method were used to answer the research questions concerning the organizational change communication inside the two organizations at multiple employee levels, as well as the effect the merger has had on the organizational cultures of the City and the ISD. This sociocultural tradition technique allowed for a better understanding and interpretation of the participants' perspectives of the change communication and cultural changes surrounding the facilities merger.

1.5 Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study, which compares the two organization's change communication and culture, was to further the understanding and the scope of research in the field of organizational change communication and culture in a facility merger, specifically in a government setting. It compared the change communication used within each organization and its employee hierarchy before the facility merger, interpreted how the change communication was perceived within each organization at multiple employee hierarchy levels, and studied the effects of the facility merger of the two organizational cultures. Employee interviews were utilized to answer the research questions in this study so that the researcher could gain the most detailed and descriptive insight into how employees perceived the communication and interpreted it at their organizational level, as well as how their cultures were affected by the merger. In addition,

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the study set out to provide lessons for other public entities considering entering into similar agreements and organizational structures.

1.6 Methodology

This qualitative study, in line with the interpretive approach, gathered data through 14 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with personnel from both organizations. An equal number of participants from each organization were chosen to ensure consistency. These participants were equally distributed both vertically and horizontally throughout the organization's hierarchy so that participants in one organization mirrored the levels of participants chosen from the other organization. The interviews were then transcribed and analyzed following the framework of Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory method. This method was used because the situation of the facility merger between the City and the ISD is so unusual that current studies and theories could not readily be applied. In addition, because the research questions deal with the employee perceptions of the organizational change and culture, the grounded theory method allowed for a more interpretive approach.

1.7 Further Chapters

Chapter two begins with a review of the current literature surrounding organizational change communication, organizational culture, and organizational mergers. In chapter three, the qualitative methodology behind the data collection and analysis is outlined, and the recruitment of participants is discussed. Chapter four goes on to present the results of the investigation, while chapter five provides a discussion of the theoretical and practical insights gained about the change communication and organizational culture of the two organizations, discusses the limitations to the study, and presents directions for future research in the areas of organizational change communication and organizational culture.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Organizational change communication and organizational culture are at the heart of issues surrounding the facility merger of the City and ISD. This radical change to the core of each organization required organizational change communication efforts within both organizations. In this study, organizational culture is defined as the shared assumption among members about how to react to external and internal factors (Schein, 1992). Organizational change is defined by the degree of change to the organization's core elements (Cornelissen, 2008; Hannon, Polos, & Carroll, 2004; Griffin, Rafferty, & Mason, 2004). It is the purpose of this study to examine the effects of the facility merger on the culture of both the City and the ISD. However, despite previous research on organizational change communication (Zorn, Page, & Cheney, 2000; Bordia et al., 2004; Holan & Nelson, 2004; Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2005), and the impact of mergers on organizational culture (Stahl & Voight, 2007; Weber & Camerer, 2003), no such studies exist in the context of a facilities merger, specifically, between a municipal government and independent school district. This review of current literature provides a detailed summary of research conducted on organizational change, organizational change communication, organizational culture, and mergers and organizational culture. It concludes with a discussion on the theoretical and methodological background to the study which provides a framework for answering the research questions that guide this study.

2.1 Organizational Change

Organizational change tends to occur in organizations that deal predominantly with the public or rely heavily on interactions to complete tasks and projects (Rooney et al., 2010). To keep up with an ever-changing world, organizations must be flexible and change with it (Griffin,

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Rafferty, & Mason, 2004). The business environment changes rapidly and unpredictably with increased competition, technological developments, higher customer demand, and market globalization. In response to these pressures, organizations are structuring themselves for change so that they are flexible and ready to shift in response to threats to their effectiveness and survival (Zorn, Page, & Cheney, 2000; Kraatz & Zajac, 2001). More (1998) argues that, "successful organizations are those that initiate change, respond to change, plan change and implement change as an ongoing way of life" (p. 30).

While anything altering the daily routine of an organization can be considered change, organizational change is often defined by the degree of the change, for instance whether it is radical and major, or convergent and minor. Radical change consists of "a complete reorientation of an organization, whereas convergent change consists of fine-tuning the existing orientation and ways of working" (Cornelissen, 2008, p. 202). Anytime there is change in an organization, though, it can represent a threat to security or an opportunity to move forward for the people involved (Goodman, 2000).

Organizational change research was widely popular in the 1990s (Barry, 1997; Reichers, Wanus, & Austin, 1997; Robertson & Seneviratne, 1995; Fox & Amichai-Hamburger, 1993; Ford & Ford, 1995). While the literature on organizational change in the 90s was "mostly about de-layering and downsizing middle layers of management and associated roles, there is now a greater focus upon horizontal restructuring" (Bordia et al, 2004, p. 511). Evidence of the popularity of change and its integration into organizational culture is reflected in several books related to organizational leadership and change (Freiburg & Freiburg, 1998; Deutschman, 2007; Johnson, 1998). Although these books approach change from different perspectives, they all work to persuade readers that change is good, and they therefore should either initiate it or adapt to it by integrating change into their own culture.

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According to Robertson and Seneviratne (1995), the public sector is no different in its need for change. They go on to explain:

> With the environment becoming more turbulent, organizational boundaries changing or even collapsing, and the number of constituents in the political arena increasing, many public organizations will require implementation of a broad range of proactive changes designed to improve organizational functioning. (p. 547)

Recent studies reveal several types of organizational changes that can be categorized as effecting "core" organizational features, including organizational reorganization, downsizing, and mergers (Hannon, Polos, & Carroll, 2004; Griffin, Rafferty, & Mason, 2004). Hannon and Freeman's (1984) theory of structural inertia in organizational change looks at changes to an organization's core aspects including its goals, forms of authority, core technology, and marketing strategy. Hannon and Freeman (1984) ascertain that:

> [Structural inertia] refers to the comparisons of the typical rates of change of the processes identified above. In particular, structures of organizations have high inertia when the speed of reorganization is much lower than the rate at which the environmental conditions change. Thus, the concept of inertia, like fitness, refers to a correspondence between the behavioral capabilities of a class of organizations and their environment. (p. 151)

The theory has led to research on how organizations react and implement changes to their core (Kelly & Amburgey, 1991; Jansen, 2004; Ruef, 1997; Dobrey, Kim, & Carroll, 2003; Gresov, Haveman, & Olivia, 1993; Gilbert, 2005). In particular, Hannon, Polos, and Carroll (2003) examined what types of processes could delay a core organizational change. They outlined four processes including (1) structural processes, or slow response, (2) institutional processes, or the

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organizational arrangements, (3) political processes, or organizational politics, and (4) learning processes, or feedback.

According to Griffin, Rafferty, and Mason (2004), existing research suggests that change, especially radical changes to the core of an organization, has a predominately negative impact on the employees. These changes can contribute to employee uncertainty and distress, job dissatisfaction, lower trust and organizational commitment, and even increased turnover.

2.1.1 Perceptions of Organizational Change

While some prior research on responses to organizational change has been conducted (Bordia et al., 2004; Goodman, 2000; Griffin, Rafferty, & Mason, 2004; Heracleaus & Barrett, 2001; Holan & Nelson, 2004), the majority of studies focus on issues affecting the outcome of organizational change. Some of the reactions to change studied include problems (Covin & Kilman, 1990; Medved et al, 2001), resistance (Markus, 1983; Lewis, 2000), and uncertainty (Ashford & Black, 1996; Miller, Joseph & Apker, 2000; Eisenberg, 1984; Harter & Krone, 2001).

2.1.1.1 Uncertainty and Cynicism in Organizational Change

Uncertainty in organizational change can be defined as a person's inability to accurately predict the outcome of the change, whether it be due to wrong information or a lack thereof (Bordia et al, 2004). In organizational change, uncertainty is one of the most highly reported psychological states, and presents a challenge for managers when developing change communication and implementation strategies. Changes in government settings can especially create uncertainties among the public employees regarding policy changes and strategic direction. They may even feel uncertain about the reasons for the change and the overall nature of it.

> During a merger, employees may experience uncertainty about the nature and form of the merged organization, the impact of the merger on their work unity, and the likely changes to their job role… Similarly, in times of organizational

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restructuring, employees feel uncertain about the changing priorities of the organization and the likelihood of lay-offs. (Bordia et al, 2004, p. 509)

According to Reichers, Wanos, and Austin (1997), cynicism about the change can also be a factor. Cynicism is often, but should not be, mistaken with skepticism, where the likelihood of success is doubted but still hoped for, or resistance to change, where self-interest, misunderstanding, and low tolerance for change are accepted. Cynicism is a loss of faith in the initiators of change in a response to a history of failed or less-than-adequate attempts. In spite of the best attempts by the change leaders, cynicism can arise amongst even the most rational decision-makers who care about their reputations and the well-being of their employees (Reichers, Wanos, & Austin, 1997).

According to Stanley, Meyer, and Topolnytsky (2005), however, cynicism towards organizational change is not as easy to define. They claim that cynicism has cognitive, behavioral, and affective parts and ultimately define it as "disbelief of another's stated or implied motives for a decision or action" (p. 436). By applying this definition to organizational change communication, it can be used as disbelief of management's stated or implied motives for a decision or action. In addition, another type of cynicism, called dispositional cynicism, can be defined as "disbelief in the stated or implied motives of people in general for their decisions or actions" (p. 436).

Cynicism can present a major barrier to the intended outcome. Few changes in an organization can be mandated from the top administrators and then successfully implemented if the change does not have the support needed at every level of the organization. Cynicism can also be cyclical in that if the change is not supported, it will likely fail and therefore only reinforce the initial cynicism for any future changes (Reichers, Wanos, & Austin, 1997).

It is important to note, however, that not all organizational change communication is received negatively. Griffin, Rafferty, and Mason (2004) studied the sources of organizational

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change in regard to its effect on group leadership and morale. They found that when organizational change was initiated by a leader or employee within the individual's work group, the change was viewed more favorably than when it was initiated by a leader outside of the work group. Using multiple approaches to study change communication, Zorn, Page, and Cheney (2000) also found some similar instances where the employees adapted to the change without resistance or cynicism.

2.1.1.2 Perceptions at Different Employee Hierarchy Levels

The wide range of uncertainties, cynicism, and resistance to change can also contribute to differing perceptions of the organizational change depending on the employees' positions, roles, and duties within the organization (Bordia et al, 2004; Rooney et al, 2010). Rooney et al. (2010) claim that employees at different hierarchical levels learn about and make sense of changes differently. Many lower-level employees can feel their identities threatened in a new environment, which can lead to feelings of alienation, disorientation, and nostalgia. In their study, lower level employees were unable to see the benefits of a new environment and its work implications (Rooney, et al., 2010). In contrast, higher-level employees embraced and adapted to the change much quicker because they were able to see the benefits of the change and had a more positive, future-oriented view of it.

2.2 Organizational Change Communication

According to Bordia et al, (2004), organizational change communication is commonly used to reduce uncertainties and cynicism during organizational change. Communication can work to reduce these negative effects of the change process in two ways. First, the communication's quality and content can inform employees involved and it helps them feel more prepared and ready to cope with the change itself. Second, using a participatory communication process allows employees to feel more involved in the decision-making process and increases their awareness, understanding, and sense of control over the changing events.

2.2.1 Strategies to Minimize Resistance and Cynicism

Managing organizational change and employee resistance and cynicism is an intricate and delicate task for organizational leaders. Fox and Amichai-Hamburger (2001) suggest the use of emotional appeals when communicating change to employees, rather than solely using rational appeals. "Change programs in organizations are events that arouse intense emotions. The antecedents to initiating change – usually a crisis or an opportunity – are themselves strong generators of emotions" (p. 85). They believe that open and effective communication with employees is the key to reducing uncertainty, building more positive and trusting relationships, showing the advantages and benefits of the change, and strengthening the sense of control of the employee.

One of the emotional appeals Fox and Amichai-Hamburger (2001) argued for was the use of the metaphor, saying that it is important for managers to incorporate these into their communication when attempting to persuade employees of the change. They go on to explain:

> When organizations are going through a major change, employees need to acquire an understanding of their organization as an open system, influenced by and influencing its environment. The organization must also see itself as having a warm, open relationship between its management and employees. One effective way to achieve this is by changing the dominant metaphor from one that represents a rigid system and cold approach, such as that of a machine, to one that evokes a more caring and flexible system, such as the family. (p. 88)

Reichers, Wanous, and Austin (1997) sought to understand the reasons for cynicism in organizational change and ways to manage it from an organizational perspective. They compiled a list of 10 steps or 'suggestions' for managing cynicism in organizational change that can also be followed to avoid cynicism all together. They emphasize open communication at all hierarchical levels, developing positive relationships with employees, and employee involvement in the

communication and decision making process. The steps include: (1) keeping people involved in making decisions that affect them, (2) emphasizing (and rewarding) relationship-oriented behavior for supervisors, (3) keeping people informed of ongoing changes, (4) enhancing the effectiveness of timing, (5) keeping surprises to a minimum, (6) enhancing credibility by using a spokesperson that is liked and trusted, using positive messages, and use multiple channels and repetition, (7) dealing with the past by acknowledging mistakes, apologizing, and making amends, (8) publicizing successful changes, (9) using two-way communication in order to see change from the employees' perspective, and (10) providing opportunities for employees to express feelings, and receive validation and reassurance (Reichers, Wanous, and Austin (1997).

Bordia et al (2004) devised a two-prong approach to organizational change that was meant to reduce uncertainties about the change. They suggested ensuring the quality of managerial communication and employee participation in decision-making. The quality of managerial communication involves making sure that employees receive the information they need to help them deal with and understand the organizational change process. At the same time, employee participation in decision making increases employees' understanding and awareness of change events while giving them a sense of control over outcomes.

The benefits of employee involvement in organizational change decision making was also acknowledged by Feldman (2000), who studied organizational routines as a catalyst for organizational change. She argued that the agents involved in the routines are the most influential people to actually change that routine within the organization.

> Routines are performed by people who think and feel and care. Their reactions
> are situated in institutional, organizational, and personal contexts. Their actions
> are motivated by will and intention. They create, resist, engage in conflict,
> acquiesce to domination. All of these forces influence the enactment of

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organizational routines and create in them a tremendous potential for change. (p. 614)

Griffin, Rafferty, and Mason (2004) agreed that to increase the acceptance of an organizational change, all the levels within the organization should be involved in its planning and implementation. Research related to groups and teamwork suggests that when more responsibility is given to a group, it allows for more participation in decision-making which improves productivity and supports team members' social and emotional needs. When the group has initiated or been involved in a change, the overall outlook of the change within the group is supportive (Fox & Amichai-Hamburger, 2001).

2.2.2 Approaches to Organizational Change Communication Research

According to Heracleous and Barrett (2001), four primary approaches to organizational change communication can be identified in the current body of research – functional, interpretive, critical, and structurational. The functional approach views discourse as a communicative tool, used by the actor or communicator for a specific purpose. The interpretive approach sees discourse as an action through which the subject's social reality is constructed. The critical approach views discourse as politically implicated for power and knowledge relations. Finally, the structurational approach views discourse as a "duality of deep discursive structures and surface communicative action" (p. 758).

Although researchers in the current body of research most prevalently apply specific approaches to organizational change communication, Zorn, Page, and Cheney (2000) used a combination of approaches to analyze their case by employing the multiple methods framework. In doing so, they were able to apply multiple approaches and uncover possible conflicts when analyzing the same scene through multiple perspectives.

Barry (1997) found that the communication of organizational change tends to take either an "authorial expertise rooted in the notion of an objective, independent reality… [or] a 'client

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knows best' position" (p. 30). He argued that when structuring organizational change communication, it is beneficial to apply certain techniques often used in narrative family therapy because of the many similarities between families and organizations. Many organizational change communication models look to CEOs and senior management to communicate and implement change because of the assumption that they are the driving forces (Griffin, Rafferty, & Mason, 2004). However, Allen (2003) said he was "puzzled by the approach to strategic change promulgated by government and many practitioners, which assumed that a hard managerialist approach to strategic change was more effective than traditional models of collegial debate and decision-making" (p. 62). Other researchers suggest a more collaborative process to provide insight into organizational members' perspectives of change.

   2.2.2.1 Sensemaking

   Sensemaking involves rationalizing and giving meaning to what people are doing and communicating by looking at a situation both retrospectively and continuously. It is "the ongoing retrospective development of plausible images that rationalize what people are doing" (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005, p. 409). Taylor and Van Every (2000) visualize sensemaking as "a weigh station on the road to a consensually constructed, coordinated system of action... [where circumstances are] turned into a situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a spring board to action" (p. 40). Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obsteld (2005) give three important aspects of sensemaking in organizational life: sensemaking happens when circumstances are turned into words and categories, when organizing is embodied in spoken and written texts, and when there are multiple media methods that shape organizational conduct. They further that "sensemaking is about the interplay of action and interpretation rather than the influence of evaluation on choice. When action is the central focus, action, not choice, is the core phenomenon" (p. 409).

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Several studies examine sensemaking in organizations. Thomas, Sussman, and Henderson (2001) suggested that sensemaking plays an important role in the strategic learning process. Kezar and Eckel (2002) examined the importance of sensemaking in the transformational change of a higher education facility. Harris (1994) used schema theory to apply sensemaking to organizational culture. Balogun and Johnson (2004) examined how it is used in organizational change:

> When individuals face change, they experience surprise, a "gap" in their expectations vis a vis their experience. They start to act in a more conscious and less automatic sensemaking mode and to interact with each other to make sense of what is going on around them and to determine how they should respond. In the face of change, individuals exchange gossip, stories, rumors, and accounts of past experiences, and they take not of symbolic behaviors and actions. Through these social processes, recipients of change develop new understandings and interpretive frameworks. (Balogun & Johnson, 2004, p. 524)

Weick, Sutcliffe, and Obstfeld (2005) take the position that sensemaking is used to fill in gaps in organizational theory, and is based on two questions. "How does something come to be an event for organizational members? [and]… What does an event mean?" (p. 410). They argue that in order to understand how sensemaking can answer these questions in an organization, one must understand its distinctive features. First, sensemaking organizes flux, or experienced activities. Then, it begins with noticing and bracketing activities by interpreting something that occurred in the organization process but does not have a name yet. It goes on to label the experiences that are occurring and have occurred and categorize them into flexible groups that can change and adapt with further experience. Sensemaking is in retrospect because more can be viewed about an event or activity after it has occurred, and is about presumption because the sensemaker is connecting the concrete with the abstract. It is also social and systematic and

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easily influenced by a variety of social factors. Sensemaking is about action, because the sensemaker is trying to decide what to do next. Finally, it is also about organizing through communication, with communication as an integral part of sensemaking and organizational culture.

<u>2.3 Organizational Culture</u>

2.3.1 Culture Defined

Research performed in the area of organizational culture is substantial (i.e. O'Neill, 2003; Howard-Grenville, 2005; Kraatz & Zajac, 2001; Griffin, Rafferty, & Mason, 2004), with several studies revealing that an important factor in determining the success of organizational change communication is the culture of the organization itself (Weber & Camerer, 2003; Balle, 2008; Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Chatterjee, Lubatkin, Schweiger, & Weber, 1992). In this study, organizational culture is defined as:

> A pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration that has worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems. (Schein, 1992, p. 12)

Thus, organizational culture includes practices, as well as organizationally embedded values, assumptions, and expectations. The concept emerged from symbolic interactionism and anthropology with a dominant paradigm that focused on using qualitative methodology to understand cultures (Allen, 2003). Schneider (1990) contrasted organizational climate and organizational culture, saying:

> Both climate and culture deal with the ways by which organization members make sense of their environment. These sense-making attempts manifest themselves as shared meanings that form the basis for action. Both climate and

culture are learned, largely through the socialization process through symbolic interaction among group members... Culture exists at a higher level of abstraction than climate, and climate is a manifestation of culture. (p. 29)

Weber and Camerer (2003) point out that the theory of organizational culture shares key elements with the interpretive approach: "culture is usually thought of as a general shared social understanding, resulting in commonly held assumptions and views of the world among organizational members… [It] is developed in an organization through joint experience, usually over long periods of time" (p. 402). Hallett (2003) defined organizational culture as "a negotiated order influenced in particular by people with symbolic power – the power to define the situation in which interactions take place" (p. 130).

2.3.2 Elements of Organizational Culture

Organizational culture can be a major component of any organization. The elements that make up the organization's culture are wide-ranging and integral in understanding the culture itself. Wines and Hamilton (2009) examined organizational culture, saying:

One of the most powerful forces in an organization is its culture; yet, in many organizations it is invisible, intangible, and almost has a life of its own. Culture is like the air we breathe. "We don't know who discovered water, but we're certain it wasn't the fish." Similar observations hold true for cultures. People do not usually "see" cultures; rather we tend to "see through" cultures much the same way fish see through water or people see through the lenses of glasses. (p. 433)

Wilkins and Ouchi (1983) argued that, "organizational performance cannot be adequately nor accurately understood without a comprehension of the culture of the organization" (p. 469). They proposed a three-part typology of organizational culture including clans, bureaucracies (also called hierarchies in current literature), and markets. Later, a fourth type was added called

"adhocracies" and the four-fold typology used today was adopted (Fjortoft & Smart, 1994). According to Giberson et al., (2009):

> Clan cultures, also referred to as group cultures, combine a focus on flexibility and internal maintenance. Adhocracy cultures, also referred to as development cultures, combine a focus on flexibility with an emphasis on competitive positioning. Market cultures, also referred to as rational cultures, combine an emphasis on stability and control with competitive market positioning. Finally, hierarchical cultures emphasize stability and internal maintenance. (p. 124)

Using this four-fold typology, researchers Fjortoft and Smart (1994) compared organizational culture and its perceived effectiveness. They found that culture did influence organizational effectiveness through its ability to contribute to internal integration problems as well as external adaptation. They concluded, however, that optimal culture types differ for specific organizations.

Later, Cameron et al. (2007) used the four cultures in combination with two dimensions of organizational culture - (1) flexibility versus stability and control, and (2) focus on internal maintenance versus external competitive positioning - to elaborate on the competing values model (CVM) for organizational cultures. The CVM suggests that organizations experience tensions that compete along the two dimensions, which combine to create the four types of organizational cultures with specific sets of values.

Samovar, Porter, and McDaniel (2007) claim that the most important aspect of culture is that it is learned. The terms enculturation or socialization refer to the process of learning one's culture, and can include learning through proverbs, folktales, legends, myths, art, and mass media. Jermier, Slocum, Fry, and Gaines (1991) argued that specifically, organizational culture is manifested in many forms, including: myths, values, and ideologies; sagas and stories; legends and heroes; metaphors and slogans; rituals, rites and ceremonies; and symbolic artifacts, such as logos, architecture, and structural forms. They also contend that:

Organizational cultures (and subcultures) consist of two components: one is material; the other is ideational. These components present themselves in layers. The material component consists of more tangible symbols (e.g., insignia, formal dress, punching a time clock) that represent deeper layers of meaning. To be comprehended, they must be linked to underlying patterns of meaning from which they emerged… Search for an organizational culture's covert layers of meaning leads to the ideational component. More specifically, it leads to the domain of shared beliefs about the organization's mission and desirable standards of conduct. (p. 172)

Duh, Belak, and Milfelner (2010) draw on Thommen's (2002) research stating that organizational cultures also have two dimensions of either being strong or weak. An organization with a strong culture is said to have "a high level of values and high norms of anchoring, a high level of agreement, as well as significant system and environment compatibility" (p. 476). The level of anchoring shows the extent to which the employees accept the norms and values, with higher levels indicating a stronger impact of the organizational culture. The level of agreement identifies the overall character of the norms and values, with the effect of an organization's culture being stronger if the majority of employees share the values. The system compatibility level is the integration of the organizational culture with all other systems of the organization, which assumes that the greater the impact of the culture on the other systems the better and easier they can be implemented. Finally, the compatibility with the environment level, or external focus, is the degree to which the organizational culture is developed in accordance with the environment it operates within.

2.3.3 Organizational Subcultures

Indeed, in every society, a dominant culture can be found. However, culture is not monolithic, and within each culture subcultures and co-cultures can be found (Samovar, Porter, &

McDaniel, 2007). The same is said for organizational culture, where organizational subcultures form as groups of employees challenge, modify, and even replace the official culture. Several subcultures can sometimes coexist without friction, but often they end up in conflict. They can arise from personal characteristics such as age, race and gender; personal experience and social history such as family background, social class, and education; positional characteristics such as occupational specialty, or department and shift; and even technical requirements of the work or managerial demands (Jermier, Slocum, Fry, & Gaines, 1991). To truly understand the organizational culture of a company, one must identify and decipher its subcultures to gain knowledge into how they interrelate to influence decision making and organizational behavior (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988).

2.3.4 Acculturation

Acculturation is defined as "changes induced in (two cultural) systems as a result of the diffusions of cultural elements in both directions" (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988, p. 81). The process can occur at both the group and individual levels through the three stages of contact, conflict, and adaptation. Even though the process is generally viewed as a balance of two-way communication, one culture may attempt to dominate the other.

Berry (1983) outlined four modes through which acculturation may take place and define ways in which the two cultures adapt to each other and solve emergent conflicts. The modes included integration, assimilation, separation, and deculturation. Integration occurs when employees of the acquired firm want to preserve their own culture and remain independent. This can often lead to the physical and structural assimilation of the two organizations, but little behavioral and cultural assimilation. This can only occur if the acquiring organization allows the other group to remain independent culturally, and if both groups are viewed as equals and one does not try to dominate the other.

In contrast, assimilation is when one of the organizations willingly adopts the culture of the other organization, usually the acquired firm. Once this assimilation happens, the acquired firm will cease to have an independent organizational culture. Separation occurs when members of the acquired firm seek to maintain their own organizational culture and systems and they refuse to assimilate at any level with the acquiring firm. This often leaves them as a separate entity under the umbrella of the acquiring firm. Finally, deculturation is when employees lose cultural contact with their own group and the acquiring group, making them an outcast to both. This occurs when employees do not value the culture of their own group and do not wish to assimilate with the culture of the merging group.

<center>2.4 Mergers and Organizational Culture</center>

Organizational mergers are a national and global trend that can occur anywhere within an organization, between departments, and among entire organizations in every industry and of any size (Balle, 2008). Although traditional mergers involve the combination of two or more business operations, a less common type of merger could be considered a facility merger where organizations merge facilities, but not the operational structures themselves. Mergers of any type not only put a lot of company money on the line, but they put the people involved in the merger on the line as well. If a merger is unsuccessful, it can affect the morale and satisfaction of the employees, and ultimately even their jobs. Unfortunately, studies show that between half to three-quarters of mergers are considered unsuccessful, oftentimes due to the inability to realize the synergies required in a successful merger (Balle, 2008).

Organizational change, including the relocation of an organization to a new facility such as in a merger, can alter the way in which employees are able to identify and relate to each other, as well as with the workplace. Under these conditions, employees may struggle with their place identity and feel uncertain about the change. This change can affect their sense of

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connectedness, status, efficacy, or even value within their organization (Rooney et al., 2010).

Stahl and Voigt (2008) claim that:

> Literature has sought to explain [mergers and acquisitions] performance or underperformance in terms of the impact that variables such as cultural distance, culture compatibility, cultural fit, management style similarity, cultural change, cultural convergence, or acculturation have on the integration process of the financial performance of firms engaging in M&A activity. (p.160)

Although the combination of the two cultures often plays an important role in the success or failure of a merger, it is often overlooked when the benefits of a potential merger are being examined by the organizations themselves.

> While culture may seem like a "small thing" when evaluating a merger, compared to product-market and resource synergies, we think the opposite is true because culture is pervasive. It affects how the everyday business of the firm gets done – whether there is shared understanding during meetings and in promotion policy, how priorities are set and whether they are uniformly recognized, whether promises that get made are carried out, whether the merger partners agree on how time should be spent, and so forth. (Weber & Camerer, 2003, p. 401)

Organizational culture is a highly common topic among organizational communication researchers, as well as mergers and acquisitions, but the two are not as commonly researched together. A meta-analysis performed by King, Dalton, Daily, and Covin (2004) examined 93 published studies about acquisitions and mergers and found that the most commonly studied variables of merger and acquisition success (including the diversification of the acquirer, degree of relatedness, method of payment, and acquisition experience) had little significance in predicting post-acquisition and merger performance. Instead, the study implied that anticipated

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synergies of the firms, which can be one of the most important factors, are often not realized beforehand due to unforeseen circumstances.

2.4.1 Cultural Distance Theory

Stahl and Voigt (2007) performed their own meta-analysis of merger and acquisition studies saying that: "A key assumption underlying much of [the] research is the notion that cultural differences represent a source of acquisition cultural risk and a potential obstacle to achieving integration benefits" (p. 160). They go on to say that the research is consistent with cultural distance theory, which suggests that there is an increase in the costs, difficulties, and risks with cross-cultural contact as the cultural differences also increase between two individuals, groups, and organizations. However, they argue the actual relationship between culture and performance after an acquisition or merger is much more complex than the cultural distance theory had originally anticipated, and that the impact of cultural differences must be studied further by breaking down the levels of the culture within an organization.

Although the Government Center is an unusual situation in that it is a facilities merger rather than a full organizational merger, the current body of research suggests that the cultures of the two organizations are a fundamental consideration when analyzing the merger.

2.4.1 Culture and Identity

According to Rooney et al. (2010), "Organizational changes such as the implementation of new ways of working or a relocation to a new building, alter the ways in which employees relate to and identify with each other and the workplace" (p. 45). Under conditions such as these, employees may be uncertain about how the impending change may affect their connectedness, status, efficacy, and even value in the organization. An employee's sense of self can be defined by his relationship with other people in a place as well as the relationship to the different settings that can define day-to-day life for the employee. Place identity theory research looks at the response people have when there are physical changes in their environments and how they

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defend their sense of self-efficacy and connectedness when those physical changes are perceived as a threat.

> As people form emotional attachments to the places in which they live and work, they are more likely to resist changes to those places. These place identities develop through a continuing series of positive and negative events that together contribute to the development of the person. Positive and negative experiences in these contexts produce particular values, attitudes, feelings, beliefs, and narratives about the physical world that define a person's place identity. Place identity is not only constructed through experience with the physical setting but also a function of what people do and communicate to each other and what people think is good or bad in a place. (p. 47)

In addition to space and place, individuals will sometimes also identify with the organization itself (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007). Albert and Whetton (1985) defined organizational identity as the organization's members' views of the distinctive and central characteristics of the organization. It can also be applied to members' perceptions of how the organization's attributes rank against other organizations in the industry (Martins, 2005). Some studies have shown that when members' organizational identity differs from the perceived external identity of an organization, that discrepancy can be a catalyst for organizational change (Dutton & Dukerich, 1991; Gioia et al, 2000). In addition to being a change agent, Hsu and Hannon (2005) argue that organizational identity is also important in understanding organizational culture since employees often construct their identity based on the culture of the organization. A common approach to understanding organizational culture and identity is through the sociocultural tradition.

<u>2.5 Theoretical Background</u>

2.5.1 The Sociocultural Tradition

   The sociocultural tradition focuses on the idea of identity and seeks to address "the ways our understandings, meanings, norms, roles, and rules are worked out interactively in communication" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2008, p. 43). It seeks to understand the patterns of interaction between people, rather than individual communication characteristics. This interaction between people is where meanings, rules, roles, and cultural values are decided. It is where researchers using this tradition focus because they want to understand the ways that people come together to create the realities of their cultures, social groups, and organizations.

   Research using this approach is usually thought to be highly interpretive with the meanings behind words and actions in certain situations being of great importance. According to Nasir and Hand (2006), the sociocultural perspective on culture is that it is "produced and reproduced in moments as people 'do' life" (p. 450). Using this perspective, it can be assumed that culture is carried with individuals, but it is also recreated as people interact with others and reconstruct cultural practices.

2.5.2 The Interpretive Perspective

   The interpretive perspective used in qualitative research has had a "substantial influence" on the body of research based on organizational theory and method (Jermier, Slocum, Fry, & Gaines, 1991). Geertz (1973) believed that understanding culture was one of the primary goals in the interpretive approach. He analogized culture as a web that is spun with a meaning that only the animal can understand, and therefore should not be approached experimentally, but interpretively in order to understand its significance. Scammell (2010) said:

     Interpretivism is concerned with the *meaning* of reality, not with measuring reality

     per se. Some interpretivist scholars would assert that no single reality exists and

     that all reality is filtered through the perception of human cognition. According to

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this logic, because all observations are acts of unconscious interpretation, interpretive research focuses on meanings and is usually represented by qualitative assessments. (p. 1146)

According to Schutz (1973), individuals are able to create their own meaning out of the world around them and the behaviors within it. The aim of the interpretive approach, therefore, is to analyze the data while still allowing the voices of the participants to be heard (Scammell, 2010). It aims to understand how the participants perceive their own lives or situations without removing the interpretation of the researcher from the process. It also seeks to integrate the perceptions of the native and the researcher in order to better understand the life experience of the native (Baxter and Babbie, 2003).

By using this approach in organizational culture and communication, the researcher seeks to understand and interpret the situation and communication through the lens of the employee. Because the research is performed retrospectively, the researcher also must perform sensemaking activities (Geertz, 1993), as well as determine whether to approach the study from an emic or etic perspective, or an integration of the two (Pike, 1967).

2.5.3 Grounded Theory Method

"One of the most influential models for coding qualitative data is the grounded theory approach" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 218). Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory method is based on the assumptions that theory is grounded in the relationships between the data and the categories they are coded into, and that codes and categories are "mutable" until later in the research and analysis process when the researcher is out of the field because new experiences may alter the approach and coding framework. The process uses multiple stages of coding and categorizing qualitative data until the final stage which adapts the categories into theoretical constructs. Throughout the process, the researcher compares each incident to other incidents to

find the best category fit, thus the use of the name "constant comparative" method is also used when referring to the grounded theory method (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

This method is especially useful when taking the interpretive approach because rather than assigning theories to make sense of the anticipated data beforehand, it allows the researcher to grow the theory or theories out of his or her interpretation of the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). According to Strauss (1993), "phenomena do not just automatically unfold nor are they straightforwardly determined by social, economic, political, cultural, or any other circumstances; rather they are in part shaped by the interaction of concerned actors" (pp. 53-54).

When interviews are the main form of data collection, the interpretive approach and the grounded theory method are often used together to analyze the data for two reasons. First, the researchers want the participants to have a voice in the results, but through their interpretation. Second, the grounded theory method allows for a more open interpretation of the data which is not restricted by a certain, predetermined theory. As in this study, other recent studies utilizing interviews for data collection have applied the interpretive approach and grounded theory method when analyzing the results (Daub, 2010; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2010; Smart & Igo, 2010; Gregory & Jones, 2009).

2.6 Research Questions

There is no lack of research on organizational culture, communication, and even in the area of mergers and acquisitions. Prior research has been performed in all of these areas separately and in combination, but never in such a unique setting as the one cultivated in the Government Center. This study will examine the organizational cultures of two separate public entities after a facilities merger, as well as the communication during the change both between themselves and within the organizations. It also lends the opportunity to see how the cultures have adapted to each other *after* the change. Finally, the change itself is such a unique situation. The organizations did not simply merge into one large organization; rather they entered into a

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facilities merger partnership both maintaining their separate internal operations. Therefore, the research questions this study seeks to answer are:

RQ1a. How did the City communicate the change to its employees?

RQ1b. How did the ISD communicate the change to its employees?

RQ2a. How did employees at the City administrative level perceive the change communication?

RQ2b. How did employees at the ISD administrative level perceive the change communication?

RQ2c. How did employees at the City middle level perceive the change communication?

RQ2d. How did employees at the ISD middle level perceive the change communication?

RQ2e. How did employees at the City front-line level perceive the change communication?

RQ2f. How did employees at the ISD front-line level perceive the change communication?

RQ3a. How do members of the City perceive the effects of the merger on the current culture of the organization?

RQ3b. How do members of the ISD perceive the effects of the merger on the current culture of the organization?

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

      This chapter elaborates on the methods used for collecting and analyzing the data in the current study to answer the proposed research questions regarding the organizational change communication surrounding a facilities merger as well the impact of the merger on organizational culture. The chapter also explains the reasoning for the use of a qualitative research approach as opposed to a quantitative approach to answer the proposed questions. In line with a qualitative approach, it then outlines the interpretive perspective as well as the benefits and risks of using in-depth interviews as a method of data collection. From there, it explains the selection of participants using the process of purposeful sampling, including the identification of participants and the recruitment technique. It outlines how interviews were conducted to collect data for the study and describes the interview format and guide that was used. Finally, the chapter concludes with an explanation of the data analysis, which utilizes Strauss and Corbin's (1990) grounded theory.

3.2 A Qualitative Approach

      According to Baxter and Babbie (2003), qualitative methods such as interviews can be "especially appropriate when the researcher wants to understand in a richly detailed manner what the interviewee thinks and feels about some phenomenon," (p. 326). Lindlof and Taylor (2002) explain that "Fundamentally, qualitative researchers seek to preserve and analyze the situated form, content, and experience of social action rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformations," (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 18). In addition, Jackson, Drummond, and Camara (2007) state that qualitative research focuses on:

> Understanding human beings' richly textured experiences and reflections about those experiences. Rather than relying on a set of finite questions to elicit categorized, forced-choice responses with little room for open-ended replies to questions as quantitative research does, the qualitative researcher relies on the participants to offer in-depth responses to questions about how they have constructed or understood their experience. (pp. 22-23)

Using a quantitative research method, such as a questionnaire or survey, would not have adequately answered the research questions regarding the participants' perceptions and feelings surrounding the facility merger. Only a qualitative research method, such as an in-depth interview, would allow the researcher to gain the "thick-description" necessary to truly analyze and interpret the participants' unique experiences and feelings (Geertz, 1973; Jackson, Drummond, & Camara, 2007).

This study involved 14 participants: seven employees from the City and seven employees from the ISD. Saturation was reached with these participants because data became repetitive and more participants would not have added additional insight into the research (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). Since the study focused on participants' feelings and perceptions of the circumstances surrounding the facility merger a qualitative research method was used.

3.2.1 The Interpretive Approach

The researcher's access to the organization as a staff member provided inside knowledge and access to both organizations. The access to participants as well as the nature of the research questions called for an interpretive approach, which utilized qualitative research methods to analyze and interpret the data. Geertz (1973) believed that one of the primary goals of the interpretive approach was to understand culture. He wrote:

> The concept of culture I espouse is essentially a semiotic one. Believing with
> Max Weber that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself

has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore

not an experimental science in search of laws but an interpretive one in search of

meaning. (p. 5)

According to Schutz (1973), people have the ability to create their own meanings of the

world around them and of their behavior in that world. Interpretivism aims to discover how the

participants understand their own lives, and that the interpretation of the researcher should not be

removed from the research process. Interpretive research, therefore, seeks "to weave together

native and researcher subjectivities in an attempt to understand the life experience as a native"

(Baxter & Babbie, 2003, p. 326). Therefore, the purpose of this study is to interpret the meaning

the participants have created to make sense of the facility merger as well as the communication

surrounding the facility merger.

3.2.1.1 Emic and Etic Perspectives

In the research of cultures, the divide among scholars over the emic versus etic

perspectives is often identified (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999). The emic, or 'inside'

perspective strives to understand culture in its own language or terms, while the etic, or 'outside'

perspective works to understand cultures in a way that can be generalized across cultures rather

than a specific one. Pike (1967) notated the difference in these two approaches and based them

on the two approaches to language of phonemic and phonetic analysis which looks at the

uniqueness of a particular language, while the latter performs comparisons among different

languages.

Emic perspectives can be seen as following the tradition of psychological studies of

folklore beliefs, as well as cultural anthropology study of working to understand a culture from the

inside out, or rather the native's perspective. According to Morris, Leung, Ames, and Lickel (1999)

Scholars using this method describe thoughts and action in terms of the self-understanding of the

actor that are often historically and culturally bound. These scholars often view culture as an

interconnected system and use research methods that involve long, wide-ranging observation of a specific cultural group. However, emic accounts are sometimes discounted based on the inability to apply them consistently across reports and for possible misconceptions by the cultural insiders (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999).

The etic perspective is seen to follow in the tradition of behaviorist psychology studies and anthropological views that link culture to outside factors such as economic or ecological conditions. In contrast to the emic perspective, it looks to describe cultural phenomena in ways that apply across cultures rather than to a specific one. Researchers tend to isolate certain aspects of a culture and form hypotheses about their certain consequences or background. Usually, research involves structured observations of multiple cultural groups in a parallel fashion across different settings. If etic accounts are based on survey research, they can also be sometimes discounted due to researchers remaining at a distance from respondents and unable to observe how participants were affected by the survey questions (Morris, Leung, Ames, & Lickel, 1999).

More and more researchers are beginning to argue for the integration of the emic and etic perspectives, which was the approach taken in this study. Both Berry (1990) and Brett et al. (1997) proposed three-stage sequences that integrate both emic and etic approaches, each varying in the emphasis on the influence of one approach over the other. Morris, Leung, Ames, and Lickel (1999) argue that the two approaches are complimentary to eachother. Finally, Lidlof and Taylor (2002) recommend using both perspectives when "casing the scene" during the planning stages of qualitative research. However, no matter the perspective or approach to organizational culture, when it comes to an organizational change, such as a merger, organizational culture must be carefully considered.

Many researchers have an etic perspective to their research, as they are "outsiders." However, in this study, the researcher was an employee, and was therefore able to draw on both

her emic and etic perspectives when interpreting the data. The researcher was not present for the facilities merger, which provided additional etic perspective in this interpretive study. Due to the researcher's employment with the organization, measures were taken to ensure she remained as objective as possible. One such measure was the development of a reflexive memo, which contained details of the researcher's initial thoughts and knowledge of the study, as well as any expectations and predictions that she may have considered. The researcher referred to the memo throughout the study which served as a mechanism to compare interpretations of interview data to, as well as to confirm that the results and interpretations were not swayed by any of her prior experiences or initial expectations.

3.2.2 Interviews

An interview can be defined as "an event in which one person (the interviewer) encourages others to freely articulate their interests and experiences," (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 170). Interviews are often used in qualitative research because they are easily adaptable to different situations and topics, and they can provide an abundance of interpretive data for qualitative research. They are "particularly well-suited to understand the social actor's experience and perspective" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 173). Interviews seek to gain information from participants whose experience is important in answering the question at hand. Experiential knowledge is gained through stories, explanations, and accounts – all of which can be collected during the interview process. Interviews are also favored because they can allow researchers to gain access to participants without violating their privacy or having to utilize longer-term methods such as participant observation and prolonged contact (McCracken, 1988).

Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, and Ganesh (2003) suggest that interviewing an organization's members lets researchers enhance their understanding of an organization's communication. They go on to say that interviews are more than a verbal survey; they are a "moderately open-ended discussion between interviewer and interviewee, a discussion with a

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purpose" (p. 450). An interview allows the researcher to gain access to detailed descriptions of the thoughts, beliefs, and values of participants in their own words. It also allows, through the course of conversation, for the researcher to gather information on topics that otherwise would not have come up in other research techniques. However, because each interview is an open-ended discussion unique to the participants, they may not be easily recreated and answers to the same question may not be directly comparable as with the answers to a survey (Cheney, Christensen, Zorn, & Ganesh, 2003).

McCracken (1988) goes on to identify additional concerns regarding the interview process. These include the relationship between the researcher and his or her own culture, the relationship between the researcher and the data, and the relationship between the researcher and the respondent. In response to the issue of the researcher and his or her own culture, McCracken says that it is because qualitative researchers are working in their own culture that they are able to use interviews to do "such powerful work" (p. 12). By drawing on their own experiences in their culture and in the world to analyze and interpret the data generated from an interview, they are able to actually supplement the data. Although he concedes that the culture can also create blindness instead of insight, by following interview formats and designs it can be avoided.

The second issue presented was the relationship between the researcher and the data, meaning the ability of the research to control the type and amount of data collected in an interview without constraining or skewing the results. Again, McCracken (1988) asserts that if the researcher follows interview formats and designs this can also be avoided. The final issue concerns the researcher and respondent, specifically how the researcher is able to construct the relationship between them. The interview is an unusual social situation in which some of the relationship must be constructed for the purpose of data collection (McCracken 1988).

McCracken (1988) formulated a Four-Step Method of Inquiry for qualitative researchers to use when conducting interviews in order to combat concerns in the data collection process. The four steps he describes are: "(1) review of analytic categories and interview design, (2) review of cultural categories and interview design, (3) interview procedure and the discovery of cultural categories, [and] (4) interview analysis and the discovery of analytical procedures" (p. 29).

3.3 Selection of Participants

Since the goal of the research questions was to discover participants' perceptions and interpretations of the change communication and culture during the facility merger not only *between* the two organizations, but also *within* the different levels of the organizations, purposeful sampling was used to identify the participants. This type of sampling was used rather than a procedure of random probability because purposeful sampling uses "sites or cases [that] are chosen because there may be good reason to believe that 'what goes on there' is critical to understanding some process or concept" (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 122). The purposeful sampling strategy used in this study was snowball sampling, where the researcher set parameters for the attributes of the participants, and some of the research participants helped her identify others that met the attributes and would be willing to participate.

Specific attributes for the participants were that he or she had to have been employed with the organization before the facility merger took place and he or she had to be at a certain level within the organization. To ensure consistency in the research data, an equal number of participants from each organization were chosen. These participants were distributed both vertically and horizontally throughout each organization's hierarchy so that participants within one organization mirrored the levels of participants chosen from the other organization. For example, out of the seven interviews, two of the participants were administrative-level employees, two were

mid-level supervisors, and three were front-line employees (Please see Appendix C for an organizational flow chart of the City and an organizational flow chart of the ISD).

Once participants were identified with these attributes, they were recruited using a letter from the researcher sent via email asking for their participation in the study and explaining that it would be confidential, that participation was not mandatory, and that they would not be penalized if they chose not to participate. (Please see Appendix D). Out of the 14 people contacted, all 14 agreed to participate.

3.3.1 Participant Profiles

In order to maintain confidentiality of the participants, a profile of each participant has been provided as Appendix G that can be easily exerted in future publications so that participants cannot be identified by their titles within the organizations. The participant profiles include the names assigned to them in the study, the organization they work for (either the City or ISD), their employment level (administrative, mid-level supervisor, or front-line employee), their official title or position, and their length of employment at the organization.

3.4 Method of Data Collection

3.4.1 Interviews

Data was collected using in-depth interviews with personnel from the City and the ISD. Interviews were chosen as the data collection method in order to learn more about an event that could not be directly observed because it occurred in the past. This method was also chosen to gain the rich information essential to better understand the participants' views and opinions of the situations around the facility merger so that they may be interpreted to answer the research questions (Baxter & Babbie, 2003).Other qualitative methods, such as focus groups, were not used because the participants were co-workers and may not have been comfortable discussing their feelings in a group setting. Also, interviews allowed for more individualized probing that focus groups or surveys would not have.

Interviews were scheduled according to the participants' availability and took place during the last week in September 2010. All interviews except for one took place at the Government Center in either the participant's office, the researcher's office, or in a meeting room, depending on where the participant was most comfortable. The exception was one interview that occurred at a local restaurant. Each interview was audio recorded and lasted approximately 35 minutes on average, with the shortest interview lasting only 10 minutes and the longest lasting one hour and 47 minutes.

At the beginning of each interview, the purpose, process, and confidentiality of the research was explained to the participants, and each one signed a consent form approved by the University's Institutional Review Board (please see Appendix E). Separate interview schedules were used for front-line employees, mid-level employees, and administrative employees in order to understand how change was communicated at different levels within the organization. For instance, the study focused on how front-line employees were communicated to by their supervisors and how mid-level employees, or supervisors, were communicated to by administrators, as well as how they communicated the change to front-line employees. Front-line employees were asked to explain how they heard about the change, and how the communication process with their supervisor changed, or did not, during the process of the facilities merger. They were asked to describe any additional meetings or questions they had with their supervisor, how they perceived the process, and even what the communication was like after the facility merger. Supervisors, or mid-level employees, were asked similar questions, but from the perspective of how the administration communicated the change to them, and then how they, in turn, had to communicate the change to their own employees. For instance, did they call more meetings, or have to field more questions from their employees? Did they feel like they were kept adequately informed themselves? And they, too, were asked to describe the communication flow during the facility merger.

In addition, the study also included administrators who were responsible for first communicating about the change, and also for communicating about the change to mid-level employees. They were asked to discuss when the idea for the change first came up and how it was communicated, when they began telling employees about the impeding change, and how they kept the mid-level employees informed during the process. The following section further explains the interview process. To see the complete interview schedule for each employee level, please see Appendix F.

3.4.2 Interview Guides

The interview guides used at the three different employee levels during the interviews followed a semi-structured interview protocol (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). Each participant was asked the questions which corresponded to his or her employment level; however, the researcher used the flow of the conversation to dictate the order of the questions, as well as specific language and probes. The semi-structured protocol was chosen over the structured or unstructured interview protocols to help ensure that the participants' answers pertained to the research questions. Also, structured interview questions made it easier to make comparisons between the participants' answers – whether it be between employee levels or organizations. According to Jackson, Drummon, and Camara (2007), this type of protocol is preferred among qualitative researchers "to allow for more flexibility and responsiveness to emerging themes for both the interviewer and the respondent" (p. 25).

An element to the semi-structured protocol that allowed for more flexibility was the use of open-ended questions, which did not dictate how the participant should respond. These questions were often descriptive, or nondirective and asked the participant to describe a specific event or phenomenon in his or her own words (Baxter & Babbie, 2003; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Some examples of these types of questions used in this study included:

- Tell me about your position within the organization.

- Describe the first time you heard about the Government Center.

- Tell me about when the Government Center was finished, and your first time going through it.

These questions also varied according to the level of the employee in order to gain a better understanding of how the change was communicated among the hierarchy of the two organizations. For example, to understand how front-line employees were being communicated to and how they perceived that communication, they were asked:

- During the construction of the Government Center how were you kept informed?

- Do you feel like your supervisor's communication with you changed during that time?

In line with the same type of questioning, to understand how mid-level employees were being communicated to, how they perceived that communication, and then how they in turn communicated to their own employees, they were asked:

- When did you start telling your employees about [the Government Center]?

- Did you feel like your employees' communication with you changed during that time?

- Tell me about communication from administration during the process of constructing the Government Center.

Administrative level employees were also asked questions regarding their communication with staff to better understand how they handled the initial communication regarding the facility merger, and managed the communication during the construction process. Some of the questions they were asked included:

- Tell me about how (and why) the idea of the Government Center came about.

- When did you start telling employees about the idea of the Government Center?

- Tell me about the process of constructing the Government Center and how you communicated during that with employees.

Although many of the interview questions were similar for each employee at all three levels, some questions were included to help identify the difference in the communication and the perception of what was being communicated at each employee level within the two organizations.

<u>3.5 Data Analysis</u>

Interviews were transcribed and then analyzed using the grounded theory method of Strauss & Corbin (1990), also referred to as the constant-comparative method. It is based on the assumptions that (1) theory is grounded in the relationships between the data and the categories that they are coded into, and (2) that codes and categories are "mutable" until later in the process when the researcher is out of the field because new experiences can alter the approach and coding framework. This method is especially useful when taking an interpretive approach to research because rather than assigning theories to make sense of data beforehand, it inductively generates conclusions from the researcher's own experience when collecting the data (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). Chesebro and Borisoff (2007) go on to explain:

> Essentially, grounded theory suggests that theory emerges inductively from the data – that is, 'from the ground up.' This contrasts with the traditional inquiry characteristic of quantitative research which posits a deductive approach (one begins with a theory and then tests or examines it). (p. 10)

Following the framework of the grounded theory method outlined by Strauss and Corbin (1990), the researcher first read through the transcripts, looking for relevant and recurring ideas and topics. Then, the researcher went back through the transcripts and began open coding and in vivo coding. Open coding is "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). It is meant to "open up" the research and is seen as tentative and unrestricted. Large, broad areas of text in the

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transcripts were highlighted and noted as possible categories and category characteristics were loosely defined (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002).

At the same time as open coding, the researcher also performed in vivo coding, which is the coding of data using the actual terms and language of the participants themselves. One example could be the frequent use of the term "us versus them" becoming a category itself. According to Lindlof & Taylor (2002), "these instances of vivid language not only anchor conceptual categories, they also serve as category names and supply quotes for the research narrative" (p. 220). To aid in the coding stages of data analysis, Strauss & Corbin (1990) outlined four properties and their dimensional ranges: (1) "frequency," with a dimensional range of often to never, (2) "extent," with a dimensional range of more to less, (3) "intensity," with a dimensional range of high to low, and (4) "duration," with a dimensional range of long to short (p. 73).

Next, the researcher compiled a codebook to document the codes and their properties, as well as the tentative categories and sub-categories. Microanalysis was then performed with the researcher writing notes for her own use regarding initial thoughts and linkages between the transcripts. These "theoretical memos" served to describe the thematic attributes of the categories, how they may change over time, with whom, and how the data dimensionalizes, or sits on its dimensional range (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Creswell, 1997). For example, Initial notes included thoughts about the use of employee involvement in the change process in the City but not the ISD, and the difference in the attitudes towards the change in the two organizations,

Then, the researcher performed axial coding and reorganized the data in a new way to analyze how the different categories may relate to one another. A central phenomenon was identified in each category and then possible connections were addressed between causes, conditions, context, actions/interactions, and consequences (Baxter & Babbie, 2003, Creswell, 1997). Finally, the researcher used selective coding to finalize the categories and develop a "story line" to integrate them together (Creswell, 1997). For example, the researcher compared how the two

organizations' different approaches to the change communication may have resulted in the participants' different perceptions of the outcome of the facility merger. According to Glaser & Strauss (1967), by this stage in the grounded theory process, the categories are "theoretically saturated" and new data adds little new value to the categories themselves. They go on to point out that "later modifications are mainly on the order of clarifying the logic, taking out nonrelevant properties, integrating details of properties into the major outline of interrelated categories, and – most importantly – reduction" (p. 110). The changes the researcher made at this point were to further clarify the categories to the reader and ensure that the research questions were answered using the correct data. Additionally, the researcher's thesis chair read through the transcripts and coding to compare categories and aid in the overall organization. After the analysis of the transcripts was completed, the "story line" was developed. Chapter four describes the story and details the study's findings according to the research questions.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The data collected for this study included 14 semi-structured interviews which were conducted with an equal number of employees from the City and ISD, and within both organizations at the administrative, mid-level, and front-line employee levels. Profiles of these participants can be found in Appendix G. The analysis of the interview data revealed several dominant themes that ran throughout the interviews and assisted in answering the following research questions related to organizational change communication and culture.

4.1 Research Questions

4.1.1 RQ1a: How did the City communicate the change to its employees?

In answering the research question of how the City communicated the change, the major theme that emerged was that of participation and involvement of City employees in the change communication. With its change communication, the City encouraged participation from employees in the decision-making and change process. Administration communicated to employees using multiple media, and worked to evoke emotion and integrate the organizational culture. They also held structured workshops and meetings to keep the flow of information open and educate employees on both the change and how to manage it.

4.1.1.1 Participation and Involvement

Initial communication regarding the Government Center was very informal in the City. According to the research participants, employees would receive updates on the building's progress through other employees or from their director following the weekly department head meetings with the City Manager. Nearing the end of construction, when the logistics of the move were being coordinated, the City formed a committee to keep employees informed and bring them in on the decision-making, called the "Move Masters." Each department was designated a

"Move Master" that was tasked with taking the information back to the department and keeping everyone informed. To supplement the committee, information was also distributed to employees via the citywide employee email. "There was full communication," said Maria (administrative employee, City). "Anybody that wanted to be involved could be involved that was going to be moving into the new facility. So it didn't matter your rank or anything. Everybody was involved."

By forming the "Move Masters" committee, the City administration was able to identify with all levels of employment within the City. Robyn, a front-line employee with the City said:

> Myself and another representative…were the "move coordinators" for our building. So he and I went to meetings and we stayed in touch with…the coordination committee. So we were kept very informed of that because it was our responsibility to tell the others, you know, what to do.

As Robyn points out, not only were the committee members kept well informed, but they were also given the responsibility to relay the information to others so that they had a "stake" in the change itself. In addition, the City took the opportunity to incorporate elements of its culture into the organizational change communication by adopting the slogan of "Move Masters" to the committee, and identifying the members as the designated "Move Master" for each department.

The City also educated the managers so that they were able to ensure quality communication, even informally, at all levels of the organization The City did this each week at the scheduled department head meetings with an update on where they were in the change process. They then reinforced the desire for quality communication by encouraging directors and managers to go back to their respective departments and share the information they had learned, which was appreciated by their employees. In addition, the City also held a workshop for department directors on change communication. The workshop centered on the change management book, *Who Moved My Cheese* (Johnson, 1998), and discussed the lessons about change management and communication. Each director was encouraged to then take those lessons back to their employees, discuss the upcoming change, and answer any questions their

employees may have had about it. Katelyn, a mid-level City employee talked about the workshop saying:

> I remember they had *Who Moved My Cheese* – we needed to read that book and we had a seminar type of thing talking about change and how we were supposed to talk to our employees about change, and change management, and that change can be good but some people are resistant to it… We just passed the book around [in the department] and they read it as well. Then we talked about it in our weekly staff meetings.

The City's work to convey quality communication and include employees in the decision-making process was conveyed during the managers' workshop as well as by the "Move Masters" team. They were able to educate employees as well as have an outlet for employees at any level to be involved in the process if they wished to be. This was crucial to the success of the move and was reinforced through the positive comments about teamwork and employee input that were received on surveys the City had employees complete when they toured the space.

Although the change communication from the City did include functional information regarding the move into the Government Center, it also included elements of fun such as graphics, headlines, and color in the moving communication and booklets, and demonstrations at committee meetings. Even the name of the committee being "Move Masters" and each member being designated as the "Move Master" for his or her department made the process more fun for the City employees and more apt to get involved in the decision-making process, according to the participants. The overall feel of the messages that were communicated were positive and worked to get members excited about the move.

The City, moved everything at one time over a weekend because they, "did not want the public to be inconvenienced because we decided to move" according to Haley (front-line employee, City). "We closed on Friday at 5:00 at the old place and opened up at 8:00 that next Monday after the weekend, right on time" said Phillip (administrative employee, City). "I think

employees embraced it and the Saturday move-in was really kind of a lot of fun…There was a rebonding." Katelyn, a mid-level City employee said:

>It was fun. I remember it was a Sunday and we came and I actually had all my pictures put up by that day. I was just ready. I had everything set up and ready to go and I remember a lot of the employees here. It was just a fun time. I think we brought some of our family and they helped us move. So, my girls still remember that.

By having all the City employees move on the same day, the City worked to reinforce their "family" culture by not only keeping all of the employees together and trying to make it a fun experience, but by also allowing employees to bring in their families to see the space and meet others in their work groups..

4.1.2 RQ1b: How did the ISD communicate the change to its employees?

When answering the research question concerning how the ISD communicated change to its employees, the predominant theme that emerged from the research was that of instruction and separation. Their communication was comprised mainly of one-way and task-oriented messages, with little employee involvement. Additionally, the ISD did not use any emotional appeals or cultural reinforcement in their messages.

4.1.2.1 Instruction and Separation

Initial communication within the School District was very informal. Because the School District comprised a smaller number of people who were all located in one building with one break area prior to the move, they often received updates during lunch from one another. Sometimes the superintendent would also call them into one room and give updates after major decisions. In addition, they kept the site plans displayed in a central location so employees could look at them throughout the process.

When the move to the new facility grew closer, the directors of the business center and IT departments met with each department individually to discuss the move. In those meetings they

outlined the details of the move and the date that each department would be moving. Additional details were also communicated via email. When describing the process, Ryan, a mid-level ISD employee said:

> We met with each department head and the main powers and we all figured out what would work best. We figured out how much time each department would take for a smooth set up…and we said, 'Hey, is it all right if we move you all on this day, this department on this day, this department on this day?'

Although the departments were given the opportunity to have input on a specific time to move their offices, the communication remained informal and functional. The communication surrounding the physical move was very directive, with no use of emotional appeals or reinforcement of culture, giving it a more authoritative feel. According to Diana (administrative employee, ISD),

> We gave them specific instructions when they [needed to] pack up their files, [and] what they needed to label that with…and then we just lined up all the offices and gave them dates and times they were going to move.

4.1.3 RQ2a: How did employees at the City administrative level perceive the change communication?

Communication surrounding the change at the City administrative level focused on the negotiations of the partnership with the ISD. While interpreting how the administrative employees within the City perceived the change communication, the predominant theme that emerged was that of a marriage of opportunity. Although there was initial cynicism regarding the partnership discussions between the two organizations, there was ultimately an overall feeling of effectiveness regarding the change communication.

4.1.3.1 A Marriage of Opportunity

Although administrative employees in the two organizations knew each other well before the facility merger, they tended to have separate views on issues within the local government and

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did not have a well-known history of working together. Administrators of each organization who were familiar with this history were cynical and worried about the past repeating itself and the ability to form a partnership at all. Phillip (administrative employee, City) remembers where he was when he first heard the idea of the Government Center.

> I can remember exactly where I was standing in my old office…[with] a previous mayor pro-tem whom I had worked with for a long time. I had heard him say this before, but he was saying it with much more seriousness… He was like, 'You know, it really does make a lot of sense if you think about where the school is and where the City is to build a building together.' And I'm like, 'That's just the craziest thing I've ever heard of!' I mean it sounds great and philosophically, it makes a lot of sense and blah, blah, blah, but there were just a bazillion reasons why that just would never work… At the time, the reasons were what normally keeps people from really thinking about possibilities. It was just, sort of, the past.

Remembering the same council member Phillip referred to as the spearhead for the partnership, Maria (administrative employee, City) recalled past discussions:

> Why can't we put our resources together and build a facility that is for citizens rather than thinking individually as an individual government? We can put our resources together and maybe get more bang for our buck – share council chambers, things like that. And so at that point we started having discussions and we had to sign an agreement, a memorandum of understanding where we were heading.

This memorandum, or letter of understanding, was something similar to a "letter of intent" where the two organizations made a public decree of their intent to form a partnership for a shared building. Around that time, the new partnership became known as a "marriage" between the City and School District. Although the origin of the term differs according to who is asked,

many agree the term can be applied to the partnership in several ways. Referring to the marriage, Maria (administrative employee, City) said,

> [The city manager] has a tendency to relate things to a personal relationship… At first we were all like, 'You know, I don't know about that,' but after a while we were kind of like, 'Well, it kind of is because this is forever.' We wanted to make sure that the ISD understood that we believed that this was forever. This was not something that we were going to break. It's a commitment.

4.1.4 RQ2b: How did employees at the ISD administrative level perceive the change communication?

At the administrative level within the ISD, the change communication was also centered on the partnership with the City. When interpreting how the administrative employees within the ISD perceived the change communication, the theme that emerged was that of a marriage of convenience. There was initial cynicism about the partnership between the two organizations, but ultimately the communication was seen as effective with the ISD feeling that the partnership was one of convenience.

4.1.4.1 A Marriage of Convenience

Within the School District the change communication leading up to the move was perceived as lacking, but the communication surrounding the actual organization of the move was perceived to be very effective and well done. One ISD administrator said:

> I think you'll find that with talking to other people both on the school side and the City side that the communications were not coordinated between the two of us. I suspect that the City communication was probably quite a bit better than ours, because clearly there were more City people involved in the transition and the move. (Trey, administrative employee, ISD)

When interviewing administrators in the ISD about the change communication surrounding the facility merger, the communication during the planning stages was often

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discussed along with the partnership between the City and the ISD. Most participants were apprehensive when they first heard of the idea of a partnership between the two organizations. "I thought, 'You know, this is a recipe for disaster,'" said Trey (administrative employee, ISD). He continued to explain:

> There were days in [the City] which many people nowadays would not remember when the City fathers and school board members did not get along too well. Although they may have been friends on the street corner, when it came to their positions and their two institutionalized bodies, they did not get along well…at all. (Trey, administrative employee, ISD)

Although the reference to the partnership between the two organizations as a marriage began with the City, it also spread to the ISD. Trey (administrative employee, ISD) compared the first year of the two entities' partnership in the new facility to the first year of marriage:

> It's not unlike the first year of marriage, and we were - we needed to learn how to get along. And one of them, of course, I could have just seen this coming, there was a squabble over the coffee… And the City was trying to dole out the coffee or something. I don't know. Anyway, our people thought that the City was not going to give us our share of the coffee. Well, I'm not a coffee drinker and I couldn't have cared less, but I have people who just chewed me out because I didn't go over there and whoop [a City employee's] butt and get them some coffee.

Even though the partnership was likened to a marriage throughout the organization, the administrative level was the one that adopted it more openly. The lower level employees in the ISD that didn't have as much participation in the "marriage vows" may have used the term but sometimes still displayed an "us versus them" mentality, which the ISD administrators had to field.

4.1.5 RQ2c: How did employees at the City middle level perceive the change communication?

        In answering this question, the theme that arose surrounding the change communication was that of an opportunity. The City's mid-level management viewed the overall communication as being effective, and presenting an opportunity for increased professionalism in the workplace. Although some resistance arose from the change communication that the mid-level managers had to field, it was because the expectations around the change were so well communicated that a few employees were resistant to the change at first.

        4.1.5.1 An Opportunity

        At the City middle level, or the management/supervisor level, employees from both organizations perceived the change communication well. They felt they were kept informed by the administration and were able to answer and field any questions their own employees may have had. Department directors met weekly as a group with administration and stayed informed on the progress. They then had meetings with their own departments and relayed the information to them. In addition, they also participated in a seminar on change communication and how to relate it to their own employees and combat any cynicism. "For my group it worked really well," said Katelyn (mid-level employee, City). "[The department] is used to change – we change all the time, and so it was not a problem at all for my group. We're very adaptable."

        According to participants, the departments knew what was expected of them durng the change and were kept informed on what expectations would be after the facility merger as well. While most City departments did seem to adapt to the facility merger easily, Brandon (mid-level employee, City) did meet some resistance in his department:

            I knew it was gonna be different. A lot of people in the…department didn't want it. They did not want it…They knew they were gonna have to be – there was gonna be a lot of changes made… Dress code, you were gonna have to be a little more accountable for your time, and some of them didn't want to do that. They did not like it at all.

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Because the City departments were separated into different locations, some of them had developed their own subcultures as far as dress and daily operational routines. The move into the Government Center was a threat to their subcultures, even though it was meant to strengthen the overall culture of the organization. They weren't cynical about the change because they were kept well-informed and knew what effects the facility merger would have on them individually, they were simply resistant to it because they did not want their subcultures to change.

4.1.6 RQ2d: How did employees at the ISD middle level perceive the change communication?

When answering the questions of perception at the ISD middle level, the theme that arose was that of confusion as to whether the change was a possible threat. While the mid-level ISD employees felt they were kept informally up-to-date on the change itself, they had to field more questions and uncertainties from their employees.

4.1.6.1 A Possible Threat

With the School District, since the group was much smaller and already sharing the same space, they felt they were able to stay updated through daily conversation and contact with administration, and then passed that information on to their employees. "I don't think I really sat down with them [the employees]. We'd talk here and there, and we filled them in. But, it was pretty much common knowledge," (Ryan, mid-level employee, ISD). Supervisors in the School District, however, did have to field more concerns about the "marriage" between the City and the School District than the supervisors on the City level did. When describing the discussions with employees, Rebecca, a mid-level ISD employee said:

> The grapevine is an interesting thing… We did have to make some clarifications [to employees] obviously about what that would actually mean… The term "marriage" was being used a lot and what that would be like. You know, we would still function as separate entities, obviously, but it would give us again the opportunities to collaborate on some different things but still remain separate.

While the metaphor of a "marriage" was used as an emotional appeal to describe the partnership between the two organizations, it was met with much more uncertainty further into the process within the ISD than with the City. Due to the ISD's informal and unstructured change communication, there was much more sensemaking that had to take place among its employees, especially around the partnership and "marriage." Much like the administrators, the mid-level managers had to field more questions and concerns over the term and its meaning.

4.1.7 RQ2e: How did employees at the City front-line level perceive the change communication?

In answering this question, the theme that emerged for the City front-line employees was that of preparation for the change both mentally and physically. The front-line City employees were much more involved in the change process and not only prepared, but also well informed and understanding of the decisions and process in general.

4.1.7.1 Physical and Mental Preparedness

The City employees felt well informed about not only the move, but also the reasons for it and perceived the communication as being very effective. For Robyn (front-line employee, City), the communication regarding the change kept her well informed, it was the physical move into the new space that was difficult.

> I mean, how many times would you in your career move from one location to another – physically move? Everything, I mean, all your files, your computers, your furniture, everything. So that was a tremendous undertaking… But, I mean we made it through.

Natalie (Front-line employee, City) also felt that the move co-ordination was well planned on the City side. She participated in the regular meetings with representatives from each department and was able to voice any questions or concerns. She actually enjoyed the meetings because she got to learn more about other departments and their operations during the planning process.

The move itself went well. I was amazed that it went that smoothly, the move itself. I just felt like it was going to be – you hold your breath and hope that something doesn't turn out to be something terrible, and it wasn't. (Natalie)

The City's front-line employees contribute the smoothness of the move to the effective change communication prior to the facility merger. The participants had no hesitation or resistance to the facility merger because of their involvement in the change communication process. Instead, their apprehensions only surrounded the physical move itself and they were happy with the outcome of that as well.

4.1.8 RQ2f: How did employees at the ISD front-line level perceive the change communication?

When answering this question for the ISD front-line employees, the theme that emerged was that employees felt prepared physically, but not mentally. The ISD front-line employees felt prepared to physically move, but there were more uncertainties and concerns about the outcome of the change and what the facility merger meant for them. In addition, they also wished to have been more involved in the decision-making and change process.

4.1.8.1 Physical Preparedness

Front-line employees in the ISD perceived the change communication as effective. Although they had to receive the communication through a combination of their supervisors, administration, and other employees, they felt they were well informed and prepared for the facility merger. Andrea (front-line employee, ISD) said, "We were kept up to date with what was going on - usually from the Superintendent. We'd have meetings where we all got together and we'd get updates on what was going on, approximate move-in times, and what we were doing as far as furniture." Chelsey (front-line, ISD) echoed the communication effort saying:

They would keep us up to date, we would have meetings, or like, the Superintendent would call everybody into the boardroom over at the old building and just keep us up to date. I think he did it like, I don't know, maybe every five or six months.

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Although the ISD front-line employees felt "up to date" or prepared for the move, they were not involved in the decision making process and most of the information that was communicated to them was only functional, instructional, and task oriented. A few ISD employees expressed some apprehension about the merger and the desire to have been more involved in the process. Virginia, a front-line employee with the ISD said, "Coworkers and a couple board members just thought it was not a good idea…Of course, I didn't have a say so or a voice in it, which I don't think most of our staff really did."

Front-line employees also had to perform more sensemaking and seemed to have more questions of their administrators. Andrea (front-line employee, ISD) said they would hold occasional informal meetings in the old boardroom:

> It gave us a chance to ask questions or voice concerns or, you know, 'What floor are we going to be on?' or 'How much space does this department get?' or, you know, 'What kind of furniture are we getting?' Or, you know, 'Where are we going to park?' 'What's this?' Just lots of little things. 'Do we have a breakroom?' Things like that.

Although the ISD did allow some time for employees to ask these questions in informal meetings, if they had instituted a more structured and involved approach to the change communication process, then employees may not have had to seek out as much information to fill in the gaps in their knowledge of the change.

4.1.9 RQ3a: How do members of the City perceive the effects of the merger on the current culture of the organization?

When interpreting the effects the merger was perceived to have had on the City's organizational culture, three major themes were evident. These included a separation of subcultures with strengthening of the organizational culture, preservation of culture through space, and a separate "us and them" mentality. Although some members of the City felt somewhat disconnected from the people they were previously housed so closely with in

established subcultures, they felt like it brought them closer to the other departments as a whole. The City still maintained the "family-feel" that was present before the facility merger in individual departments, making a conscious effort to do so. They felt that they were in a better work environment now and had increased their level of professionalism to blend in with the higher degree of professionalism associated with the Government Center

4.1.9.1 Separate Subcultures and a Stronger Organizational Culture

Overall, the City members in this study perceived the organization's culture as stronger now that all the departments were housed together. However, some of the subcultures that had developed felt more separated as a result. The City departments were largely divided in entirely different buildings prior to the facility merger. The City departments were so spread out that they were not very functional. If someone needed help, "they would have to get in their car and come... It's not far but it's an inconvenience instead of just running down the stairs or hop on the elevator like we do now" said Haley (front-line employee, City). Robyn (front-line employee, City) would have to tell customers:

> You maybe need to go down to the EDC, they're in the Bank of America building. Or, you know, talk to administration, they're across the street. That was kind of from a – I would think from a developer standpoint or a public person's standpoint [they would think], 'God, it seems like you're all over the place.'

Although employees may have felt separated from departments in other buildings before the move, they were close to the departments that were housed with them and built strong subcultures. In the new facility, the departments were all in one building, but the ones that were housed together previously were actually more separated now. Natalie (front-line employee, City) explained that, "We were a close group…because it was a small building. And here it's one floor and you may or may not see another person on another floor for a very long time."

Although Brandon (mid-level employee, City) felt like he had more contact with the other departments within the Government Center, he also felt separated from some of his own employees.

> I don't have the real contact with the guys out in the field like I used to… I have to spend a lot more time up here than I was before. And they won't come by and just drop in like they used to. (Brandon)

Prior to the merger, the locations the departments were housed in were smaller and less formal, making them easier to get in and out of faster. After the merger, the majority of City departments were housed in one large building, there was more formalness to the offices and "dropping by" was less easy. In addition, employees who worked predominately in the field felt no sense of connection to the new building.

In talking with employees, Katelyn (mid-level employee, City) heard similar comments regarding the separation of subcultures,

> They feel like we don't see each other as much… that it's a little more spread out as far as in the levels… When we do employee surveys, they have wanted more cross-departmental interaction, and so we're trying to address that issue as well. And then some of the ones in the outlying buildings…still feel that they are out there and they're not in with the Government Center. So we try to address those issues. We try to bring them in and include them as much as we can.

One of the departments in particular that was viewed as being more separated was the administration department. In the City's previous location, administration was mixed in with other departments, but at the new Government Center they had their own separate floor. According to Natalie (front-line employee, City), "Mainly the fourth floor is the principal's office here, and most people feel like if they come up to the fourth floor they don't feel very comfortable." Administrators recognized the separation saying, "We've had a continual problem of getting information from the

top down and I think it's probably something that happens in all organizations, but some departments are better than others" (Maria, administrative employee, City).

To combat the separation, the participating administrators said they made an effort to stop into other departments around the building to say hello. "I think we've maintained the idea that, well that little conversation, assuming it's not happening every ten minutes, is an important conversation," said Phillip (administrative employee, City).

In contrast to the physical separation of departments that some employees felt, there was also a lot of discussion among participants about the new partnerships between departments that were developed in the new facility. Since the City departments were largely separated before moving into the new facility, the ability for more collaboration among them was made much easier with the new closer proximity. "It was a nice idea that all the departments were going to be together, because it's hard to help someone if they're miles away when they have a problem with anything," said Haley (front-line employee, City). Robyn (front-line employee, City) described their new situation at the Government Center as, "What we're calling a one stop shop where planning and zoning, building inspection, code enforcement, and the administrative offices for public works are all located in the same area." According to Brandon (mid-level employee, City),

> We do a lot of communicating with planning now. Public works is up here – it's a
> lot more communication with them. The public can access us all at one time. It's
> a lot easier. A lot better in my opinion.

In spite of some of the feelings of separation, the City employees felt an increase in the family-feel of the organization that was already there in the subcultures as well as a shift toward professionalism. Since the City departments were so separated before the move to the Government Center, many participants expressed the new family feel that they have now that everyone is together.

> Now, it's more of a connection. They feel like family, they used to feel like the
> little children who were over there and forgotten. But now that they're here we're

all one big family and we get to see each other, and give each other hugs. It's a very, very nice, loving atmosphere. I do have to say that. And even with the school, 'Hi!' So it's really nice, I think it's really nice. (Haley, front-line employee, City)

Brandon (mid-level employee, City) said some of the people in his department were resistant to the move because they knew there were going to be changes. He did, however, felt that it was a change for the better. For Robyn (front-line employee, City), "This building is just – it's a continuation of that same culture that we experienced in the other location." Other City employees shared a similar view:

We were so cramped in the old building we communicated a lot more. I mean you just had to walk a few steps down the hall and you were at every other department… Back then, and now we've tried to preserve it, we did in a cultural statement before we came over... And so we're attempting to preserve the culture but it was really family-oriented, very close-knit, sometimes we fought like family as far as that one conference room that we had. But also, we did see more of, of course, administration in that building since it was just down the hall and…some of the others would come by and we would go over there. So, it's more spread out now and you have to make an effort to go around and see people now. (Katelyn, mid-level employee, City)

The move into the Government Center and the combination of City departments created an entirely new situation for employees, forcing them to become internally integrated again by combining any subcultures they may have developed while separated. Recognizing that this could be an issue, administration addressed it directly and continued to work to maintain the "family" culture that they had before the move into the Government Center. One example was the culture statement that was adopted by the City prior to the move (please see Appendix B). The page outlined what an organizational culture is, the values of the City such as high standards and

teamwork, and the official culture statement of the City which said in part: "we have a team oriented work environment that is focused on achieving the highest level of customer satisfaction, providing a family-oriented and fun work environment, and pursuing excellence at all levels in the organization."

The organizational change has also affected the way that some employees identify with their workplace in that the new building made them feel more professional and accountable to the public. At first some employees were resistant to the change, but the majority of participants felt that it was for the better. All of the participants enjoyed the newness of the space.

4.1.9.2 Preserving Culture through Space

The use of space and its effect on the culture of the organizations also presented itself in the research. A specific location that was discussed was the shared employee break room. According to Phillip (administrative employee, City), the purpose of the shared break room was that:

> We wanted to replicate what we had in the tiny kitchen with the Dr. Pepper machine in the hallway that was in the back of the old City Hall because that was the place where we rubbed elbows and we had our showers and our parties and all these kinds of things.

By creating a shared space to carry on the sense of family at the previous location, the administration worked to also preserve the organizational subculture they had developed and shared that with the other departments in the City. After talking with the participants however, that did not seem to have worked quite as imagined. Robyn (front-line employee, City) said she used the break room, but only rarely:

> If I don't go out for lunch I'll eat at my desk. But, yeah, I'll go in there and get a cup of coffee. I might sit in there every once in a while, and I may see a School District employee, and other than the 'Hello, how are you?' I don't have any interaction with them.

As to why employees weren't using the shared space as much as anticipated, Phillip (administrative employee, City) said:

> I think it was because it's not convenient, it's not right there. They've created this space, mini spaces, in their own areas. It's right there… And that was something that I was bound and determined not to do. 'I'm going to go down to the second floor and I'm going to use that Coke machine and I want everyone else to do it.' The whole notion of keeping the Coke machine 35 cents was we want to encourage people to want to go down there. Frankly it hadn't been enough.

Participants in the City administration thought they could use the shared space to help preserve and strengthen the previous culture of a "family-feel" in the organization. They went on to explain that although the organization still had that "family-feel", it was not because of the space. They felt closer to the departments they were separated from before, and they had redeveloped subcultures according to the employees they were housed with now. These new subcultures also had a "family-feel" and reinforced the organizational culture as a whole.

Another way the City sought to reinforce culture through space was with the unified look and finish out of the spaces. However, according to the research participants, that did not go as originally planned either. Inside of the Government Center, the office spaces for the City and for the School District were finished out differently. The same architect was used for the exterior of the building, but different architects were used by the City and School District to finish out their respective spaces. Since an organization's culture could be identified using symbols, artifacts, and color, it was evident that the ISD purposefully wanted to remain a separate culture by making even their physical space different from the City's. According to Phillip, a City administrative employee:

> The coordination of that was much more difficult than they had imagined. And the coordination pressures that it put on the folks, the other two architects, were a lot higher, and frankly, it did not come out very well. We had walls in the

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middle of windows and stuff like that. And it created some very interesting

emotions.

The difference in the look and feel of the space only divided the organizations more and

did not portray a unified culture of the Government Center as a whole, but rather two separate

cultures and organizations housed in one building. The "marriage" that had been conveyed in the

change communication seemed to be less of a partnership than anticipated. Participants were

surprised at the different looks within the two organizations. Rebecca, a mid-level ISD employee

said:

One of the things I was a little surprised about I guess is there definitely is two

distinctive interior designs I guess. You know we have different carpet than [the

City] has, different wall colors and that type of thing and I was a little surprised

about that. You know, I thought it would be a little more uniform but that's fine.

In addition to the owned space, the School District also finished out their leased space to

their specifications, rather than the City's, which created an issue.

The deal was you finish our third floor to City standards and you use it for three

years, or whatever it was. You move out, it's already set up for the City, doing

this whole flexibility thing. We pick our folks up and move it where it's going to

be, everything's fine. The problem was, they used their internal design for theirs

and it didn't pay off. They've got giant offices. The front area did not work right,

and more importantly and more honestly, the HVAC [heating, ventilating, and air

conditioning] system's different. And so when you go back to this open concept,

theirs has drop ceilings and all that stuff so all the vents are in it, and all that has

to be changed. (Phillip, administrative employee, City)

In keeping with the agreement to change it back to the City's specifications when they

moved out, the School District, "also bought materials ahead of time, like carpet and things like

that, because they could store it instead of having to buy it [later]," according to Maria, a City administrative employee.

The City and ISD went to great lengths to form a partnership, or marriage, between the two organizations. But when the time came to physically get into the new, shared facility, they had several issues concerning their physical spaces, specifically on the ISD side. By striving to maintain their individuality and organizational culture, the participants from the ISD explained that they actually became more separate from the City distancing themselves as much as they could while still being in the same building.

4.1.9.3 "Us and Them"

The theme of separation between the organizations was common in the interviews. Although the City participants did not have an antagonist "us versus them" mentality, they still felt separate from the school district in several aspects including communication and operational activities and views. This view was contrary to original intent of the facility merger to be a partnership or "marriage" of the two organizations.

Prior to the facility merger, the City and ISD employees did not have much communication. "I didn't have a whole lot of use for them, [the ISD] I didn't think, before the move," explained Natalie (front-line employee, City). Since the merger, there is a little more interaction between the two entities, but the separation still remains. Philip (administrative employee, City) put the separation of entities into perspective saying,

> The expectation that someone might have that this was going to be something that was magically created simply because we built this building together is naïve and wrong. We really have to think of the building as being sort of a common language, and it gives us the opportunity to have a great relationship. But it does not mandate it or make it a guarantee.

The difference of the operations of the two entities also contributed to the perceived separation of their organizational cultures. According to Maria (administrative employee, City):

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It's critical to understand the difference…City Managers are hired by the elected body and…are supposed to be silent servants, silent partners. [They] are not a representative of the City. [They] serve at the discretion of the City council. [The city managers] give them the praise. They get all of the accolades for what [the city managers] do. Their work is done for [the council]… They're the leaders. [City managers] are the doers. And the ISD, in the Independent School District, the governing body hires their ISD superintendent or what we would call city manager and they give all the accolades they can to him. He is the leader head. He is the spearhead of everything.

Although combining City departments into one facility strengthened the overall culture of the City, the subcultures that were present prior to the merger had weakened or dissolved. In addition, a feeling of separation, or an "us and them" mentality still remained between the participants from the City and ISD, both due to the use of space and the distinctly different cultures and organizational structure of the two.

4.1.10 RQ3b: How do members of the ISD perceive the effects of the merger on the current culture of the organization?

Analysis of the effects of the facility merger on the ISD showed a weakening in the overall organizational culture and subcultures, as well as the issue of a lack of space and more excitement over new space rather than the partnership itself. Participants from the School District had more mixed perceptions of how the move had affected their culture. While all the participants acknowledged that the move had changed how they communicated with other departments now that they were more spread out, about half of the participants interviewed felt it actually affected their culture. Some said they missed the "family-feel" and that the organization felt more corporate now while others felt like the close-knit ties were still present.

In the School District, the organizational change also affected the way that participants identified with the workplace and related to each other. Because they became more separated,

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they did not relate to each other as easily. Some felt that since they did not relate as easily, they had lost some of their previous culture, making the organization more "business-like." Those participants who felt that the culture was not greatly affected knew that they had to put a little more effort into their communication and contacts.

4.1.10.1 Weakening of the Culture

As with the City, there was also a theme of separation that emerged in the research on the ISD's organizational culture. Before the facility merger, the ISD participants also felt largely separated from the City. "Really there was not any reason for communication between the City and ISD" (Diana, administrative employee, ISD). Andrea, (front line employee, ISD) also explained: "There is a higher level of communication going on, but we are not involved in that much." "We just didn't really think about City people."

Since the merger, there was a little more interaction between the two organizations, but the feeling of separation still remained among some of the participants. "They all seem very warm, open, you know, so I don't really know what it is that doesn't quite connect us" said Andrea (front-line employee, ISD).

> We serve all the same people because they are the taxpayers. And I would like
> to see those of us that are public servants - and we all are - be closer together.
> And that has not happened like I wish it had. (Trey, administrative employee,
> ISD)

The differences of each organization also seem to add to the separation between them.

> City Hall is the focal point of a City, that's where people go to do their business.
> And that is the icon that is the face of the city – city hall. With a school
> administration building, it is not true. Our clients, our business customers, our
> people are parents and they go to a campus to do their business and very rarely
> do they come to a place like City Hall. And so the administration building is not
> our face, it is not the icon of the school district probably anywhere. And that's

why you'll find a lot of school districts in this great state have administration buildings that look like a dump. But their high schools and their stadiums look like the Taj Mahal. And that is because, that is where their clients go. (Trey, administrative employee, ISD)

This operational difference was also one of the issues that was raised during initial cynicism as to why a partnership between the City and ISD could not work. It was also a reason that the ISD had a different finish-out in their space than the finish-out of the City. These differences in operations were reflected in the differences in the organizational cultures of the two organizations that had contributed to a sense of separation.

There was also a sense of separation among the participants within the organization since the merger. Employees at the School District administration building were all together in one hallway before moving into the Government Center, but were separated onto multiple floors at the new facility.

We feel very disconnected or cut off, you know, and everything is through email or phone call… Previously, if I needed to send something to special ed. either I would walk over there and give it to them or they would come, and right now I'm going up and down. It's really not that practical or time saving so we just depend on the inter-office mail which sometimes doesn't get [there the] same day. (Diana, administrative employee, ISD)

According to the research participants, the new space had not only weakened many of the ISD employees' perceptions of the subcultures, but also the perception of the culture as a whole. They felt so separated from others, that there was almost a lack of culture. In addition, some of the employees even felt as if it had weakened their efficiency and social bonds. According to Virginia (front-line employee, ISD),

Most people that I talk to feel more distant because before… you may not go into someone's office, but you'd always see someone checking their mail, always

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someone getting coffee… I'll go a month now and not see someone that I used to

see at least once a week in the old building.

The more consistent interaction among the ISD employees prior to the merger aided in

not only their perception of their organizational culture, but also in the dissemination of

information. Now that they were more separated and did not interact as often as before, some

participants felt more distant and cut off from the rest of the organization. Andrea (front-line

employee, ISD) said, "I come up here some days…and don't go to lunch and I don't leave my

office…until I go home at night. So other than people on this floor – I may not see anybody in the

other building." Trey (administrative employee, ISD) recalled:

Our people that were going to be involved were fewer in number and pretty much located

in one building. Whereas the city at the time had people spread out all over town. They

were going to be able to finally come together.

Similar to participants from the City, the ISD's administrative department was also viewed

as being more separated now that they alone occupied the third floor of the Government Center.

"It's caused a lot of employees to say, 'Well, I'm not going up there,'" according to Virginia (front-

line employee, ISD). Administrators in the ISD recognized the issue as well. Trey (administrative

employee, ISD) also tried to maintain his communication with other departments saying, "I can go

around and visit with people and they see that as being part of my job…just to check in on people

and see how they're doing." He realized, however, that not all employees were able to do that,

which contributed to the feelings of separation.

Each organization expressed a "family-feel" when referring to their culture, but also how

the feel had changed somewhat with the move into the new facility – especially for the School

District.

I think we felt more like a family over there because we saw everybody and we

were just a little bit more close-knit than we are over here. I mean…we see who's

on our floor and really coming and going that's still all you see because we all

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come and go about the same time…It's like we've all been sent to little foster families now, or something…We're still connected. I mean if there's, if someone in our group has a death or if we want to celebrate something – we still get together and do it, it's just not that intimate daily interaction. That's what we miss, is the daily interaction with everybody. (Diana, administrative employee, ISD)

To some, the shift in the culture of the School District was towards a more professional feel rather than family. "We are more like corporate, corporate level, you know like how the private industry is," said Diana (administrative employee, ISD). Virginia (front-line employee, ISD) even described the culture of the School District in the new facility as, "Business. Strictly business."

Some participants from the School District had felt the shift in culture, but did not necessarily think of it as a negative. Chelsey (front-line employee, ISD) explained that the School District culture before the move into the Government Center was, "pretty much like it is now. I think we're all a very close-knit group… Here we're more spread out so you don't see everybody every day because you're on different floors …but I think we're all a pretty close-knit group anyway."

4.1.10.2 Where's the Space?

The non-use of the shared space, such as the break room, was echoed in the ISD as well. "I probably only know three or four people that regularly go there for lunch. I'm not there a lot," said Virginia (front-line employee, ISD). Another employee, Rebecca (mid-level employee, ISD), said, "I have been in the break room to purchase items, snack items, but other than that I've never sat to have lunch or anything of that nature."

Participants from the ISD felt that they simply did not have enough space in the Government Center. "Originally when we started on the design we had a lot more room but then because of the cost of everything it cut down," said Diana (administrative employee, ISD). According to Phillip (administrative employee, City):

The City had the third floor shell space that we weren't going to finish it out. [The School District] didn't have enough money for the space left over, and they were like, 'Okay, this makes sense. We'll see if we can't bang out a deal.'

The deal resulted in a lease agreement between the City and School District for the space on the third floor to house school administration; however, some School District employees still felt cramped.

We are really from the point of view like if our ISD grew and we needed to add a person in this department we don't have room for it… And that was I think the biggest concern or downfall of this joint facility because we just don't have room to grow and not s single department has room to grow. (Diana, administrative employee, ISD)

The perception of change at the administrative level was much different than the perception of change at other levels within the organization. While all levels may agree that the ISD did not have enough functional space in the Government Center, those at the administrative level saw it as a negative looking forward to the future of the organization. They understood the reasoning behind the situation they were in, and that there had to be a change for the organization to grow. Front-line employees, on the other hand, viewed the lack of space as a negative from the beginning and relayed that to the partnership as a whole as being a negative thing. Virginia (front-line employee, ISD) explained:

With us leasing space on the third floor, we've already outgrown the building. If that's the case, there's not enough space for all of us on the third floor in the ISD part of the building. So, basically it was a bad deal.

4.1.10.3 Excitement over Space

The last sub-theme of space was the excitement that the research participants felt over getting a new space and how it overshadowed the concept of the joint facility. Trey

(administrative employee, ISD) said when people first started learning about the idea of the Government Center,

> most of the people who showed any reactions at all, their reactions were a mixed bag. Number one, and probably the first one was 'Why would we want to do that? And then number two was 'Well I'll do almost anything to get out of this dump that we are in now.

Diana (administrative employee, ISD) shared a similar view:

> I think on the ISD side people were just excited that we were moving to the new offices. They didn't care where we were moving, but that we were moving because we were in a very old building. We had lots of maintenance issues on that building and everybody was really eager to get out of there.

Katelyn (mid-level employee, City) described her initial reaction as, "Thank God I'm not going to be in this office forever. I was in an office that had a drain underneath that used to be a shower." Andrea, a front-line employee with the ISD said,

> If you know anything about our old building, we always had roof leaks from the first day I was there, we always had roof leaks. So you never knew if people were going to come in and the ceiling was going to be lying on your desk, or, you know, and what we thought was our secure room, if the ceiling was going to be, you know, or if water was going to be all over the boxes.

The new building was even thought to have improved the quality of some employees' jobs. Ryan, a mid-level ISD employee said,

> I can definitely say that some worries that I used to have are not present anymore. That's definitely probably the biggest difference. And, of course, just the fact of being able to come into a nice facility to work instead of something that's 50-60 years old and has got mold and mildew and leaking water everywhere.

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For some, the new space may have led to a renewed sense of connectedness and pride in the organization. "Some people maybe don't care what their surroundings look like, but I appreciate nice surroundings so I think it uplifts the morale, for me anyway," said Katelyn (mid-level employee, City). "It's definitely a mood elevator compared to going to some moldy old shower."

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS, AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This chapter further discusses the findings in chapter four, and seeks to apply them both theoretically and practically. It also discusses the limitations to the study as well as directions for possible future research in the areas of organizational change communication and organizational culture.

5.1 Discussion

This study set out to examine the communication of organizational change, employee perceptions about the change and the effects of the change on organizational culture in a government municipal setting. Overall, the facilities merger of the City and School District into the Government Center was successful according to research participants. Both organizations have a new space and the combination of the organizations and their departments meets the goal of increased customer service by providing a "one-stop-shop" to citizens. However, the facilities merger has remained strictly that, a facilities merger, with both organizations remaining separate operationally and culturally. Two of the differences between the two organizations that led to such a separation were their change communication techniques and organizational culture as a whole.

5.1.1 Differences in Organizational Change Communication

A radical organizational change, such as a merger, is either seen as a threat to the security of the organization, or an opportunity to move forward by its members (Cornelissen, 2008; Goodman, 2000). More often than not, a core change, such as this one of a facility merger is perceived negatively by employees and can contribute to employee uncertainty and distress, job dissatisfaction, lower trust and organizational commitment, and increased turnover (Griffin, Rafferty, and Mason, 2004). Therefore, strategic organizational change communication is crucial to minimize the risk of uncertainties and cynicism during an organizational change (Bordia, et al,

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2004). There are several strategies that researchers have developed and recommended regarding organizational change, and the City and ISD took two separate approaches to the change communication within their organization.

The separate organizational change communication approaches adopted by the City and ISD are due, in part, to their differing situations prior to the facility merger. The City offices were much more separated and housed in different locations throughout the city, so the change was viewed as not only a facility merger of the City and ISD, but as integrating the City departments as well. The ISD offices, on the other and, were already housed in one facility and contained far less staff than the City. Therefore, the ISD took a more informal and functional approach to the change communication, while the City's approach was very structured and participatory. What follows is a comparison and critique of those approaches.

5.1.1.1 Organizational Change Communication of the City

Part of the purpose of this study was to determine how the City communicated change to its employees, and also how that communication was perceived at the administrative, middle, and front-line levels. The City's approach to the organizational change communication followed very closely the ten steps recommended by Reichers, Wanouse, and Austin (1997) that were later adapted into a two-prong approach by Bordia et al. (2004). Administrators kept directors and managers updated at the weekly scheduled and structured department head meetings and encouraged them to go back to their own staff with the updates. They also orchestrated a change communication workshop for managers to assist them with learning the proper ways to communicate change to their employees and handle any uncertainties that may arise. In addition, the City formed a "Move Masters" committee allowing employees at all levels within the organization to be involved in the planning and implementation of the move itself. These elements of the City's organizational change communication strategy all combined to support Reichers, Wanouse, and Austin's (1997) ten steps, and Bordia et al.'s (2004) two-prong approach of ensuring the quality of managerial communication and employee participation in decision-making.

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Within the change communication, the City also incorporated its culture and emotional appeals of excitement and family (Fox & Amichai-Hamburger, 2001). The communication was enthusiastic and fun. The documents and artifacts contained logos, colors, and images to display the excitement of the change and encourage involvement. The metaphor of a marriage was introduced as a way to describe the partnership between the two organizations and often applied in the communication. The term 'marriage' brought a sense of nostalgia and a feeling of commitment to the change from some employees, according to the participants. The literature supported these findings in that it is important for managers to incorporate these metaphors and emotional appeals into their change communication to better persuade employees of the change (Fox & Amichai-Hamburger, 2001).

By incorporating quality communication, employee participation in decision-making, emotional appeals, and their culture into the organizational change communication strategy, the City was extremely effective in the change process and encountered very little cynicism and resistance from employees. This was especially important because of the potential for cynicism and resistance to have been a barrier in the organizational change. After the initial cynicism over the partnership itself was changed, the only negative perceptions that remained were from a select few that were resistant to a change in their subculture. To many employees their subcultures were their main culture. To better understand an organization's overall culture, it was important for the researcher to identify and decipher the subcultures first. Therefore to communicate effectively to a culture, especially on an organizational change, one must understand the culture as well as the subcultures of an organization.

In that specific case, the City was so effective in its change communication that the employees knew exactly what to expect in the change, and understood the reasoning for it, but simply did not want to give up certain elements of the subculture they had developed such as a more relaxed dress code and flexible schedule. Therefore, the City's organizational change communication strategy was highly effective and well received within the organization.

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5.1.1.2 Organizational Change Communication of the ISD

Another part of this study was to determine how the ISD communicated change to its employees, and to understand how ISD employees at the administrative, middle, and front line levels perceived the communication. The ISD did not implement as structured an organizational change communication strategy as the City. Instead, their organizational change communication was more functional, task-oriented, and authoritative (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001; Barry, 1997). Up until the planning for the physical move, there was no structured communication to employees within the ISD. There were a few articles in internal newsletters, and the plans for the Government Center were on display in the administrative offices, but there were no scheduled updates or committees appointed to the change communication. There were, however, impromptu meetings with the superintendent to update employees on different milestones or decisions with the process, but employees had to rely heavily on getting information through the organizational grapevine. This reliance on alternative methods of information caused a greater amount of cynicism, uncertainty, and sensemaking within the ISD – especially in the lower-level positions. Because they were not given as much information, employees were required to fill in the gaps themselves by acting more consciously either through talk of cynicism with other employees or asking questions directly.

Closer to the actual change event, an ISD employee was appointed to oversee the change communication regarding the physical move into the new building. This involved the employee meeting with the different ISD department heads individually to coordinate the move and give them each specific instructions on how the details were to be handled. The change communication consisted of those meetings and follow-up via email and informal verbal correspondence. There was very little employee participation in the process and few, if any, emotional appeals..

As a result of the informal and functional nature of the ISD's approach to the change communication proves, there was more cynicism about the change throughout the process, in

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addition to uncertainty and resistance. Because of the informalness of the initial communication, there was much more speculation and sensemaking to fill in the gaps of knowledge pertaining to what the partnership would really mean and how or if the organizational operations would be changing.

5.1.2 Differences in Organizational Culture

The differences in organizational change communication approaches between the City and ISD is due in part to the difference in situations prior to the facility merger, and in part to the differences in the cultures of the organizations. Organizational culture is seen as a major component, if not the most important component, of any organization (Wines & Hamilton, 2009). Organizational cultures are categorized in several ways depending on the organizational characteristics (Giberson, et al., 2009). One of the many characteristics used to define a culture is the organizational communication within it that manifests itself in many different ways such as myths, values, ideologies, sagas, stories, legends, metaphors, and slogans (Jermier, Slocum, Fry & Gaines, 1991). Prior to the facility merger, and still today, the ISD and the City have two very different cultures.

5.1.2.1 Organizational Culture of the City

The current study also sought to understand if the change had any affect on the organizational culture of the City. The City's organizational culture can be described as a "clan" or "group" culture because of its emphasis on flexibility and internal maintenance. The culture was often described by members as a "family," with emphasis on the shared caring and concern of others, the rituals and ceremonies of baby showers and birthday celebrations, and even the physical contact of hugging. Although the locational separation of departments prior to the merger developed strong subcultures (Samovar, Porter, & McDaniel, 2007), the same family-feel was used to describe those subcultures as well.

What makes the City's organizational culture unique is that it was described the same way before and after the facility merger. Therefore, it was strong enough to withstand such a

monumental change as facility merger. Although some of the subcultures were dissolved because of the separation of departments in the Government Center, the overall culture was actually viewed as having been strengthened and feeling even more like a family now that the majority of employees were all under one roof. Different subcultures have developed, but they coexist easily with an increased interaction among them and even partnerships between them.

Knowing that the merger and movement to a new space could alter the way that some employees identified with the organization and its culture, the City purposefully integrated their culture into their change communication and even developed and formally adopted a culture statement (attached as Appendix B) to increase the employee awareness and appreciation of the organizational culture. Their statement as having a "team oriented work environment that is focused on achieving the highest level of customer satisfaction, providing a family-oriented and fun work environment, and pursuing excellence at all level in the organization" was a true reflection of their perceived organizational culture by the group members.

The "family" culture of the City was also portrayed in the physical move into the Government Center. In order to not disrupt customer service, they moved all of their offices on a Saturday. They wanted to make it fun for employees, so they had lunch brought in and even invited the families of employees to come help out and see the new building. The move itself became a party, or ceremony, for employees, reinforcing the clan culture of the organization.

5.1.2.2 Organizational Culture of the ISD

Finally, the study sought to understand if the change affected the organizational culture of the ISD. In contrast to the City, the ISD's culture can be described as a hierarchical or authoritative culture because of their focus on internal stability and control. This was evident in the type of change communication techniques they used during the facility merger since the majority of their communication was authoritative and task-oriented. The shift in the culture after the facility merger also suggests that the culture itself was not strong or flexible enough to withstand a core change to the organization.

Although some employees described the organization as having a "family feel" prior to the move, most of them felt more separated and had less contact with other group members after the move into the Government Center. The ISD administrative offices were much smaller than the City offices, and all concentrated in one building on the same hallway before the move. There was much more interaction among employees across the organization and therefore very few, if any, subcultures were formed. Because of the informal nature of the organization and its relatively small size, there was never a formal emphasis put on the organizational culture. As a result, the facility merger affected it greatly. The separation caused the group members to no longer share in cultural rituals, ceremonies, and general contact, therefore that "general shared understand" that comprises an organizational culture was disrupted.

After the merger, some employees still described the organization as having a "family feel," but that feeling of closeness was concentrated to the department or two they were located with at the new facility. This suggests that since the overall organizational culture of the ISD was weakened, some of the departments have formed subcultures as a way to make sense of the change and to maintain the feeling of closeness they once shared overall. The ceremonies and rituals such as holiday gatherings and baby showers were now mostly departmentalized instead of organization wide.

Other employees said that the organization felt much different than before. They expressed that the "family feel" was actually gone and had been replaced with a more business-oriented approach with less interaction among the group. These employees seemed to be members of departments who had not formed subcultures and were still going through the sensemaking process and attempting to find a cultural identity. The organizational change was jarring to them, and they were not emotionally prepared for it. Some of these employees seemed to be still recovering from the change, to "relearn" the new organizational culture and subcultures as well as identity with their new space.

<u>5.2 Theoretical Implications</u>

Although this study used the grounded theory method of Strauss and Corbin (1990), and therefore did not use a specific theory to interpret the research data, the results could indeed be related to a few established theories and prior research by other scholars in the fields of organizational communication and culture. The theories culminated from the grounded theory approach in that rather than creating a new theory as a result of the analysis, the researcher was able to identify theories already in existence that were relevant to the findings. This added to the research by allowing for further reinforcement of the accuracy of the findings. These theories and suggestions include the two-prong approach to change communication (Bordia et al., 2004), place identity theory (Rooney et al., 2010), and cultural distance theory (Stahl & Voigt, 2007).

5.2.1 The Two-Prong Approach to Organizational Change Communication

The results of this study strongly supported the use of the Bordia et al's (2004) two-prong approach to change communication. The implementation of quality managerial communication and employee participation in decision-making was crucial in the success of the facility merger for the City. The City's inclusion of cultural values and emotional appeals also enhanced the quality of their change communication to group members (Fox & Amichai-Hamburger, 2001). By applying this approach, the City was able to use the facility merger as a mechanism to actually strengthen their overall organizational culture.

In contrast, the ISD did not adhere to the two-prong approach and used functional, informal communication techniques with little employee involvement. Although the physical move into the Government Center itself was well planned and communicated, the organizational culture was threatened by the core organizational change and weakened as a result. The ISD employees had to go through more sensemaking (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005) during the change and still did not really understand some of the decisions that were made by administration during the process. If the ISD had taken a more structured approach to communication and involved employees at an earlier stage in the change process, some of the negative feelings toward the

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change could have been avoided. Perhaps the involvement would have even strengthened their organizational culture and it would not have been as affected by the move.

What makes this study unique when applying the two-prong approach to change communication (Bordia et al., 2004) is that both organizations were presented with the same task of merging facilities into the Government Center, and since they remained separate organizations, they approached the change communication separately. Therefore, the researcher was able to directly compare how each organization approached the change at different hierarchical levels in the organization.

5.2.2 Place Identity Theory

The results of this study also support the premise of place identity theory, which suggests that when a person's work environment changes it can alter the way he or she identifies with the organization as well as the organizational identification of others (Rooney et al., 2010). The facility merger into the new Government Center made employees in both organizations express feelings of a more "professional" atmosphere. Being in a large, new building with several other departments as well as with a completely different organization was a big change from the old, small buildings that only one or two departments may have occupied. While this new feeling of professionalism was viewed as mostly positive within the City and strengthened their organizational culture, some of the ISD members felt the professional formalness was actually a hindrance to the culture they shared in the space before.

These negative feelings regarding the new space and shift toward a more business-oriented atmosphere were mostly on the front-line level employees in the ISD. In line with Rooney et al.'s (2010) findings, these front-line employees in the ISD that had not been included in decision making had to perform more sensemaking on their own, leaving them to feel their identity threatened in the new space and a sense of alienation. Due to these feelings, the employees were less likely to see the benefits of the merger and adapted to the change more slowly than others. Again, had these employees been involved in the change process they may

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have been more likely to understand the reasons for the merger, feel a sense of connectedness to the process, and have adapted much more quickly and positively to the new space.

5.2.3 Cultural Distance Theory

Such differences in the two organizations resulted in a lack of cross-cultural contact and interaction between their members. These results actually supported the literature on cultural distance theory, which suggests that the greater the differences between two cultures, the greater the perceived risk of interaction by their members (Stahl & Voigt, 2007). This separation of the two organizational cultures could be seen in the results beginning with the separate approaches to the organizational change communication and more recently with the shared nature of the new location. Although the administration of the two organizations had some contact, the cross-cultural interaction did not extend past them.

The merging into a shared facility did not merge any other aspects of the City or ISD. Instead of forming one large culture in the new facility, or each culture taking on aspects of the other, there was still a complete separation resulting in cultural assimilation rather than integration (Berry, 1983). What was interesting about this particular situation was that what the ISD said they missed about the culture of their old location was actually what the City had strengthened in the culture of their new location. Because of the apparent differences between the organizations, however, they were unable to fulfill any cultural needs the other may have had without the necessary cross-cultural contact.

In addition to the theoretical implications the study results have pertaining to the emic and etic perspectives, the two-prong approach to change communication, place identity theory, and cultural distance theory, the study can also serve to provide practical implications in the area of organizational culture and change communication.

5.3 Practical Implications

The findings in this study are relevant because the situation is unique in so many ways. First, the facility merger was between two public organizations that traditionally had little

operational collaboration. That the two organizations and their elected councils were able to come to an operations agreement for a joint facility is a political milestone in itself. Other public entities looking to enter into agreements with each other can use this partnership as a guide by examining the hurdles the City and School District overcame and learn from both their accomplishments and mistakes.

The situation was also unique in that the negotiations of the agreement were all public. That public information served as the basis for the change communication to employees, but had to be supplemented by each organization. While both of the organizations' approaches were successful and effective in that they accomplished an organized facility move, the City's communication techniques used to increase the knowledge of employees and involve them in the process led to more excitement from employees about the facility merger and a more positive final outcome. Therefore, other public entities going through change can model their change communication after the techniques used by the City.

Finally, the merger itself is unique because it was simply a merging of facilities and not the organizations themselves. This study allowed for a direct comparison of two public organizations that were entering into the same situation but still had complete individual control over how they handled the change internally. Usually, with a merger one of the organizations is dominant and assumes control over how the organizational change communication will take place, what departments may be merged, and so on (Nahavandi & Malekzadeh, 1988). Or if the organizations are not merging, one organization will own the space and simply lease it to the other organization. With this situation, the City and the ISD still remained completely separate, yet entered into a legally binding contract to share space and operate under the same roof.

A facility merger is not a common practice in the business world, but with the current economic recession and more and more businesses going through significant organizational changes, businesses and organizations have to be creative and think strategically about change. Most mergers involve the integration of two or more organizations both in physical space and

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operations. A facility merger may integrate two organizations into the same space, but they remain separate operationally. Usually in this type of situation with public entities, one organization owns the space and simply leases it to another under their lease rules. With this situation, both of the organizations actually own the space, so a new type of partnership had to be formed. In this study, both organizational cultures were affected, but to a different degree because of the change in space and the change communication styles of each organization. Had this been a traditional merger, the change communication would have been handled predominately by one of the organizations instead of being as separated as it was in this situation. This study can serve as "lessons learned" for other organizations, especially in unique situations such as this one.

<center>5.4 Limitations</center>

One limitation to this study was that the research was conducted *after* the facility merger rather than during the change. To fully understand the cultures, how the change was communicated, and how the change affected both organizational cultures, it would have been most beneficial to observe the change and collect data while the events were taking place rather than two years after. With participant observation, the study could have taken a more ethnographic approach and participants could have been observed in their natural settings. The researcher would also have been able to observe the communication directly and have the possibility to gather a fuller understanding of the phenomenon itself (Baxter & Babbie, 2003).

However, the data gathered after the completion of the project was still beneficial because participants could offer information retrospectively, therefore contributing to the concept of sensemaking (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 2005), which can be used to fill the gaps in organizational theory. The retrospective nature of the research also shed light on how people rationalized theirs and others' actions and communication during the change. In addition, the use of interviews as the data collection method allowed for the ability to gain "thick description" from the participants, which provided more quality data (McCracken, 1998).

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A second limitation to the study may have been the researcher's employment at the City because of the possibility of participants not being candid with the researcher in interviews if she is also a co-worker, and also that the researcher may be partial to the organization she is employed with. Knowing this could possibly be a limitation, the researcher took measures to separate her from the two organizations and analyze the data using an outsider's perspective. One measure taken was the production of a reflexive memo that was referred to during the research process. There is also the possibility that employees were not completely honest with the researcher since she was employed with the City. To combat any apprehensiveness, at each interview the researcher outlined the IRB protocol prior to beginning the interview and stressed the confidentiality of the participant identities and what they had to share. She also worked to choose participants that she was not a close friend with outside of the workplace to not sway the data gathered to favor one organization over the other. Ultimately, the researcher's employment appears to have only aided her in that it allowed access to people and documents in a more timely fashion than may have happened otherwise.

The use of both of Pike's (1967) emic and etic perspectives in this study supported the proposition of several researchers that the two perspectives are complimentary and should be used together when studying organizational culture qualitatively (Beryy, 1990; Brett et al., 1997; Morris, Leung, Ames, and Lickel, 1999; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002). By using elements of both the emic and etic perspectives, the researcher was able to adhere even more closely to the grounded theory method (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) and not let one approach to culture over the other sway the outcome and interpretation of the results. In doing so, she was able to gain a deeper understanding of the organizational cultures and the drivers behind them without excluding or overlooking elements that contributed the organizational cultures.

For instance, although the researcher sought to understand and interpret the organizational culture from the native's perspective (emic), she did not discount outside factors that may contribute to the organizational culture such as economic issues surrounding the study

(etic). The study also involved research on two specific cultural groups in a similar setting (emic), but then compared and contrasted them in a parallel fashion (etic). Furthermore, the adoption of interviews as the primary data collection method fell somewhere in between the two approaches which tend to adhere to long, extended ethnographic observations (emic) and mass, close-ended surveys (etic).

Additionally, one of the key positions – the superintendent – changed a few times during the planning of and move into the Government Center. Had the position been held by the same person during the process, as had the City Manager, it would have been beneficial to the study to have gained both of their perspectives on the process. In the interest of parallel selection of participants, however, both of the positions were left out of the interview process. However, the two positions that were designated to be in charge of the change communication process in each organization had remained filled by the same individual during the process, so they were able to be included in the data collection.

Finally, a major limitation to this study was the lack of directly comparable documentary evidence between the two organizations. The City's interactive and culture-oriented approach to the change communication allowed for a multitude of documents that integrated both their culture and their communication including the culture statement document (Appendix B), a "Moving Guide" with pictures and directions, surveys from a tour of the facility, and even agendas from the "Move Masters" committee meetings. The City had all of these documents in addition to the traditional informative and functional communication one may think of when orchestrating a move of this magnitude.

In contrast, because the ISD used such a functional and task-oriented approach to the change communication, the traditional documents were the only ones they had available. Although they kept great documentation of the move, where furniture items were intended to go, and the schedule of the move, they did not design documents that really portrayed the communication they had with employees. Part of this was because of the informal nature of the

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organizational change communication, and part of it was simply their more functionalist culture. Although this offered some insight into both organizations' change communication, it was unfortunately not enough to include as a document analysis in the current study. Once again, this is where participant observation would have been able to add to the study's results.

<u>5.5 Directions for Future Research</u>

Future research on this topic has a lot of potential. When conducting a study, researchers have to make a lot of decisions such as their theoretical approach to the topic, how best to collect data, and from how many people over what period of time. During the process the researcher may often wonder what type of turn a study would have taken had he or she changed something.

As noted in the limitations, one approach for further research would be to conduct the research before, during, and after a facility merger using participant observation and interviews. This approach would allow for a more ethnographic and longitudinal study to gain insight into the communication and the culture from multiple perspectives within the organizations and from first-hand experience by the researcher. In addition, a longer approach such as this one may also be enhanced by a larger sample size from each organization to even further represent the members of each one.

One curiosity that arose a few times during the interviews was the difference in the perception of the communication between the men and women in the two organizations. A study on gender differences in change communication would be a very interesting approach. The majority of participants that expressed either an appreciation or desire for involvement in the decision-making process were female. The majority of the male respondents felt like the communication about the change was enough. It could be that males and females process and respond to change communication differently. Therefore, a change communication strategy that utilizes multiple approaches may be most effective.

Another approach would be to expand on this study by facilitating instances for the two organizations to blend cultures and evaluate the outcome. A study to find out what factors or

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elements have to be in place to break across cultural boundaries may gain more insight into the cultural distance theory. Additionally, if a culture is weakened during a facility merger, what measures could an organization go to in order to strengthen the culture once again? Or, is the culture that the organization developed necessarily a "bad" one for that organization? An approach to the research such as this one may be more in line with the functionalist approach instead of the interpretive approach used in the current study (Heracleous & Barrett, 2001).

A similar study, but with the use of a different theoretical approach such as the functional, critical, or structurational approach may also be of value to the literary research on the subject. By looking at organizational change communication and culture from these perspectives, the study may have a very different outcome. For instance, the functionalist approach may look at what communication was actually being used and the effectiveness of it rather than being concerned with its effect on the cultures. The critical approach may look at who the change communication came from, and what implications that may have had on issues of power and control. Finally, the structurational approach may look at what was said on the surface of the change communication and its alternative deep discursive meaning.

Further studies could also examine issues of identity and identification during organizational change. As discussed, facility changes can often alter the way in which employees identify with an organization and even with each other (Rooney et al., 2010). While research on the effects of mergers and acquisitions on culture may be growing, there seems to be little research on their effects on individual identities or at certain hierarchal levels within the organizations.

Another element of culture often left out of merger and acquisition research is the effects on organizational subcultures. A study analyzing how the strength (or existence at all) of organizational subcultures can affect the success of a merger would lend more knowledge to the field of study. As noted, the fields of organizational culture and change communication research are vast. While this study used qualitative research with an interpretive approach to analyze the

organizational change communication and culture of two government organizations undergoing a

facility merger, there are numerous directions further studies could take, especially in the unique

field of a facility merger.

APPENDIX A

GOVERNMENT CENTER FLOOR PLAN

First Floor

Police

Court Rooms

Conference Rooms

Municipal Court & Marshals

Human Resources

Finance & Accounting

Cedar Hill Room

Reception Desk

Stairs

E

Executive Conference Room

CHISD

1 FIRST LEVEL CODE PLAN
SCALE 1/16"=1'-0"

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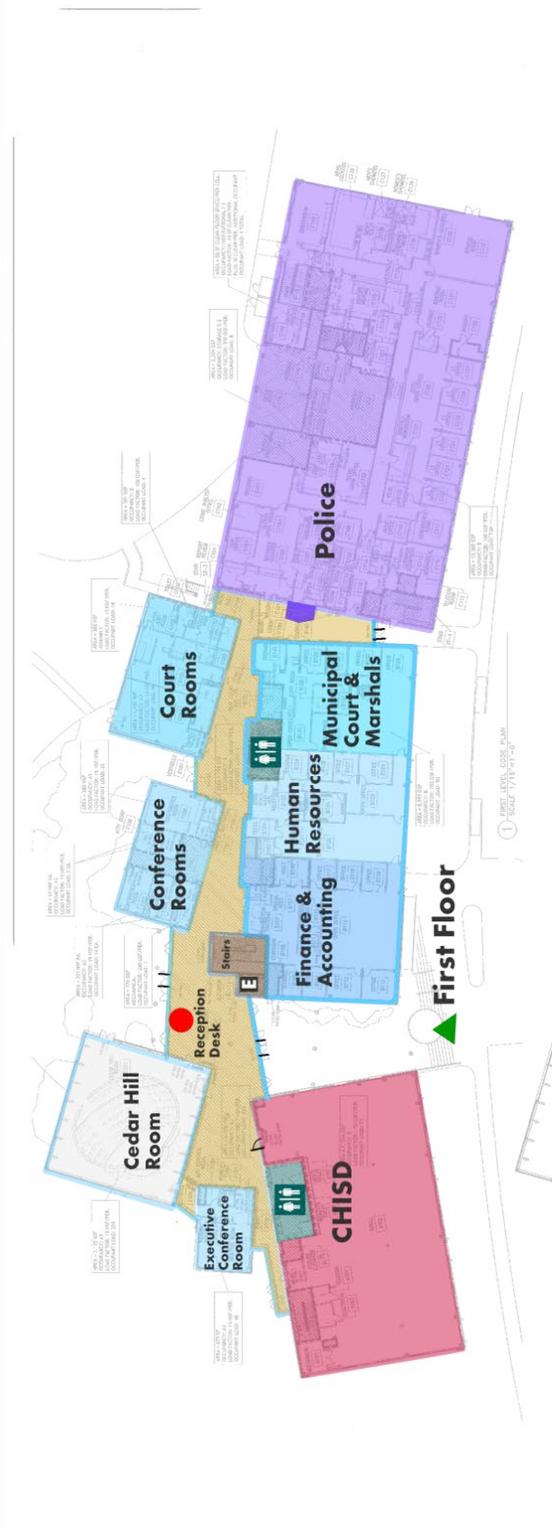
APPENDIX B

CITY ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Organizational Culture

Definition of Culture: The development, improvement, and refinement of the originality, individuality, identity, and personality of a given people. The set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization

Values

The City of Cedar Hill's culture sets us apart from any other City in the world. We live by five very important values, which also contain many parts to make a whole. The five values we live by are *High Standards, Teamwork, Premier Customer Service, Family Oriented and Fun.*

High Standards	Teamwork	Premier Customer Service	Family Oriented	Fun
Pursue Excellence	Shared Vision	Customer Friendly	Close Knit / Caring	Uniquely Different
Professionalism	Shared Values	Accountable	Compassionate	Friendly
Personally Motivated	Unified	Service Driven	Exudes Tremendous Pride	Competitive
High Integrity	Open Communication	Honorable	Resilient	Genuine
Innovative	Collaborative	Diverse Workforce	Supportive	Respectful
Hard Working	Considerate	Enthusiastic	Nurturing	Humor
Continuous Improvement	Helpful	Empowering Workplace	Love for Community	Creative
Results Oriented	Willing		Wellness	Happy

Culture Statement

At the City of Cedar Hill, we have a team oriented work environment that is focused on achieving the highest level of customer satisfaction, providing a family-oriented and fun work environment and pursuing excellence at all levels in the organization. We envision being the City that our peers strive to emulate by exuding professionalism, exceptional pride and the love we have for our colleagues, citizens and community. We have a culture that is second to none; one that can only be understood through experience.

7/9/08

APPENDIX C

CITY AND SCHOOL DISTRICT ORGANIZATIONAL FLOW CHARTS

City Organizational Flow Chart

Citizens

Mayor and City Council

Municipal Court Judge

Advisory Boards

City Manager

Public Relations

City Secretary

Deputy City Manager	Assistant City Manager	Assistant City Manager	Finance	Police	Fire	Economic Development

Departments / Functional Areas

Parks and Recreation	Human Resources	Budget Administration	Budget Development	Field Operations	Suppression	Recruitment
Planning	Municipal Court	Facility Management	Payroll	Investigations	Medical	Retention
Code Enforcement	Utility Billing	Animal Shelter	Accounting	Community Services	Investigations	Marketing
Public Works		Library	Treasury	Records Management	Prevention	
Neighborhood Services			Purchasing	Animal Control	Emergency Management	
			Information Technology			

ISD Organizational Flow Chart

Board of Trustees

School Superintendent

Chief Operations Officer

CFO Curriculum & Instruction

Athletic Director

Education Foundation Director

Executive Director Administrative Services

Director of Family & Community Services

Director of Maintenance & Operations

Administrator of Facilities

Director of Child Nutrition

Director of Information Systems

Chief of Police

Executive Director of Special Programs

Executive Director of Special Education

Executive Director of Instructional Technology

Principals

Instructional Specialists

Director of Purchasing

Payroll Coordinator

Finance Specialist

Employee Benefits Payroll Coordinator

Executive Director of Personnel

EDP Coordinator

Even Start Program Coordinator

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEWEE RECRUITMENT LETTER

Interviewee Recruitment Letter

(Date)

Dear City/ISD employee,

I am a graduate student in the Department of Communication at the University of Texas at Arlington (UTA). I am writing to invite you to participate in my research on The Government Center.

In the summer of 2008, I moved here from Florida to begin working in the [name of organization]. The Government Center was just completed and the two organizations had moved into the building just the week prior. Being from a state where the school districts were organized in a completely different fashion, the integration of the two entities fascinated me. Looking for a thesis topic, the Government Center was a natural choice.

My research examines organizational cultures and communication during a time of change. A facilities merger, such as the one the ISD and City went through, is a huge change for an organization and its employees. The research seeks to understand the culture and communication from the employee's point of view. Therefore, your participation in my research would be invaluable and I would like to request an interview with you.

Upon your approval, the interview will be audio taped and transcribed for analysis. A copy of the transcript will be made available at your request. The information obtained from this interview will be included in a research report and possibly presented at conferences and meetings. Participation in this research is voluntary. Should you wish to do so, you may withdraw from the research at any time. Before the interview, we will each sign two consent forms which will detail the research procedures and outline the steps that will be taken to ensure the protection of your information and your identity, if you wish to remain anonymous. You will retain your copy for your records. A copy of the topic questions will also be provided for you to review before the interview.

Interviews will last approximately 60 minutes and will be located in one of the conference rooms at the Government Center, or at a place that is convenient to you. We can also plan to conduct the interview during your lunch hour, and either bring in lunch or go to a restaurant if that fits your schedule more appropriately.

Please contact me directly if you have any questions about my research or to arrange an interview date, time, and location that suit you. I can be contacted at City extension 3303, by my cell phone at 469-337-5796, or via email at michaela.dollar@cedarhilltx.com. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Michaela Dollar

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

INFORMED CONSENT

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR NAME: Sharon Michaela Dollar

TITLE OF PROJECT: A Public Marriage: A comparison of organizational change communication between two cultures involved in a municipal government facilities merger

INTRODUCTION: *You are being asked to participate in a research study. Your participation is voluntary. Please ask questions if there is anything you do not understand.*

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study is to examine the organizational change communication and the organizational culture of two separate public organizations involved in a facilities merger.

DURATION: Interviews will take approximately 60 minutes

PROCEDURES: Information for this study will be collected from you, the participant, through audio recorded interviews. The goal is to see the research topic from your perspective and to understand how and why you come to have this particular perspective. You will be asked a set of questions on several topics; however, you will be encouraged to actively shape the course of the interview by focusing or elaborating on what you consider to be important or relevant to this research study. The goal of the interview is to gain a better understanding of the relationship between employees and values-based organizations; therefore, you will be invited to share your experiences and stories to provide an insight into how you identify with your organization.

No experimental procedures exist in this study.

No drugs or devices are being used. All participants will be treated equally.

POSSIBLE BENEFITS: The opportunity to discuss pros and cons of the organizational culture and communication without consequences.

COMPENSATION: Lunch may be provided as part of the interview.

POSSIBLE RISKS/DISCOMFORTS: There are no known risks for being involved in this research. If you feel uncomfortable and wish to discontinue your participation, you may do so by notifying me, the researcher.

ALTERNATIVE PROCEDURES/TREATMENTS: If you choose not to participate, or to end your participation after it has started, there will be no consequences. There are also no alternatives to participation in the research through interviews.

WITHDRAWAL FROM THE STUDY: You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

NUMBER OF PARTICIPANTS: I expect a total of 14 participants to enroll in this study.

CONFIDENTIALITY: If in the unlikely event it becomes necessary for the Institutional Review Board to review your research records, then The University of Texas at Arlington will protect the confidentiality of those records to the extent permitted by law. Your research records will not be released without your consent unless required by law or a court order. The data resulting from your participation may be made available to other researchers in the future for research purposes not detailed within this consent form. In

16 October 2007

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these cases, the data will contain no identifying information that could associate you with it, or with your participation in any study.

(a) Interviews will be audio taped and written out by me, the researcher; (b) the cassettes will be coded so that no personally identifying information is visible on them; (c) all study related documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my advisor, Dr. Sasha Grant's office which is located in room 2115 in the Fine Arts Building at The University of Texas at Arlington; (d) they will be heard only for research purposes by me; and (e) they will be retained for possible future analysis.

If the results of this research are published or presented at scientific meetings, your identity will not be disclosed.

CONTACT FOR QUESTIONS: Questions about this research or your rights as a research subject may be directed to Michaela Dollar at (469) 337-5796. You may contact the chairperson of the UT Arlington Institutional Review Board at (817)-272-3723 in the event of a research-related injury to the subject.

CONSENT:

Signatures:
As a representative of this study, I have explained the purpose, the procedures, the benefits, and the risks that are involved in this research study:

_____
Signature and printed name of principal investigator or person obtaining consent   Date

By signing below, you confirm that you have read or had this document read to you.

You have been informed about this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks, and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time

You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled, and you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits, to which you are otherwise entitled.

_____
SIGNATURE OF VOLUNTEER   **DATE**

SEP 17 2010

APPROVED

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Institutional Review Board

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APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW SCHEDULES

Interview Schedule

Administration

1. Tell me about your position within the organization.
2. How long have you been a part of the City/ISD?
3. Tell me about how (and why) the idea of the Government Center came about.
    a. Who was the first to bring it up?
    b. What was your initial reaction?
    c. Do you remember where you were when the idea first came up?
4. When did you start telling the employees about the idea of a Government Center?
    a. What did you tell them?
    b. How did you tell them about it? Can you give me some examples?
    c. What would you say the awareness level of the employees in the organization was about the project?
    d. Was communication about the project coordinated with the other organization, or was it handled separately?
5. What were the employees' reactions?
    a. Was it what you expected?
    b. Does anyone's reaction in particular stand out in your mind?
6. Tell me about the process of constructing the Government Center and how you communicated during that with employees.
    a. Did you give updates, renderings, etc? What about and to whom?
7. Did you feel like employees' communication with you changed during that time?
    a. For example, the number of phone calls and emails you received?
    b. Did employees have a lot of questions about the project? If so, can you give me some examples?
    c. How did you answer these questions?
8. Tell me about when the Government Center was finally finished, and your first time going through it.
    a. How did you feel? Was it what you expected?
    b. Why or why not?
9. How about moving into the Government Center? What was that like?
    a. With so many people sharing the same space, do you feel like communication with your employees has changed? What about amongst your employees?
    b. Can you give me some examples of how it has/hasn't changed, or both?

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10. Thinking back to before the idea of the Government Center, how would you describe the feel or atmosphere of the organization?
    a. Has that changed since moving into the Government Center?
    b. Can you think of a specific example of how it has/hasn't, or both?
11. Describe your interaction with people from other departments within the organization before moving into the Government Center.
    a. How about now that you're in the Government Center? Do you feel like it has changed? If so, please describe the change.
    b. Can you think of a specific instance?
12. Now, describe your interaction with people from the other organization before moving into the Government Center.
    a. And now? Do you feel like it's changed? If so, please describe the change?
    b. Why, or why not?
    c. Can you give me an example?
13. What kind of impact, if any, has the move to the Government Center made on you as an employee?
    a. Has it changed your:
        i. Values, attitudes, and beliefs about the organization?
        ii. Communication efficiency?
        iii. Satisfaction?
        iv. Involvement?
        v. Sense of belonging?
        vi. Commitment?

Mid-Level Supervisors

1. Tell me about your position within the organization.
2. How long have you been a part of the City/ISD?
3. Tell me about the first time you heard of the idea of a Government Center.
   a. What did you hear?
   b. What was your reaction? (How did you feel?)
   c. Did your supervisor tell you or did you hear about it somewhere else first?
4. When did you start telling your employees about it?
   a. What did you tell them?
   b. How did you tell them about it?
   c. What would you say the awareness level of the employees in the organization was about the project?
5. What were the employees' reactions, if any?
   a. Was it was you expected? Why or why not?
   b. Does anyone's reaction in particular stand out in your mind?
6. Tell me about the communication from administration during the process of constructing the Government Center.
   a. Did you get updates, renderings, etc? What about and from whom?
   b. Did you relay those on to your own employees?
7. Did you feel like employees' communication with you changed during that time? If so why?
   a. For example, the number of phone calls and emails you received
   b. Did you have employees asking you for updates?
   c. Did they have questions about what was going on?
   d. How did you answer the questions?
8. Tell me about when the Government Center was finally finished, and your first time going through it.
   a. How did you feel? Was it what you expected?
9. How about moving into the Government Center? What was that like?
   a. With so many people sharing the same space, do you feel like communication has changed:
      i. Between you and your supervisor
      ii. Between you and your peers
      iii. Between you and your employees

        iv.   Between your employees

    b. Can you give me an example of how it has/hasn't changed, or both?

10. Thinking back to before the idea of the Government Center, how would you describe the feel or atmosphere of the City/ISD?

    a. Has that changed since moving into the Government Center?

    b. Can you think of a specific example of how it has/hasn't, or both?

11. Describe your interaction with people from other departments within the organization before moving into the Government Center.

    a. How about now that you're in the Government Center? Do you feel like it's changed? If so, please describe the change.

    b. How about with your employees? If so, please describe the change.

    c. How about with your supervisor? If so, please describe the change.

12. Now, describe your interaction with people from the other organization before moving into the Government Center.

    a. And now? Do you feel like it's changed

    b. Why, or why not?

    c. ? If so, please describe the change?

13. What kind of impact, if any, has the move to the Government Center made on you as an employee?

    a. Has it changed your:

        i.   Values, attitudes and beliefs about the organization?

        ii. Communication efficiency?

        iii. Satisfaction?

        iv. Involvement?

        v.   Sense of belonging?

        vi. Commitment?

1. Tell me about your position within the organization.
2. How long have you been a part of the City/ISD?
3. Describe the first time you heard about the Government Center.
   a. What did you hear and from whom?
   b. What was your initial reaction? (How did you feel?)
   c. How did some of your co-workers react?
4. During the construction of the Government Center, how you were kept informed?
   a. Were you given updates, renderings, etc? What about and by whom?
5. Did you feel like your supervisor's communication with you changed during that time?
   a. If so, how? Can you give an example?
   b. What about communication for and from the upper management? Did it change at all?
   c. If so, how? Do you have an example?
   d. Did you have questions or concerns that you address to your supervisor that they relayed to upper management?
   e. Can you give me an example?
6. Tell me about when the Government Center was finally finished, and your first time going through it.
   a. How did you feel? Was it what you expected?
7. How about moving into the Government Center? What was that like?
   a. With so many people sharing the same space, do you feel like communication has changed:
      v. Between you and your supervisor
      vi. Between you and your peers
   a. Can you give me an example of how it has/hasn't changed, or both?
8. Thinking back to before the idea of the Government Center, how would you describe the feel or atmosphere of the organization?
   a. Has that changed since moving into the Government Center? If so, why?
   b. Can you think of a specific example of how it has/hasn't, or both?
9. Describe your interaction with people from other departments within the organization before moving into the Government Center.
   a. How about now that you're in the Government Center? Do you feel like it has changed?

b. What about within your department?

c. Can you give me an example?

10. Now, describe your interaction with people from the other organization before moving into the Government Center.

a. And now? Do you feel like it has changed?

b. Why, or why not?

c. Can you give me an example?

11. What kind of impact, if any, has the move to the Government Center made on you as an employee?

a. Has it changed your:

i. Values, attitudes and beliefs

ii. Communication efficiency?

iii. Satisfaction?

iv. Involvement?

v. Sense of belonging?

vi. Commitment?

APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT PROFILES

INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT PROFILES

Participant 1: "Phillip"
Organization: City
Level: Administrative
Title/Position: Deputy City Manager
Length of Employment: 24 years

Participant 2: "Maria"
Organization: City
Level: Administrative
Title/Position: Assistant City Manager
Length of Employment: 7 years
* Maria was the move coordinator for the City.

Participant 3: "Katelyn"
Organization: City
Level: Mid-Level
Title/Position: Director of Human Resources
Length of Employment: 4 years

Participant 4: "Brandon"
Organization: City
Level: Mid-Level
Title/Position: Parks Superintendent
Length of Employment: 23 years

Participant 5: "Natalie"
Organization: City
Level: Front-line
Title/Position: Executive Assistant in Administration
Length of Employment: 28 years

Participant 6: "Haley"
Organization: City
Level: Front-line
Title/Position: Accounts Payable Clerk
Length of Employment: 3 years

Participant 7: Robyn
Organization: City
Level: Front-line
Title/Position: Planning Secretary
Length of Employment: 10 years

Participant 8: "Trey"
Organization: ISD
Level: Administrative
Title/Position: Chief Operating Officer
Length of Employment: 35 years

Participant 9: "Diana"
Organization: ISD
Level: Administrative
Title/Position: Assistant Superintendent for Business Services
Length of Employment: 23 years
* Diana was the mover coordinator for the ISD.

Participant 10: "Ryan"
Organization: ISD
Level: Mid-Level
Title/Position: Director of Technology
Length of Employment: 23 years

Participant 11: "Rebecca"
Organization: ISD
Level: Mid Level
Title/Position: Director of Special Education
Length of Employment: 13 years

Participant 12: "Virginia"
Organization: ISD
Level: Front-line
Title/Position: Executive Assistant to the Superintendent and School Board
Length of Employment: 6 years

Participant 13: "Andrea"
Organization: ISD
Level: Front-line
Title/Position: Secretary for Curriculum and Instruction
Length of Employment: 29 years

Participant 14: "Chelsey"
Organization: ISD
Level: Front-line
Title/Position: Secretary of Special Education
Length of Employment: 15 years

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Michaela Dollar graduated from The Florida State University with a Bachelor of Science in Communication in 2005. There, she focused on business and corporate communication. Upon graduating, she became the first student accepted into the combined credit program in the Communications Department and began the Master of Science in Communication program immediately following. Her focus of study was corporate and public communication and as a student, she was involved in projects such as an internal communications audit for the Girls Inc. of Bay County, analyzing public relations campaigns such as Perrier, and adapting advertising campaigns such as Coca-Cola. She participated in the graduate program for a year and a half before moving to Texas. In 2009 she enrolled in The University of Texas at Arlington as a transfer student and completed a Masters of Art in Communication in May 2011. She currently works as the Business Retention and Marketing Manager for a municipal economic development corporation and plans to continue her career as a marketing and communications professional in the field of economic development.